

## **Envisioning Recovery from Moral Injury in the Context of Church-related Abuse: Findings of the Evaluation and Impact Study of *Jagged Edges***

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In 1999 David Tombs first argued that Jesus was a victim of sexual abuse and possibly of sexual assault at the hands of the Roman soldiers before his crucifixion. Subsequently others have read the Gospel Passion narratives in light of this work and explored ways in which these stories might shed light on the experiences of survivors of sexual violence, and on how church communities do and should respond. Seeing Jesus as a victim of abuse opens avenues for transforming the way survivors are seen in and by the Church.

In particular, the stories of Jesus's betrayal, condemnation and crucifixion, with the complicity of the religious authorities, provide the ingredients for an exploration of moral injury in the context of abuse in the Church. In 2022 the Chaplaincy to Survivors in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle brought together three survivors of church-related abuse to explore ways of engaging creatively with the Gospel Passion narratives in light of their experiences of moral injury. The result is *Jagged Edges*: a co-created stations of the cross, comprising linocut prints, poems and music, in which the artists have addressed the broken trust in their relationships with those who harmed them, with bystanders, with church leaders and with the institution of the Church itself.

This paper presents the findings of the evaluation and impact study which formed an integral part of the *Jagged Edges* project with a view to aid scaling and development of resources. Data are presented from evaluation questionnaires at three events in the North East of England that took place in 2025 and semi-structured interviews with participants and artists. Reasons for attending events were diverse and included people with lived experience of abuse as well as those with a more general interest in church-based abuse. Responses to the exhibitions were overwhelmingly positive with numerous people visiting more than once, bringing along others or saying that they would recommend it to others. Responses also revealed diverse impacts for participants, including changes in spiritual practice, changes in professional approaches and new insight into the theology of Easter and suffering more generally. Interview responses confirmed these insights and provided valuable case study

examples for the development of additional materials to enable wider application of the *Jagged Edges* approach.

Perhaps most significant amongst the impacts of the *Jagged Edges* project were those relating to the artists themselves. These fall into three categories: the personal value of producing the art works themselves, the impacts of being part of a team in producing the broader exhibition, and the consequences of their art being public and the responses of those engaging with their artwork and their wider stories. Each of these will be explored in the paper.

Finally, as part of our analysis, we consider the viability of the *Jagged Edges* project being made more widely available through printed materials and guided reflection, and also as a methodological approach for other survivors of abuse to engage in expressing and sharing their lived experience.