

**You have given us a lot to think about. But one thing I would like to focus on today is, I guess, your professional lens and your thoughts and views as a professional in this space and how we can better support survivors of cults in Victoria. You have stated that the support systems for cult survivors are inadequate. Can you speak to what specific services or referral pathways are missing in Victoria and what your recommendations in this space would be?**

A. Referral pathways for cult leavers in Victoria are non-existent at the moment and there are no legal protections offered; except via personal safety intervention orders. These PSIVOs are often difficult to acquire and policing services are poorly trained in managing people who use these for protection and typically do not understand harms such as non-intimate partner stalking, or harassment.

Appropriate protection and referral pathways require a legal aspect so cult leavers are protected from ongoing harassment and surveillance, financial support, and psychosocial support (e.g., through referrals to psychology services).

At present, none of these exist for cult leavers except for those who have also experienced intimate partner violence/sexual violence in the cult.

As noted in my oral evidence, I believe this process may be best managed by VOC/FAS who will be able to complete assessments to determine the level and type of support needed. An information sharing platform (e.g., website or app) may also facilitate linkages. Appropriate information sharing pathways will be beneficial, such as are facilitated under the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme.

**You mentioned a few times the secretive behaviour of cults. In your view, are there any laws that are protecting and enabling that secretive behaviour that we could be looking at, like charity status?**

A. Tax exempt charity status, and religious freedom as named under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. While religious freedom is important, this should not be extended to groups which cause psychological or physical harm or which engage in coercive behaviours.

**I am just going to ask a follow-up question on the research question, Dr Guha. This is one you can take on notice too if you want to go away and have a bit of a think. What would be helpful to know is what some of those research priorities might be from your perspective: for example, research into the experiences of people while they are in a cult or the experiences of people as they are leaving a cult, the short-term impacts and the longer term impacts. These are just a few of my ideas, but we would really appreciate to hear your ideas about what some of those research priorities are, because this is a very broad area. There has been very, very limited research into it, so a question is also where to start with that research.**

A. Very little research has been conducted into cults to date. Some initial areas for research might include both qualitative and quantitative research into the experiences of cult leavers with a specific focus on understanding the psychological difficulties/diagnoses and any other psychosocial harms which may occur. It would also be beneficial to conduct research into treating psychological harm in cult leavers, such as by using a therapeutic intervention like EMDR.

Evaluation of any referral pathways which are instituted resulting from the inquiry will also be important.