

Citizen Advisory Committee

Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections
Correctional Service Canada



Public Safety Through Support and Accountability Community Reintegration Programs for Specific Groups of Offenders and their Families Webinar: November 29, 2022

Video: <https://youtu.be/z2DoBKSunm4>

Most people serving a prison sentence will eventually return to the community. To prevent re-offending, they must have supports so they can successfully reintegrate. This webinar explored community-based supports for two specific groups of offenders: those with a life sentence ("lifers") and those who have been convicted of a sexual offence.

After many years in prison, lifers on parole must adapt to a world that can feel overwhelming, unpredictable, and foreign. Those who have been convicted of a sexual offence must take accountability for the harm they have caused, and change the attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours associated with their offending. Family members also require extensive support.

Over 350 people registered for this webinar, which featured five speakers from Canada, the UK, and New Zealand:

- **Sherry Edmunds-Flett**, Executive Director of [Long-Term Inmates Now in the Community \(L.I.N.C.\)](#), Abbotsford, BC. Mrs. Flett founded L.I.N.C. with her late husband, [Glen Flett](#), who served a life sentence for shooting and killing a Hudson's Bay store manager during a hold-up. After being paroled, Glen devoted his life to restorative justice, not only supporting offenders to live prosocial lives but also empowering victims. In addition to support groups, L.I.N.C. operates [Emma's Acres](#), a 3.2 hectare farm that employs survivors/victims as well as current and former offenders. Food from the farm is donated to the community. **Contact:** seflett@telus.net
- **Dr. Wendy VanderWal Martin**, Associate Director of [CoSA Canada \(Circles of Support and Accountability\)](#), Toronto, ON. Grounded in restorative justice, CoSA aims to reduce sexual victimization by assisting people who have been convicted of a sexual offence to lead responsible, constructive, and accountable lives in their communities. CoSA runs 15 sites across Canada, serving 200+ core members annually. The program has expanded internationally. **Contact:** wvanderwalmartin@cosacanada.com
- **Cristina Abasolo**, Communications Lead, [CoSA Vancouver/Fraser Valley](#). As a former volunteer with CoSA, Cristina believes that communities can heal and overcome crime together. **Contact:** vfvcosa@gmail.com

- **[Dr. Belinda Winder](#)**, Professor of Forensic Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, UK. Dr. Winder is the Research Director of the [Centre for Crime, Offending, Prevention and Engagement \(COPE\)](#). She co-founded the [Safer Living Foundation](#), which delivers and evaluates programs to prevent sexual (re)offending and helps people with a sexual conviction reintegrate into the community. Dr. Winder's [research](#) includes the experiences of non-offending partners of those convicted of a sexual offence. **Contact:** belinda.winder@ntu.ac.uk
- **Corrina Thompson**, Senior Mentoring Coordinator, [Pillars New Zealand](#). Pillars provides support and mentorship to children of people serving a sentence in prison or the community. These children are in a situation they did not choose, yet face a sentence of their own; they are invisible victims who may become socially and economically isolated. Corrina provides support to these children in their homes. She recently completed a master's degree on the [lived experiences of people involved in the New Zealand justice system](#). She also started a Youth Advisory Panel at Pillars and recently submitted an open letter to the New Zealand Government calling for the establishment of Children's Care Plans for all children of parents serving a sentence (see end of this document). **Contact:** corrina.thompson@pillars.org.nz

This webinar was hosted by the [Citizen Advisory Committee for Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections](#), a division of [Correctional Service Canada \(CSC\)](#). We are community members who observe CSC operations; liaise between the public and CSC; and advise CSC on its policies. This was our third [annual webinar](#), moderated by CAC Vice-Chair [Eddy Elmer](#) and CAC member [Swayam Chandra](#). A special thanks to CAC member and past-Chair, John Houck, for video editing. For more information about the CAC, please email [Eddy Elmer](#) or [Dennis Herfst](#), Area Director, Metro Vancouver West Community Corrections.

