



DIGITAL PODCAST SERIES PILOT



COERCE THE SYSTEM, NOT EACH OTHER

REFORMING HOW WE RESPOND TO HARM
EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



JR McKenzie Trust

LOBBY for GOOD

New Zealand's Call for Survivor-Led Change.
A Youth Voices Action Research Paper.



Why “Coerce the System, Not Each Other” Matters:

New Zealand’s Call for Survivor-Led Change. A Youth Voices Action Research Paper.

In New Zealand, young people who survive violence often face a justice system that compounds their trauma. Courtrooms designed for adults subject children to hostile cross-examination, lengthy delays and adversarial questioning, while lenient sentences and ineffective supervision allow known offenders to harm again. Our podcast series, *Coerce the System, Not Each Other*, originated by Ara Robinson, a third year law student and member of our youth panel. Based in Tauranga, our region has been scarred by high-profile cases such as teenage serial rapist Jayden Meyer, but also nourished by survivor-advocates like Rachel Taane who refuse to accept the status quo.

We also draw inspiration from journalist Ali Mau. Her 2025 memoir *No Words for This* is a brave account of her own childhood sexual abuse and the misogyny she confronted during her media career. Mau recounts building a glittering journalism career, only to have her professional and personal worlds collide when she learned of abuse within her own family while reporting on #MeToo stories. Turning her experience into activism, she teamed up with barrister Zoë Lawton to co-found Tika, a tech-enabled charity that tackles persistently low sexual-assault reporting. Once launched, Tika will allow victims to register confidentially, match survivors harmed by the same perpetrator, and provide free legal support so they can take collective action. Mau explains that many survivors don’t report because they feel isolated and are reluctant to navigate the legal system alone; Tika is designed to break down those barriers and hold serial offenders accountable.

Tika’s vision is a world where taking legal action against sexual harm is accessible, supported and transformative, thereby reducing reoffending and creating safer communities.

This report summarises the evidence for urgent reform, highlights community-led solutions and global best practice, and explains why our series seeks to galvanise public pressure to reshape systems rather than blaming individuals.



Because stories move people, and people have the ability to move systems.

1. Systemic Failures Exposed (2020-2025)

Re traumatisation of young witnesses

Hostile court environments:

Reports analysed by New Zealand's Chief Victim's Advisor found that in thirteen of fifteen trial transcripts children were accused of lying; one defence lawyer even asked a six-year-old girl if she "liked" the abuse. Another victim vomited for a week after repeated accusations by his father's lawyer. Specialists note that our courts are designed for adults and are often damaging for children. [Appendix 1](#)

Delays deny justice:

Overloaded courts and pandemic disruptions have left many survivors waiting years for their cases to be heard. A 2025 RNZ summary of the Chief Justice's 2024 annual report acknowledged that there is "too much delay in the High Court's civil jurisdiction" and that criminal trials are becoming longer and more complex. Earlier RNZ reporting warned that COVID-19 had intensified these delays, with some jury trials taking well over two years to reach court. [Appendix 2](#)

Sexual Violence Court pilot timeframes:

An article on the Tautoko Tāne Male Survivors Aotearoa website reports on the evaluation of New Zealand's Sexual Violence Court pilot. It states that the pilot's intensive case management reduced average time to trial by 30% in Auckland and 39% in Whangārei, bringing the average time to trial down to about eight and ten months respectively. [Appendix 3](#)

Lenient sentences and reoffending:

The Tauranga case of Jayden Meyer encapsulates systemic failure. In 2022 he received only nine months' home detention for raping four girls and violating a fifth. Despite a psychologist assessing him as a "medium risk" of reoffending, he was bailed to his father's home and within hours sexually assaulted another 15-year-old. Public protests followed, with young people marching in Tauranga to demand

accountability. The High Court later described the sentence as "manifestly inadequate" and said the process "lacked transparency". [Appendix 4](#)

Debating sex offender registries:

New Zealand's child sex offender register is police managed and confidential. Community members and groups like the Sensible Sentencing Trust have repeatedly called for a public registry, arguing that parents need to know if an offender lives nearby. However, researchers note that public registers overseas do not reduce reoffending and can drive offenders underground. Experts warn that energy is better spent on effective monitoring and rehabilitation rather than public shaming. The debate remains unresolved, highlighting the need to explore evidence-based reforms rather than reactionary measures.

