

---

# Kids fear reporting abuse in religions

**OLIVIA JENKINS**

---

**CHILDREN** in religious groups are scared to report senior leaders' inappropriate and distressing behaviour, new research has revealed.

A study by the Australian Catholic University found that young people would not feel safe disclosing incidents of abuse, intimidation or bullying to people in positions of power, such as youth group leaders, priests or sporting coaches, because they were believed to at times use their roles to intimidate and "judge" vulnerable church members.

In focus groups with Australian children aged between 11 and 17 who were part of youth groups across several Christian denominations, respondents said they would be more likely to disclose "concerning" incidents to other friends than adults.

Fears were heightened among LGBTQIA+ and non-binary youths, who felt judged by older, most often male, church members.

---

Institute of Child Protection Studies director Daryl Higgins said male-dominated leadership roles remained particularly common in religious organisations and were perceived by young people as positions that could be abused. "Things that they (children) saw as concerning were people using inappropriate words or actions, which included being looked at in an uneasy way, rude comments and other more concerning things such as intimidation, usually from an adult," Professor Higgins said.

The findings, released ahead of National Child Protection Week starting on Sunday, showed power imbalances between older youths in advisory or coaching roles also deterred kids from reporting abuse or bullying at the hands of other children.