Our Previous [Webinars](#)

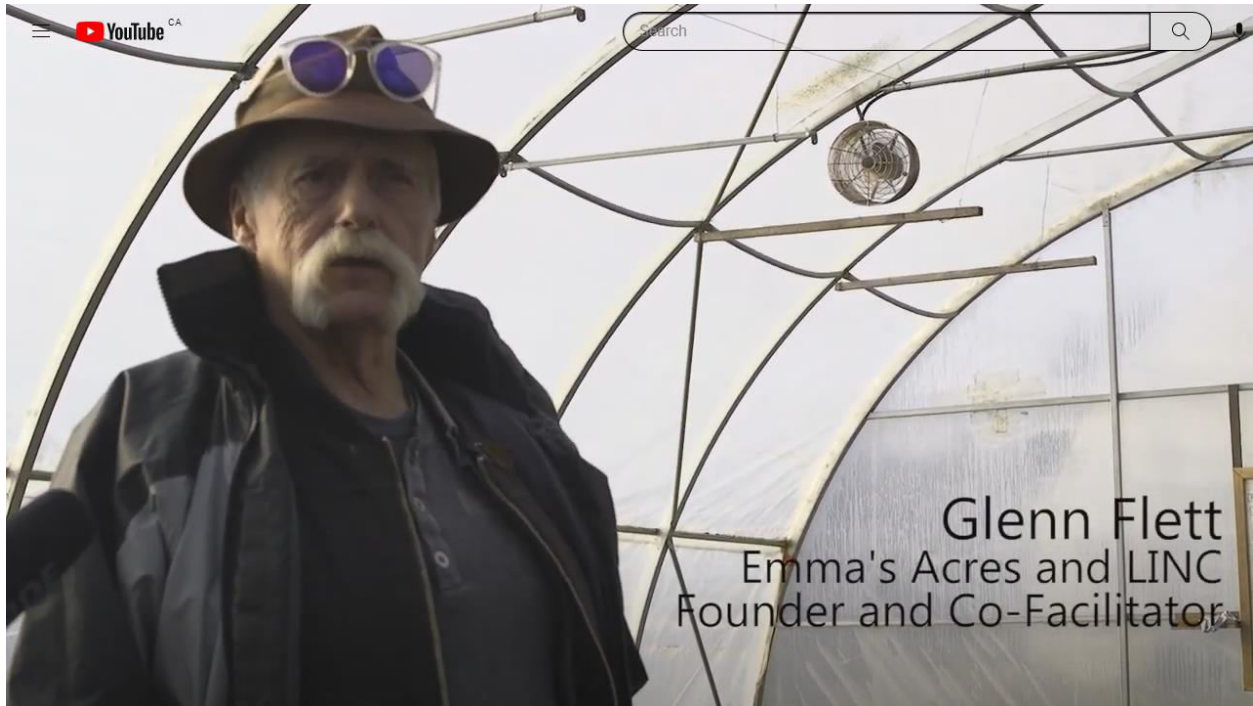
2020

[Meeting the Needs of Aging Offenders in the Community](#)

2021

[Victims of Canadian Federal Offenders: Meeting Needs and Improving Supports](#)

Emma's Acres Video from Sherry Edmunds-Flett



<https://youtu.be/4hF4m517v0o>

Other Videos

[Emma's Acres: Reintegration, Restoration and Food Security](#)

[Emma's Acres: An Agricultural Social Enterprise that Funds Victim Initiatives](#)

[Offenders, Victims Work to Heal Old Wounds on B.C. Farm](#)

[Crime and Punishment with a Twist](#)

The Back Story of Glen Flett and Me, Randie Scott

Ours is a complicated but amazing story that started in 1987, when [Glen Flett](#) was an inmate in the unit I supervised at William Head Institution in British Columbia. When I reviewed his lengthy file, I found his past to be seriously checkered; he had run afoul of the law multiple times, starting at age 11. In 1978, at age 27, [he shot and killed](#) Theodore Van Sluytman, a Hudson's Bay Store manager, during a Brink's hold-up in the Toronto area. He was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 21 years to life.

I read all his reports and considered his lengthy criminal activities. He had most certainly been a very bad guy. After incarceration in Ontario, Glen was transferred to Kent Institution in Agassiz, a maximum-security prison in BC. Glen struggled there. He was often in conflict with others and involved in the prison drug trade. He spent a lot of time in segregation.

"Life meant very little to me—anybody's life, including my own. And I got into a lot of trouble. I was constantly getting into small confrontations with the staff and with other prisoners, too."

But in 1982, Glen's attitude, behaviour, and respect for others took a visible turn for the better. He stayed out of trouble for five years and showed institutional staff that he was genuinely remorseful and repentant for his heinous offence, his violent past, and his general criminality.

