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Project Website: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research/centre/csov/networks/cwr>

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Regarding Research Project: Investigating Experiences of Sexual Violence Among Current and Ex Catholic Women Religious

Dear potential research participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project which is being conducted by Dr Kathleen McPhillips and Dr Tracy McEwan from the University of Newcastle, Australia.

The information below provides more detail about the study and how you can participate if you choose to do so.

1. What is the research study about?

Research from around the world indicates that Catholic women religious (also known as nuns, consecrated women and religious sisters) have been subject to sexual violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and/or sex-based harassment. The purpose of the research is to better understand the experiences of women who have affected by sexual violence when they were a woman religious in Australia and to advise on future safeguarding procedures.

2. Who is conducting the research?

This research is being conducted by researchers – Dr Kathleen McPhillips and Dr Tracy McEwan - from the University of Newcastle's School of Humanities, Creative Industries and Social Science. It has been funded by the University of Newcastle, Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation, the Australian Research Theology Foundation, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the Brigidine Sisters and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

3. Who can participate in the research?

This research study is recruiting women who are aged over 18 years and who meet the following criteria:

- a. Have been or are currently a Catholic woman religious in Australia
- b. Have experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, and/or sex-based harassment during their time as a woman religious or within 12 months of leaving the congregation
- c. Are fluent in English, and able to freely understand this document and give consent to participate in the study.
- d. Have no active civil or criminal or church-based litigation case in progress.

Additionally, the research study is not suitable for those who:

- a. Are women religious of other faith traditions
- b. Whose mental health is precarious and who feel that participating in this study may not be in their best interests or may negatively impact their mental health.

4. What does participation involve?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete the following research activities:

- A 15–20-minute pre-interview providing information about the interview process and questions, consent process, availability of support services, and establishing suitability for participation. This will take the form of a phone or zoom conversation.
- A one-on-one interview with one of the researchers, lasting approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place at safe, private and mutually convenient location of your choosing or in the form of a phone or zoom conversation.
- In the week following your interview a short 5 to 10-minute post-interview follow-up phone call or zoom session to make sure that you are feeling okay and if necessary to support you in connecting with any services that you may need.

The interview will be conducted by either Dr Kathleen McPhillips or Dr Tracy McEwan and will take place either in person in a private and mutually convenient place of your choice or online using a secure Zoom link provided by the University of Newcastle or another secure internet technology which is convenient for you. The researchers will ensure that any interview venues are fully private and safe, where the interview cannot be overheard.

5. Do you have to take part in this research study?

No. Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. And, if you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from the research study at any time without giving a reason up until analysis begins in December 2025.

6. What is the benefit of participating in this research study?

By participating in an interview, you will have the opportunity to contribute your experiences to the project, therefore increasing the understanding of the challenges faced by Catholic women religious who have experienced instances of sexual violence.

7. Are there any risks associated with your participation in this research?

The research activities you are being asked to participate in may involve discussion of topics which have the potential to be distressing for you. Should you find any of the activities upsetting, you can withdraw your participation at any time up until analysis begins in December 2025.

Should you need support regarding any of the issues raised in the research activities you can contact:

1800 Respect

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>
Phone 1800 737 732

Lifeline

24/7 national counselling
telephone service
131144

Beyond Blue

24/7 National Telephone
counselling service
1300 224 636

You will be able to bring a support person with you to the interview, if you wish to. The role of a support person is to provide assistance should you need it. Your support person could be a family member, a friend or a colleague. Any support person, regardless of their relationship with you, will be required to sign a consent form which includes a confidentiality agreement. The University of Newcastle research team will also be available should you need support regarding any of the issues raised in the research activities. The post-interview conversation will provide resources as needed.

You should also be aware that: (1) Researchers may be required to report information about serious offences (Crimes Act 1900) disclosed during the interview. Unless you are comfortable with information about a serious offence being reported (where required), you should provide any information on a deidentified basis (i.e. omitting any details that may identify an alleged offender). (2) You should not disclose any information during the interview that is subject to a civil claim which has settled where a settlement agreement imposes confidentiality obligations on the parties, as this may be in breach of confidentiality obligations.

