



Book Review

Sinéad Ring, Kate Gleeson and Kim Stevenson (2022) *Child Sexual Abuse Reported by Adult Survivors: Legal Responses in England and Wales, Ireland and Australia*. London: Routledge

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In the wake of various governmental inquiries into institutional child sexual abuse around the world, one question inevitably arises: what is being done in response? Ring, Gleeson and Stevenson's (2022) book explores this very question in regard to what the authors term 'non-recent child sexual abuse' and responses of the law in the three case study jurisdictions included within the book's title. These three are appropriately selected given their shared histories, common law status and governmental abuse inquiries. Alongside this, commentary and critique are offered throughout the book to highlight what, in the view of the authors, are commendable and/or underdeveloped responses across the jurisdictions and provide insightful recommendations in response to the identified limitations. There are a plethora of endnotes and references listed throughout, demonstrating wide reading and engagement of the authors in their respective fields. The book is split into two parts.

Part I explores the recent historical context (the 1850s to 2021) of the jurisdictions of Australia, England and Wales, and Ireland's recognition of and responses to non-recent child sexual abuse, both in the law and culture. It opens with a chapter detailing the shift of societal awareness towards child sexual abuse in these jurisdictions across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the events that instigated these changes (with a focus on some of the core exposés and inquiries during this period). Thereafter, each comparator is given its own chapter for the purpose of contextualisation, with the same headings and topic areas explored therein (with some minor content variations between chapters given the historical contexts). Covered topics include criminal law (the age of consent, incest and the development of assault and specific child abuse crimes), abuse prosecution (its history, hindrances and developments) and child protection (the institutional context, inquiries and statutory development). Themes throughout include the disbelief of children, legal hindrances to reporting and successful prosecution of abuse, minimal penalties for offenders, pioneering efforts of feminists, development of knowledge about causes and consequences, changing culture towards children, and key moments in history that brought societal change (and the role of the advocacy and media in these).

These chapters are well-written precis of the respective socio-legal and sociopolitical contexts, providing the reader with a broad yet informed understanding of the lay of the land. Commentary from the authors is periodically provided throughout these chapters, helpful in guiding the reader to appreciate the significance of the subject matter (e.g., specific legislative provisions), social phenomena and legal developments being described (both historically and at the present time). This is



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complemented by the skilfully evaluative discussion at the end of each of the chapters, drawing attention to the limitations of the developments. The aforementioned structure being adopted across the three chapters assists the reader to quickly flick back and forth and remind oneself of jurisdictional differences (or to compare their own jurisdiction to another).

Part II, upon the foundational work of Part I, explores a set of more specific responses of the law to non-recent child sexual abuse. Uniquely, it covers several domains, both in the courts (criminal law in Chapter 7 and torts in Chapters 8 and 9) and through governmental responses (inquiries in Chapter 10 and reparations in Chapter 11). These chapters are balanced in each opening with concise yet informative overviews of the core concepts and context being discussed (Chapters 9 and 11 especially) before then proceeding to provide a case study of the subject matter in each of the aforementioned jurisdictions. The first few chapters in Part II (criminal law, the statute of limitations and the liability of organisations) walk through statutory and case law, summarising key judgments and highlighting how these have shaped legal responses. The developments, alongside the strengths and limitations of the law, are succinctly and clearly detailed. Governmental action in terms of reparations and inquiries have a similar format, namely, an explanation (concepts and context), exploration (across jurisdictions) and evaluation. The book closes with a short conclusion, prompting a tempering of any haste to label one jurisdiction as ‘the winner’ given that each, the authors argue, ‘remains characterized by a fundamental ambivalence towards survivors’ (Ring, Gleeson and Stevenson 2022: 311).

Though broad and complex areas of specialisation in their own right (indeed, many volumes are written on each chapter topic alone), these chapters are thoughtfully written. Complex legal concepts and case law are detailed in an approachable and engaging manner and do not leave the reader confused or overwhelmed. Commendably, these chapters also include recent legal and governmental developments (as late as 2021) and descriptions of their relevance to their specific legal context, as well as responses to child sexual abuse and survivors more broadly. Commentary is peppered throughout these chapters and, as per in Part I, included within the conclusions.

Notwithstanding the excellent qualities of this book, there are, with no disrespect, some minor limitations. Whilst I recognise that word count limitations are necessary and normal components of writing, some further details on occasion would be welcomed, for instance, with respect to prejudice and the staying of prosecution in Chapter 7. Lengthier descriptions of how some of the legal responses mentioned in the book could be ameliorated and/or honed could also strengthen the book further. That said, there is understandably only so much that can be included in one book. In summary, this book provides a sound, thoughtful and well-researched precis of responses of the law to non-recent child sexual abuse across several jurisdictions. It would be a useful companion to academics and practitioners in this field and an invaluable text for those teaching, studying or researching in this subject area.

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