Glen came to be viewed as a rare offender—one who took complete responsibility. He cooperated with his case management team and carefully followed his correctional plan. He transitioned from troublemaker to model prisoner, which he credited to becoming a Christian while at Kent. Eventually he was transferred to William Head, a less structured penitentiary.

There, Glen became involved in many prison activities. Managers noticed he was a positive influence on troubled and misbehaving inmates, who respected him and found him to be a good sounding board. Glen seemed to have a calming influence on them, and staff could rely on him to help them resolve inmate disputes.

Glen's life improved further when he met Sherry Edmunds, whom he married in the WHI Chapel in 1987. Back then, federal inmates wishing to marry required permission from the Attorney General. Glen's parole officer was very excited when Glen finally received permission; in fact, it's hard to know who was happier—him or Glen!

As a supervisor, I was proud to watch Glen flourish in prison, take full responsibility for his criminal past, and make amends to [Mr. Van Sluytman's family](#). I've always remembered what I was told by [Warden Ron Weibe](#), an important mentor of mine: "When people can actually express remorse and sorrow for what they did—and more importantly, if they can do it to the affronted—we know that it is often a life-changing experience." Indeed, this has a profound effect on the offender and their family, as well as the victim and their families.

Glen and I once talked about working together to help offenders live as law-abiding citizens and become contributing members of society. That pact took on renewed meaning many years later.

In 1992, as a 'lifer' on full parole, Glen founded [L.I.N.C.—Long-term Inmates Now in the Community Society](#)—a non-profit registered charity. As the only organization of its kind in Canada, L.I.N.C. works with all people impacted by crime and is committed to the following core beliefs:

- Every person in society has a fundamental right to be safe and secure.
- Every person is part of the reintegration process and has inherent value and dignity.
- Every person's contribution can have a positive, meaningful impact on the spirit of justice and on the well-being of their community.
- Hope lies in the potential for every person to change, and in the willingness of others to support and encourage that change.
- The justice system must be both restorative and transformative. Restorative justice focuses on the needs of victims and offenders, whereas [transformative justice](#) goes further—it seeks to address the underlying causes of crime and violence, including those rooted in social systems.
- By giving offenders the opportunity to make amends to everyone they have impacted, a sense of value can be restored to victims, survivors, offenders.
- For offenders to change their behaviour, they must be accountable for what they have done to their victims, the victims' families, their own families, and the community.

L.I.N.C. has provided a variety of services over the years:

- Opportunities for offenders to participate in agricultural enterprise (e.g., [Emma's Acres](#))
- Contributing fresh food to victims and survivors of crime and local food banks
- Outreach groups, peer support, and workshops for victims and survivors of crime
- Funding and organizing victim-centered community events
- Outreach and tailored support for people exiting prison
- Weekly support groups for offenders and a toll-free support line
- Support for 2SLGBTQ+ people in prison

Prior to my retirement from CSC in 2010, I was an active supporter of L.I.N.C. With the encouragement of Brenda Marshall, the Chair at the time, I joined the Board. I have been in this role ever since, carrying on the important work that Glen started so many years ago. Right now, I am excited about our plans to create an agricultural enterprise on Vancouver Island, in cooperation with William Head Institution. This will greatly expand the work we've started at Emma's Acres, benefiting more victims and survivors, offenders, families, and communities.

Randie Scott

Correctional Service Canada (ret.)
L.I.N.C. Board Member (now in 13th year of volunteering)

Circles of Support and Accountability: Restorative Justice Approach for High-Risk Offenders

Presenters:

Cristina Abasolo, Co-Coordinator, CoSA VFV

Wendy VanderWal Martin, Associate Director,
CoSA Canada



What is CoSA?

- Made-in-Canada **reintegration** program in the mid-nineties, based on **restorative justice principles**, for individuals (known as Core Members/CMs) who have been convicted of sexual offences
- Allows the **community** to play a direct role in the restoration, reintegration, and risk management practises
- Trained and screened volunteers act as role models and companions, offering **support** to CMs to succeed
- CMs held **accountable** for their behaviour, decisions and choices; and work closely with volunteers who flag concerns, if required, to authorities



CoSA's Mission: *to substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimization by assisting and supporting released individuals in their task of integrating into the community and leading a responsible, meaningful, and accountable life.*

Inclusivity: CoSA is for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, ability, or identity. Potential Core Members who acknowledge that they are at risk to re-offend and who have a genuine desire to live crime-free lives are invited to participate.