8. How will your privacy be protected?

It is not the intention of this research to collect information regarding specific details on the sexual violence experienced. Our primary focus is on understanding affected persons' responses to their experience. It may be possible that during the interview you disclose information about current sexual violence and/or the identity of a perpetrator. In the event that illegal activity is discovered during the interview, the research team will assess whether there is an ongoing threat to your safety. If such a risk exists beyond normal daily experiences, the research team will encourage you to report to either public or church authorities and to take appropriate steps for your safety and well-being. The researchers are under no legal obligation or order to disclose such information to public or church authorities.

Each interview will be audio recorded using a hand held data recorder for the in-person interview and recording for online interviews via zoom ([zoom privacy and security policy](#)). This will allow for thorough analysis of the data. Once transferred to University of Newcastle OneDrive the audio will be removed from the handheld recording device.

Data, including audio recordings, will be retained securely for a minimum period of five years from the completion of the research project.

Audio recordings will be transcribed using Microsoft Office 365 Transcribe feature which does not store audio files or transcription results. For more information see: [Microsoft Transcribe](#) and [Microsoft Trust Center](#). Identifiable data will be removed from the transcripts, with the exception of gender and age. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts and subsequent reports.

As research is being conducted at various locations, the recordings will be uploaded to and stored in a password protected University of Newcastle OneDrive folder accessible only to the researchers named on this project.

Information will be managed and stored in accordance with the [University's Research Data and Materials Management Guideline](#) or any successor Guideline as well as any other applicable University of Newcastle policy provisions.

9. How will information collected by the research team be used?

The research data will be collated and analysed by the researchers and will contribute to understanding patterns of sexual violence and safeguarding requirements for Catholic women religious. In addition, de-identified interview data will be shared with researchers at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Regensburg, Germany and findings of this study may be presented in academic publications, journals and conferences.

A summary report of the results will be available to each participant. If you would like a summary report, please indicate this on the *Consent Form* which will be provided before the interview.

Individual participants will not be identifiable in any of the outputs generated from the research project, but individual anonymous responses may be quoted.

Non-identifiable data may be shared with other parties or researchers as part of a peer-review process to verify the robustness and integrity of the study, or to contribute to further research and public knowledge.

10. What you need to do to provide consent to participate

Read this Information Statement in its entirety and be sure you understand all the information provided before agreeing to participate.

If there is anything you do not understand, or if you have questions, contact Dr Kathleen McPhillips (kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au) or Dr Tracy McEwan (tracy.McEwan@newcastle.edu.au).

If you decide to participate, please complete and sign the Consent Form provided and return it to Kathleen McPhillips or Tracy McEwan by email.

11. What if you want to withdraw from the research study?

You may withdraw from the study by contacting Dr Kathleen McPhillips or Dr Tracy McEwan at any time up until 30 July 2027 when recruitment will close, and analysis begin.

Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with the researchers, the University of Newcastle or any of the other organisations involved in this research, including those who have assisted with the recruitment process.

12. Do you need more information?

If you would like more information about this research project and your potential involvement, please contact Dr Kathleen McPhillips or Dr Tracy McEwan or visit the project website at: <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research/centre/csov/networks/cwr>

Thank you for your time and consideration of this information,



Dr Kathleen McPhillips
Senior Lecturer
University of Newcastle



Dr Tracy McEwan
Research Fellow
University of Newcastle

Concerns or complaints about this research

This project has been approved by the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2024-0211

If you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, please contact the Chief Investigator Dr Kathleen McPhillips.

If you would prefer to contact someone independent of the research project, you can forward your concerns to:

Human Research Ethics Officer
Research and Innovation Services
University of Newcastle
University Drive
Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia
Phone: (02) 4921 6333
Email: Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au