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Child Abuse: an urgent need for safeguarding

Following the research recently published by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing within the University of Malta, entitled *Protecting our Children - Exploring and Preventing Child Abuse*, The Lisa Maria Foundation would like to express its concern and the need for the safeguarding of children to be immediately prioritised at a national level.

One finding from the research that was conducted with 484 individuals who experienced childhood abuse showed that there was no correlation between the location of residence and the childhood abuse experienced. This goes to show that the safeguarding of children is everybody's responsibility and the Lisa Maria Foundation strongly emphasises the need for a national safeguarding strategy which regulates all organisations that come into contact with children.

With the majority of respondents reporting that the combination of physical and emotional abuse and neglect went on for 10 years or more, this further reiterates how all those in contact with children should be sufficiently trained in safeguarding practices, be attentive to the signs and indicators of abuse and be hyper vigilant, increasing the safety of children and youth. Every day abuse is undetected or where a victim is unassisted is a missed opportunity to save a child from a life of abuse or neglect. Only 27% of the respondents sought help and although the researchers noted that the increase in reporting in the younger generations was due to a change in culture, these numbers are still very low and highlight the need for more education, training and awareness around the subject of childhood abuse and safeguarding.

The Lisa Maria Foundation was saddened to see that even after all it's lobbying for the removal of time barring from childhood sexual offences, the research once again showed how many victims of childhood abuse took over ten years to come forward about their abuse but how many more still have not. Our system needs to understand the long lasting effects of trauma on abused children and needs to offer them a safety net that whenever they are ready to come forward about their abuse, the system will support them fully in seeking justice. If time cannot erase the memory of the abuse for the child, then time should not remove the punishment for the abuser.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Faculty for Social Wellbeing on researching this much needed subject and in giving a voice to so many who have apparently remained voiceless up until now. The Lisa Maria Foundation affirms it's commitment to the safeguarding of children and youth and will continue to strive to bring about this much needed change.