Restorative Objectives of CoSA

- Building safer and healthier communities
- Enabling responsibility-taking for harmful actions and choices
- Generating an environment of empathy to better understand the needs of victims and the impact of sexual harm on them (recognizing that many CMs are victims themselves)
- Provides a careful balance of engagement between **support and accountability**
- Supporting CMs to develop new and positive life strategies

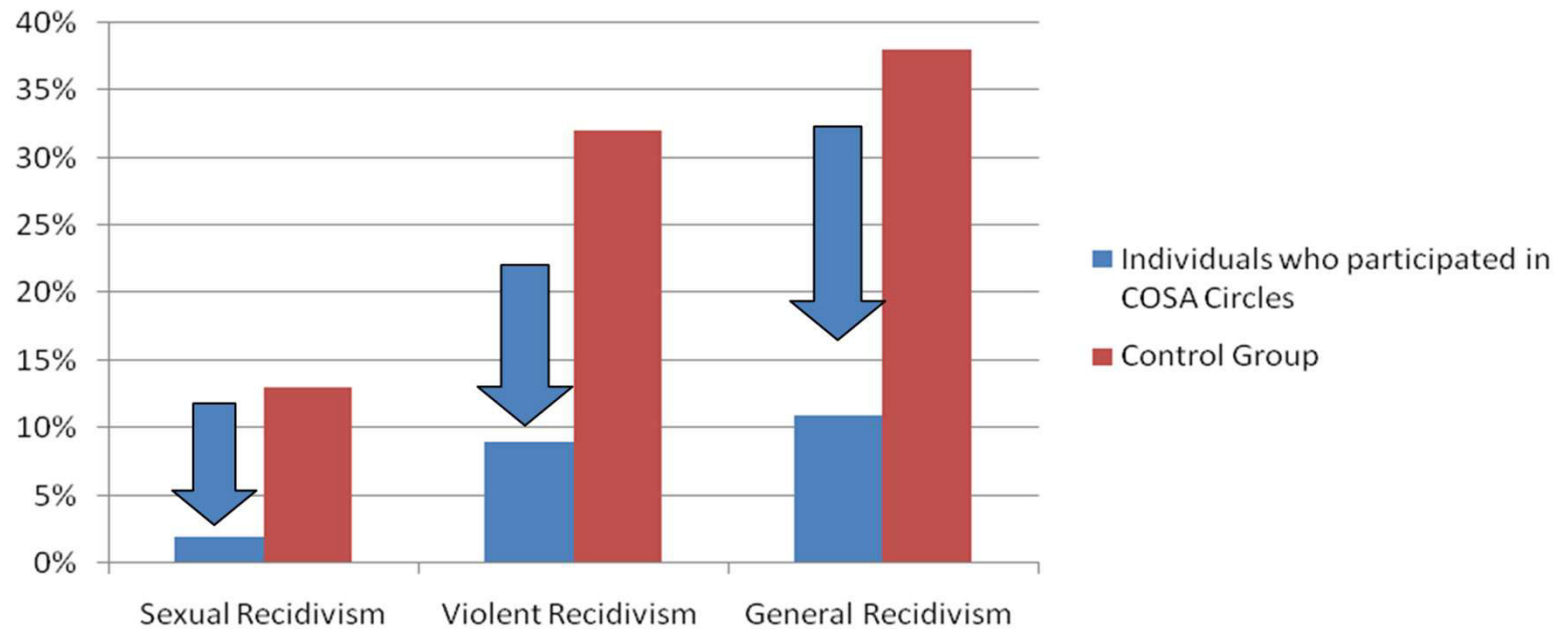


CoSA Works!

- In varying contexts, evidence-based studies consistently show reductions in offending among CMs
- Canadian studies: participants in CoSA committed between 70 and 83% fewer offences
- A 2018 study by Grant Duwe, Minnesota Department of Corrections: participation in CoSA reduced sexual recidivism by 88%



Recidivism Rates Among COSA Participants



Wilson, R.J., Cortoni, F., & Vermani, M. (2007). *Circles of Support & Accountability: A national replication of outcome findings*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

CoSA's Operational Model

- Developed in consultation with partners across the country and internationally and implemented in 2017
- Represents a broad consensus view of what CoSA's approach is and a best practice in offender reintegration
- Allows CoSA sites to ensure that common standards are met and maintained nationwide – building credibility with Corrections and Community partners
- Provides flexibility to CoSA sites across Canada to adapt to their local communities and circumstances



