International Safeguarding Conference 2026

# Title: Cultural Factors Shaping Male Sexual Abuse Disclosure in Indian Seminaries

**Case Focus:** Male Sexual Abuse in Indian Seminaries: Impact on Spiritual Life and Psychological Wellbeing

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IADC

# One Commitment, Many Contexts: The Cultural Landscape of India

# Introduction

## Unveiling the Silenced Phenomenon

This presentation explores the critical meeting point of religion, culture, and trauma in Indian Catholic Seminaries.

Utilising Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), the study focuses on the lived experiences of eight participants: priests, seminarians, and ex-seminarians.

The research addresses the chronic lack of data and the “conspiracy of silence” surrounding male victims in South India.

# The Context

- Existing literature on clergy abuse focuses predominantly on Western contexts; male survivors in South Asian (Indian) religious institutions remain largely absent from safeguarding research.

- The absence of culturally informed safeguarding frameworks in Indian seminaries represents a critical gap: one with direct implications for the global Church's commitment to survivor-centred protection.

- "We were taught that suffering in silence was holy. Speaking out felt like a betrayal of God."

-Participant, Interview 3

# Barrier-1

## Hegemonic Masculinity & The Vulnerability Taboo

1. **Hegemonic Masculinity:** Rigid cultural expectations demanding physical strength, absolute emotional control, and dominance.

2. **The Vulnerability Taboo:** Admitting victimization is culturally equated to weakness or emasculation.
   - ***Internalized Self-Blame:*** The pervasive cultural myth that a "real man" should have been able to resist or prevent violation physically.

# Voices from the Field: The Struggle with Masculinity

***“It’s high time we recognize our own weakness and humbly accept: Yes, I am weak... Abuse happened to me”.***

— **Jagan**, 40-year-old Priest

# Barrier -2

## Collectivism and “Family Honor”

1. **Collectivist Dynamics:** The reputation, harmony, and status of the collective family unit supersede individual well-being.

2. **The Weight of *Izzat* (Honor/Shame):** Disclosing sexual trauma risks bringing severe social isolation to the victim’s parents and siblings.

- ***Sacrificing the Self:*** Victims often choose to remain silent to protect their loved ones from public disgrace.

# Barrier-3

## Clergy Idealisation & Power Distance

**1. The "Alter Christus" Idealisation:** Priests and spiritual formators are heavily revered as holy, flawless representatives of God.

**2. Extreme Power Distance:** Strict traditional hierarchies that demand absolute, unquestioning obedience from candidates.

- ***Cognitive Dissonance:*** The psychological inability to reconcile a revered spiritual guide with a sexual predator.

# Barrier-4

## Minority Stress & Institutional Protectionism

**Socio-Political Context:** Christianity operates as a minority community within a highly complex multi-religious landscape.

- **Defending the Fortress:** Fear that internal institutional scandals will be weaponised by external socio-political adversaries.
- **Institutional Guilt:** Victims are pressured or self-pressured to protect the Church's reputation at all costs to preserve the community.

# Key Findings

## 2 out of 3

- Participants disclosed abuse to at least one person
- Only 1 in 3 disclosed to institutional authority
- Fear of disbelief was the #1 cited barrier to disclosure

## 10+ Years

- Average delay before first disclosure of abuse
- Shame & honor culture cited by 80%+ as key barrier
- Trusted personal relationship was the primary enabler of disclosure

# Bridging the Gap: Context-Specific Safeguarding Solutions

- Develop culturally-adapted disclosure protocols that acknowledge shame, honour, and hierarchical deference in Indian seminary contexts.
- Provide mandatory training for formators and safeguarding officers on male victimization, cultural silence, and trauma-informed responses.
- Establish independent, external accountability mechanisms within seminaries to ensure institutional transparency and survivor-centred justice.

# Conclusion

## One Commitment, Many Contexts

**True Safeguarding:** Requires looking past universal policies to understand hidden cultural realities.

**The Mandate:** Ensuring structural or institutional honour never outweighs a human life.

# THANK YOU