Under resourced support for child victims:

Until recently there was no national court support service for child sexual violence complainants; more than sixty five percent of sexual violence complainants are children. Funding for victim advisors remains thin, with some advisers carrying caseloads of one adviser per three hundred victims. In March 2025 the Ministry for Children released a Court Support Service for young sexual violence victim survivors. It recognises that the service should be holistic and trauma responsive, addressing mental, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs. The service sits within Te Aorerekura, the national strategy to eliminate family and sexual violence. While this is a positive step, it requires adequate resourcing and evaluation to ensure it does not replicate adult-centric practices. [Appendix 5](#)

2. Coercive Control: Recognising Invisible Abuse

Coercive control is a pattern of intimidation, isolation and psychological domination that traps victims, often without visible injuries. The term is widely discussed overseas, but New Zealand still lacks a specific criminal offence. A 2024 panel hosted by VINE (Violence Information Network) stressed the need to understand how coercive control and systemic entrapment affect victims, learn from Australian reforms and challenge systemic entrapment, including for wāhine Māori. This aligns with calls from survivor advocate Rachel Taane and community leaders like Moana Tane, who describe coercive control as a form of kidnapping and a violation of wāhine's rights. Statistics show controlling behaviours in relationships increased from 8.2 percent to 13.4% between 2003 and 2019, with economic abuse doubling. Recognising coercive control is therefore essential for prevention and for designing interventions that go beyond physical violence. [Appendix 6](#)

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3. Progress and Remaining Gaps in Law and Policy (2020 to 2025) Legislation and court reforms

Sexual Violence Legislation Act 2021:

This Act introduced judge-led interventions to prevent improper questioning, required judges to dispel rape myths for juries, and allowed pre-recorded evidence for vulnerable complainants. It marks a shift toward trauma informed practice but relies on training judges and lawyers to be effective.

Victims of Sexual Violence Bill 2025:

In October 2025, the law was amended so that children under 12 cannot be questioned about whether they consented to sex. The Chief Children's Commissioner welcomed the change, noting it corrects a long-standing wrong and reflects the courage of victim survivors who shared their experiences to shape the law. The Commission urged further protections for 12-16-year-olds and called for training the legal sector to apply the law appropriately. [Appendix 7](#)

Progress and Remaining Gaps in Law and Policy (2020 to 2025) Legislation and court reforms CONTINUED

Court Support Service for Children 2025:

The newly introduced court support service aims to support children and young people through the criminal justice process, including their family or whānau. It emphasises victim survivor led and trauma responsive principles such as acknowledging identity, intersectionality, and Māori tikanga. Providers must work collaboratively, act in good faith and encourage innovation. [Appendix 8](#)

Ongoing challenges:

Many reforms rely on pilot projects or under resourced services. Outside dedicated sexual violence courts, delays and adversarial tactics persist. Child victim support is still patchy despite the new service; some survivors report inadequate counselling and minimal follow up. New Zealand is still debating the issue of a standalone coercive control offence. Without clear legal recognition, survivors struggle to prove patterns of abuse and may remain trapped. Many victims do not trust mainstream systems due to historical and ongoing systemic entrapment. Effective solutions must be culturally grounded and address intersecting oppressions. [Appendix 9](#)

Youth-Led Innovations and Survivor Advocacy:

Young people are not waiting for authorities to fix the system; they are driving change through storytelling, technology and community organising. Youth Voices Action trains young people as digital advocates. Their live video panels bring politicians, lawyers and experts face to face with young people's questions. This forces decision makers to hear directly from the generation most affected by systemic failings. The group uses social media to spread consent education and policy discussions. Survivor led education by Rachel Taane, who was raped at fourteen and later ostracised, turned her story into a campaign through HELP Auckland and is currently working with Hikitia for our Future!

She produces videos explaining consent, healthy relationships and where to get help. By sharing her own trauma and recovery, she resonates with young people and helps inspire donations for free counselling. Young people have conceptualised apps and AI tools to detect grooming or let users discreetly signal for help. NetSafety Week 2025 included discussions on blocking AI generated child sexual abuse images, showing that youth and industry are collaborating on online safety. [Appendix 10](#)

Global Inspirations for Local Change:

New Zealand can draw on international practices that better support young survivors. Specialised fast track courts in the UK and Australia prioritise sexual violence cases, reducing delays. Trauma informed procedures such as the Nordic Barnahus model allow child victims to be interviewed in a safe house, with the recording used in court, and Canadian and U.S. courts use trained facility dogs to comfort child witnesses. U.S. states now require judges, prosecutors and police to undergo regular trauma informed training. Targeted disclosure schemes like Sarah's Law in the UK allow parents to inquire about specific individuals instead of a public registry. Comprehensive support programmes in other countries provide long term counselling, financial support and educational assistance for survivors; New Zealand's new court support specification aligns with these holistic services, showing readiness to adopt best practice. [Appendix 10](#)

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Progress and Remaining Gaps in Law and Policy (2020 to 2025) Legislation and court reforms **CONTINUED**

Why This Series Matters: A Call to Action

The stories and evidence summarised above reveal a justice system that too often protects offenders and traumatises young people. We cannot assume incremental reforms will fix these structural problems. Instead, we must coerce the system through collective pressure, storytelling, policy advocacy and creative use of technology, not each other.

Our pilot series hopes to expose systemic harm by sharing survivors' experiences of court delays, re traumatisation and lenient sentencing; amplify youth and Māori voices who are leading innovative solutions and demanding culturally responsive approaches; interview politicians, lawyers and experts to challenge complacency and explore legislative and procedural reforms; highlight global best practice to show that better systems are possible and to inspire local adaptation; and mobilise communities by connecting organisations, educators and supporters across New Zealand to co-design strategies and by offering practical tools for prevention and collective healing.