Support AND Accountability

- Circles act as **hub** helping CMs access needed supports and resources
- Circles support **honest** discussion through establishing clear **boundaries**
- Honouring shared goals and commitments promotes **trust and respect** between the CMs and volunteers
- Circles assist CMs to manage their personal **risk factors**, recognize their **strengths**, and develop **new skills** and **self-understanding**
- Breaking the cycle of offending and preventing harm contributes to **community safety**



Local Site: Vancouver / Fraser Valley

- 2003: Began offering circles for CMs released from Federal; 2016: expanded to include CMs released from Provincial Institutions
- 2019: Virtual circles were added, and currently expanding to include all of B.C. and the Yukon.
- At any given time, we have between **35-40 CMs** and over **90 volunteers**.
- From 2003 to the present, we have had over **250 Circles**
- We work with multiple police forces, parole and probation offices



Challenges for CoSA in Canada

- Five-year demonstration funding through Public Safety Canada ended in March 2022
- Lack of secure, long-term funding will jeopardize the ability of local CoSA sites to continue to operate
- Creating partnerships with the Provinces and Territories along with Federal funding is critical
- Other ongoing needs: more volunteers; advocacy; public education



Innovation for CoSA Canada

- Department of Justice – victims lens project
- Public Safety – Core Member Needs and Strengths Tool project
- Pending – virtual circles project
- Guiding Good Choices – pre-offense
- Peer Fellowship Nights – bonus to ongoing circles



For more information:

www.cosacanada.com

To request our Good Practice Manuals:

wvanderwalmartin@cosacanada.com



January 31, 2022

Open Letter of Support for Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a Canadian program based on restorative justice principles designed to assist individuals convicted of sexual offences as they re-enter the community at the end of their sentence. The CoSA model, which originated in Canada, has since been replicated in numerous countries in Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Sex offenders released to the community, often at warrant expiry, are without a formal process of community support or supervision. CoSA was created to address this shortfall by providing a supportive and accountable relationship to these offenders (referred to as core members) who are at risk to reoffend sexually. Core members are often released from prison with no family, friends, or support in the community. Many of them are institutionalized after having spent long periods of time in prison and many have a history of abuse and deprivation.

CoSA's operational framework relies on the development of relationships with pro-social members of the community through a circle format. For many core members, this is the first time in their lives that they are engaging in healthy relationships with people who genuinely care about their well-being (and who are not paid to spend time with them). The relationship itself, and the voluntary nature of the relationship, are seen as fundamental to CoSA's success.

Restorative justice principles and practices guide CoSA's operational format, and grounds how CoSA frames wrongdoing and what to do about it. Restorative justice begins with a belief that crimes harm relationships and create obligations to right the wrong. CoSA promotes meaningful accountability on these terms, while helping the core member build social capital. From a relational theory perspective of justice, CoSA allows the community, through volunteer members, to build relationships with core members that promote healing and well-being for everyone, while meeting the relational needs of core members and holding them accountable to the community.

In the initial stages, the circle is focussed on helping the core member work through the practical issues related to life outside of prison (e.g., finding housing, accessing a food bank, obtaining employment, and getting a driver's license) and manage the conditions of a Criminal Code of Canada s810 order or a Long-term Supervision Order. As the circle members become more familiar with one another, they can begin to address more complex issues (e.g., triggers for reoffending, danger of breaching, depression, self-harm, family issues, frustration, and anger). CoSA plays a pivotal role in providing support for integration to core members outside of more formalized support structures, an element that seems to motivate core member commitment and continued involvement in CoSA. Both formal service providers and circle volunteers note that CoSA fills the gap between prison life and life after incarceration with a support service that stands "outside the 'system'", in an intermediary role between legal/correctional services and integration into society.

CoSA has proven to be effective in preventing further crime. A number of research studies have shown significant reductions in recidivism by core members as compared with control subjects who did not participate in CoSA (see bibliography attached). Concomitantly, findings from cost-benefit analyses of CoSA programs have demonstrated substantial savings in criminal justice system costs associated with the avoidance of further criminal behaviour and victimization.

