

Religious Trauma Survey

This is the survey I use with clients before we start working together. It's designed to help find language for your unique experience of religious trauma and to support the way we work together in counselling.

Religious Trauma, also often referred to as religious abuse or harm, spiritual abuse, or trauma, is not well understood in Australia & New Zealand and people experiencing it can feel isolated and alone. We sometimes refer to the harm experienced in "high-control" and "high-demand" faith based settings, but there is no formal diagnosis or widely agreed-upon term.

Adverse Religious Experiences (AREs) in faith spaces, as named by Dr Laura Anderson, is the name given to *"experiences of a religious belief, practice or structure that undermine an individual sense of safety or autonomy and or negatively impact their physical, social, emotional, relational or psychological wellbeing."*

These experiences in the context of a religious or faith framework, belief and/or community are often core to our identity and can impact us holistically.

This can be confusing as we know belonging to a faith community can be beneficial and it won't have been all bad.

Dr Marlene Winell defines religious trauma syndrome, which is a collection of AREs, as *"the condition experienced by people struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with damaging indoctrination."*

Our experiences of religious trauma, stress or harm have many layers, and it can be hard to know where to begin. We may experience the abuse of a one-time event or the distress of repeated exposure to negative and damaging beliefs and practices. These can be in diverse contexts from megachurches, cult groups or the neighbourhood church on the corner.

Qu 1

What was the context of the religious harm you experienced? (choose as many as apply)

Faith Community

Youth group

Family

School

Friendship/peer Group

Belief system

Qu 2

What was the religion, denomination or group where you experienced the above?

Qu 3

What were the most significant elements of your experience? (choose as many as apply)

Relational

Financial

Sexual

Physical

Mental

Emotional

Other _____

Qu 4

Where there parts of your experience that felt inescapable or caused you to feel trapped or powerless? Y/N

If Y we can talk about these in our session if you are comfortable to do so.

Qu 5

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the worst), what would the highest level of impact/distress be of any of your experiences in a faith based setting? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Qu 6

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the worst), what would the highest level of impact/distress over these be now? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 - That is, have they left a residual impact?

Qu 7

If yes to Qu 6, which of the following would you use to describe the impact? (choose as many as apply)

I felt/feel:

Checked out

Numb

Overwhelmed

Afraid

Anxious

Stuck

Sad

Angry

Confused

Lonely

Ashamed

Betrayed

Duped

Gaslit

Violated

Disembodied

Other _____

Qu 8

Do you currently experience any of the following? (choose as many as apply)

Nightmares

Panic attacks

Big emotional swings

Shakiness

Heaviness in your body

Brain fog/inability to concentrate

Perfectionism

Hypervigilance

Socially disconnected

Socially unaware (gaps in knowledge of pop culture for eg or certain life skills)

Afraid of existential crises

Obsessive tendencies

Out of control

Hopeless

Sexual dysfunction

Sexual anxiety

Sexual shame

Body shame

Low self-esteem

Avoidance of people

Avoidance of things that feel hard

Other _____

Qu 9

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would you describe the level of your involvement in the context/group/setting where you experienced ARE/s?

This could be willing involvement, or being taken as a child/young person with your family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Qu 10

If you could waive a magic wand and be free of the impact of Adverse Religious Experiences, can you describe how different you would imagine feeling? What would you like to shift?

Qu 11

How would you describe sense of faith or spirituality now? (choose as many as apply)

Still believe

Still believe but with doubts & questions

Still believe and attend a faith space

Physically in but mentally/emotionally out (PIMO)

Physically out but mentally/emotionally in (POMI)

Progressive within the same religious belief system where you were once conservative

Spiritual but not religious

Mystic

Contemplative

You don't believe

Atheist

Agnostic

Qu 12

Have you found support in any books, podcasts, social media accounts specific to recovery from religious trauma? Y/N

If Y – which of these have you found the most helpful?

I hope your answers to this survey have been helpful in understanding of the impact of Religious Trauma in your own life.

If you'd like to work with me in a counselling capacity, you can book in an intro call [here](#). You can also read my story [here](#) and find me at [The Religious Trauma Collective](#).

Healing is possible.

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