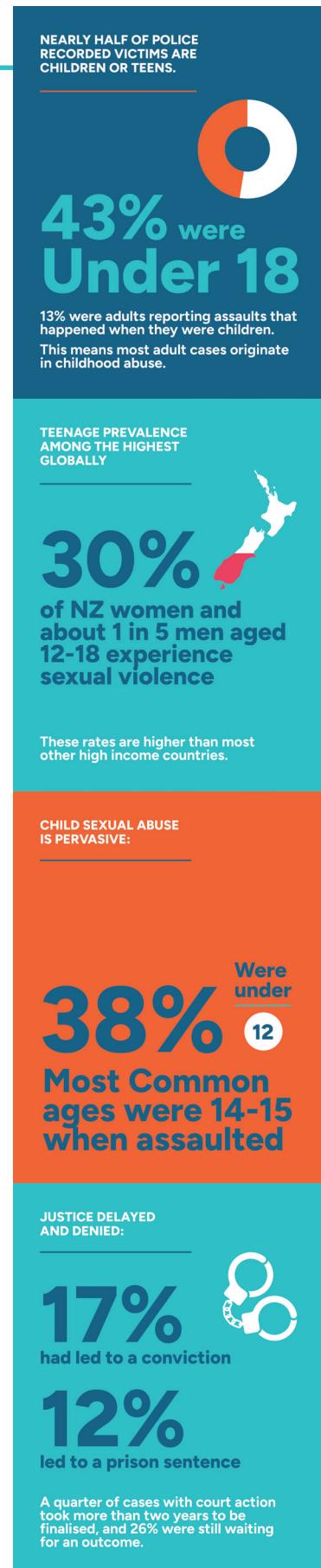
We believe in survivors, especially children and young people, and recognise their expertise in what needs to change. We are committed to supporting those who have gone before us and protecting those who come after us. Through storytelling and evidence-based advocacy, we intend to turn indignation into action and transform systems that currently serve neither justice nor healing.

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Key Statistics

- **Nearly half of police recorded victims are children or teens:** In 2019, New Zealand Police recorded sexual assaults against 5,716 people. 43 percent (2,448) were under 18 at the time of reporting, and another 13 percent (736) were adults reporting assaults that happened when they were children. This means most adult cases originate in childhood abuse. [Statistic 1](#)
- **Widespread harm in secondary schools:** The Youth19 survey found that 18–19 percent of secondary students had been touched sexually or forced to do sexual things they didn't want. More than one in four girls and nearly one in ten boys reported such experiences, and in 84 percent of cases the perpetrator was a peer. About 20 percent of female and 9 percent of male students had these experiences before age 14, and 56 percent never told anyone at the time. [Statistic 2](#)
- **Teenage prevalence among the highest globally:** International research shows that almost 30 percent of New Zealand women and about one in five men aged 12–18 experience sexual violence, rates higher than most other high income countries. [Statistic 3](#)
- **Child sexual abuse is pervasive:** High-quality surveys estimate that roughly one in four girls and one in ten boys in New Zealand experience child sexual abuse. [Statistic 4](#) Among those who reported to Police, 38 percent were under 12 when assaulted, and the most common ages were 14–15. [Statistic 5](#)
- **Girls bear the brunt:** 84 percent of child victims reported to Police were girls, matching broader findings that around 86 percent of sexual assault victims under 20 are female. [Statistic 6](#)
- **Repeat victimisation is common:** Police recorded 3,738 victimisations among the 2,448 child victims in 2019. Twelve percent of these children experienced two assaults, and ten percent suffered three or more. [Statistic 7](#)
- **Justice delayed and denied:** Two years after reporting, only 44 percent of child victimisations had resulted in any court action, 17 percent had led to a conviction and 12 percent to a prison sentence. [Statistic 8](#) A quarter of cases with court action took more than two years to be finalised, and 26 percent were still waiting for an outcome. [Statistic 9](#)
- **High attrition:** Police chose not to progress 35 percent of reported child victimisations, and 8 percent stalled because the victim or witness was not able to proceed. [Statistic 10](#)



Key Statistics CONTINUED

- **Most offences go unreported:** About 90 percent of sexual assault offences between 2018 and 2024 were never reported to Police. Combining under-reporting with court attrition means only about 4 percent of victimisations lead to charges and 1 percent to convictions. [Statistic 11](#)
- **Online exploitation is a growing threat:** Netsafe reports that around 70 percent of teens have experienced unwanted digital communications. In 2024, New Zealand's Digital Child Exploitation Filtering System blocked over one million attempts to access child sexual exploitation material and safeguarded 14 children while prosecuting 13 offenders. [Statistic 12](#). [Statistic 13](#)



Why These Numbers Matter

These figures reveal a crisis in which children and adolescents carry a disproportionate share of sexual violence. Many adults who report sexual assault were first harmed as children, so

preventing abuse in youth is the surest way to reduce adult prevalence. Yet the system fails young survivors: most offences are never reported, and for those who do come forward the court process is slow and often inconclusive.

Combining these realities with the growing threat of online exploitation shows why a trauma-informed, youth-centric overhaul of policies, support services and justice processes is urgently needed.



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