We, the undersigned, recognize the valuable contribution that CoSA has made in promoting the safe and healthy reintegration to the community of individuals who have served sentences for sexual offences, and we strongly support further funding of CoSA programs in Canada.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Cormier

Ronald-Frans Melchers

Robin J. Wilson

Anthony N. Doob

R. Karl Hanson

James Bonta

John M. W. Bradford

Stacey Hannem

Christopher D. Webster

Jennifer M. Kilty

Andrew McWhinnie

Véronique Strimelle

Nicole M. Myers

Stephen D. Hart

Christine Gervais

Stephen J. Hucker

Sandra LeHalle

Amy Peirone

Victoria Sytsma

Wagdy Loza

Isabelle Perreault

Rick Linden

Michael Petrunik

Circles of Support & Accountability – Bibliography

(v. 2022.01.17)

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Centre for Crime, Offending,
Prevention and Engagement

What happens to the families of people arrested for a sexual offence?

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Overview

- Language matters
- The starting point
- The Knock
- Initial aftermath
- Ongoing struggles
- Where to get support
- What needs to happen

The Starting Point

- The number of people arrested for internet-mediated sexual offences is rapidly increasing (MoJ, 2022) and IMISO is becoming the fastest growing form of sexual offending.
- IWF assessed reports of webpages/newsgroups 361k (up 20% from year before)
- In the summer of 2021, a total of 850 investigations commenced in those three months. In 2022, UK police data showed over 1000 investigations commenced each month.
- 30%-40% of people convicted for internet-mediated sexual abuse live in a household with children.
- Around a sixth of people arrested held positions of trust.
- 10% involved in online and contact offences (i.e. 90% online only).
- The Knock (see next slide)

The Knock

- When? How?
- Typically, the person will be male, employed, and have no previous conviction (Seto, 2018; Key et al., 2021).
- High suicide risk (100 times higher than general popn?), but low prevalence of MH diagnoses. Acute stressors relating to the investigation provoke suicide attempts (Walter & Pridmore, 2012)
- However, post-conviction, far more people had diagnosis of major depression (see Byrne et al, 2012).
- The protracted nature of police investigations, which pre-pandemic averaged around two years, and the lack of any previous contact with the criminal justice system by people committing this type of offence magnify disruption to family life.
- The police will first ascertain whether the accused person is abusing the children they live with. Once this has been ruled out, the children in the household are not formally considered to have suffered harm.

Initial aftermath

- Shock; reality check of whole of their lives;
 - Loss of control, trust, disbelief, betrayal, self-blame, blame from others
- Our study of partners (n=40) of people arrested for a sexual offence (The Knock, mean 3.8 years ago), Mean wellbeing 9.31 (wellbeing cut off = 13), with 75% of participants meeting the criteria for PTSD.
- Emotional / practical / financial / social challenges
 - loss of income, legal problems, moving house / area, friends and family, social work and school, jobs, new structures to navigate
- Courtesy stigma, web of shame and assumptions and perceptions of others
 - Working through own feelings, intimacy,
 - Expected to have protective role, judgments of others
 - Public shaming
 - Self-isolation

Ongoing Struggles and Support

- Relationship with partner / ex-partner
- Low recidivism risk, high fear of recidivism risk
- Children and challenges

Coping alone; Managing own emotions and children's; Disclosure and what to tell ACEs (parental relationship, relocation of home/school, bullying, social media, self-questioning, secrecy).

- 'The challenge for clinicians and policymakers is to distinguish those who are likely to sexually reoffend and those who are not' (Seto, 2018, p.170)
- The problems with disclosure; Community notifications and registration may be popular but increase public fear and anxiety and no evidence they are effective (see eg Beck et al, 2004).
- In the UK, Talking Forward, Children Heard and Seen, Lucy Faithfull Forum

What needs to happen...

- Research on competing tensions (e.g. risk and safeguarding with family stability and contact)
- Map out the key needs for children to minimise adverse childhood experiences that will ensue
- Analyse the impact on children and improve awareness, policy, and practice to minimise the collateral damage
- Consider data, practices, and policies of the police and criminal justice system, Children's Services and Local Education Authorities
- Identify gaps and inconsistencies between policy and practice with respect to local, regional, and national practice.
- Consider the different needs of minority groups within society
- Consider limiting information that can be reported by media

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Useful links

Academic paper about the experiences of family members (free online access)

Duncan, K., Wakeham, A., Winder, B., Blagden, N., & Armitage, R. (2022). “Grieving someone who’s still alive, that’s hard”: the experiences of non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended—an IPA study. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 1-15. Open access: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552600.2021.2024611>

Briefing report for stakeholders (may be helpful to people in this situation, social workers and others)

The experiences of non-offending partners of individuals who have committed sexual offences

https://www.ntu.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/1237405/SOCAMRU-Non-offending-partners-Stakeholders-report-Nov-20-1.pdf

Briefing paper on language and terminology

Recommended Terminology Concerning People with a Criminal Conviction

https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/46214/1/1540991_Winder.pdf or email myself Belinda.winder@ntu.ac.uk

Charities supporting people in this area

<https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/who-we-are/>

Children Heard and Seen is a charity which provides support and interventions for children with a parent in prison.



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SOCAMRU

Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct
Research Unit

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Recommended Terminology Concerning People with a Criminal Conviction

Version: 1.0

Date: 20/07/2021

Author: Professor Belinda Winder, Professor of Forensic Psychology

Contributors: Winder, B., Scott, S., Underwood, M., & Blagden, N. (2021).

Recommended Terminology Concerning People with a Criminal Conviction. COPE
Practice Brief 01/21. NTU Psychology, Nottingham Trent University.

1. Overview

This guide to terminology has been created to support staff and students in understanding helpful and appropriate ways to refer to people who have previously been convicted of a criminal offence. It has been put together with input from a survey of NTU Psychology staff, best practice guidance from the American Psychological Association, The Marshall (Language) Project, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, academic journals, research, and individuals with a vested interest in the use of language that supports rather than excludes.

In the last 40 years, there has been a move away from stigmatising and labelling language, particularly in relation to disabilities and health conditions. The progression towards person-first language has been slower in the criminal justice arena, but this is now gaining momentum. This guidance supports this evolution while recognising that mistakes will be made. However, through practice and engagement, people will increasingly use appropriate and supportive language when discussing crimes and people convicted of them.

It is important to highlight here that this guidance, in promulgating appropriate terminology to describe and communicate with and about people who have previously been convicted of a criminal offence, is not seeking to excuse or justify previous actions, but neither does it seek to downplay the damage caused by an offence.

2. Why does it matter?

This is an important step in reminding us all of the importance of language and labels. It matters because some terms can be inaccurate and damaging, and they can have an impact on a person's wellbeing (Blagden et al., 2014; Winder et al., 2021). Such language negatively and substantively changes the way others react to someone, affecting offers of help and support for them (Lowe & Willis, 2020). These terms are also copied by other people when they are used (Jacobs et al., 1998), perpetuating damage and undermining prevention efforts. They also contribute to the social 'cursing' of groups of people (see Kellezi et al., 2019; Winder & Underwood, 2021) and affect individuals' struggles in overcoming what becomes a tainted 'master status' (Becker, 1963) and a spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963).

Finally, it may not be apparent to anyone who does not work in this field, but many individuals who have committed serious offences have been traumatised by what they have done (Evans et al., 2007), a condition known as perpetration-induced traumatic stress (MacNair, 2002). This trauma can be notable and debilitating (MacNair, 2015), and the concept of perpetration as a cause of trauma is discussed in DSM-5. Moreover, while serving a custodial sentence is an appropriate punishment for many offences, further traumatic experiences arising as a direct consequence of living in a prison environment will often be inflicted upon people (see Crewe, 2011; Leeder, 2012; Sykes, 1958, 2007).

Language that compounds these traumas is unhelpful and unnecessary, and it can also be harmful. This gives a responsibility to us as researchers, teachers, and practitioners to promote the use of helpful and accurate labels that contribute to prevention and rehabilitation efforts, and which are underpinned by values of humanity and decency.

3. Recommended Terminology

We aim for language that is accurate and does not obscure the person. We do not seek to *humanise* people with criminal convictions since people with convictions are *already* human. We do, however, seek to use language that is not dehumanising.

The following are some practical examples of appropriate terms.

Type of Criminal Conviction	Appropriate Terminology
Currently serving custodial sentence	People/person in prison. Imprisoned people/person. Incarcerated people/person.
Previously served a custodial sentence	Formerly imprisoned people/person, Formerly incarcerated people/person.
Convicted of an offence	People/person convicted of [type of offence]; do not write about an individual convicted of offences (i.e., the plural) unless a person has been convicted of more than one offence.

3.1 Language that can be offensive, damaging, unhelpful and othering.

- Any term that conflates the person with the act (e.g., *rapist* or *murderer*) should be avoided.
- Simplified labels obscure the truth. For example, there are a range of sexual offences that are obscured by terms such as ‘paedophile’; it is also often the case that these terms are used inaccurately. In this instance, paedophilia is a diagnosis of someone having an enduring sexual attraction to children; this does *not* however mean they have acted or will act on this unchosen attraction, and thus it does not indicate that they have committed a sexual offence (WHO, 2018, section 6D32p).
- Any language that aligns the current identity of a person with their historical actions should also be avoided, such as *offender*, *perpetrator*, *ex-offender*, or *ex-prisoner*.
- Avoid terms that suggest a homogeneous group that is defined and stigmatised on the basis of criminal behaviour that may have taken place once or infrequently, or many years in the past (e.g., *sex offender* or *murderer*).
- Terms that are derogatory or contain negative value judgments or have superfluous overtones should not be used. Such terms include: *inmate*, *convict*, *felon*, *nonce*, *in denial*, *deviant*, *delinquent*, and *criminal*.

3.2 Avoid Othering

Language should avoid the implication that people with a conviction are somehow different from 'normal' society. Inclusive language and attitudes include:

- Recognising that people with a criminal conviction and those in prison are part of society, not separate or separated from it;
- Recognising that people with a criminal conviction (whether in prison or the community) can and do make a positive contribution to society;
- Only differentiating between convictions where relevant – e.g., sexual/non-sexual, spent/unspent convictions (for more on this, see [Unlock's website](#));
- Avoiding mentioning a person's conviction when this is not appropriate or relevant;
- Respecting the subjectivity or positionality of the person. For example, some people may regard prison as home. Respect the reality of imprisonment/punishment for that person rather than trying to sanitise it.

3.3 Avoid Doing to / Managing

- People are not cases to be managed or problems to be treated; they are individuals with goals and personal agency; that is, the ability to initiate and carry out actions to achieve goals in one's life.
- Do not undermine people's agency by describing them as passive objects rather than active participants. For example, using terms such as 'educating prisoners', rather than 'prisoners' learning'.
- Organisations may aim at 'rehabilitation' in general, but individuals themselves are not 'rehabilitated' or 'reformed'.

3.4 Don't be Possessive or Judgmental

Avoid using language which establishes a structural position over people when working with them. For example, avoid 'our service users' or 'beneficiaries'. Also avoid projecting values and making assumptions. For example, the assumption that people in prison are dangerous and continue to be so on release. Around one in five adults in the UK has a criminal conviction and, clearly, they are not identifiable visually, so please be aware of the damaging effect that words may have on people. This includes avoiding sweeping statements about news events or crimes which are not based on evidence and being cognisant of the effects that such declarations can have on people.

4. Concluding statement

It is important to see people with criminal convictions as contributing members of the community and society, not as problems, as dangerous, as liars or as unreliable. People with convictions are not a homogeneous group and should not be treated as such. Society is formed, at least in part, by our attitudes and behaviours. If we want people to be part of society, then we must help to create that space for them through our words and actions.

When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders, and other derogatory terms, we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners, and felons— all terms devoid of humanness which identify us as "things" rather than as people. These terms are accepted as the "official" language of the media, law enforcement, prison industrial complex, and public policy agencies. However, they are no longer acceptable for us. ...We are asking everyone to stop using these negative terms and to simply refer to us as PEOPLE. PEOPLE currently or formerly incarcerated, PEOPLE on parole, PEOPLE recently released from prison, PEOPLE in prison, PEOPLE with criminal convictions, but PEOPLE.

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The experiences of non-offending partners of individuals who have committed sexual offences

Recommendations for practitioners and stakeholders

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Introduction

The non-offending partners (NOPs) of individuals who have committed sexual offences experience significant repercussions following the discovery of their partners' crimes (Serin, 2018). However, there is a scarcity of research investigating NOPs' experiences (Rapp, 2011). Initial research into NOPs focused on mothers whose children had been abused in cases of father-daughter incest (Cahalane & Duff, 2018), and NOPs were frequently held responsible for their partners' sexual transgressions (Azzopardi et al., 2018). These early mother-blaming narratives within academia have since been replaced by a focus on what role NOPs can play in facilitating desistance and preventing sexual crimes (Shannon et al., 2013).

“Mother-blaming narratives ... have been replaced by a focus on what role NOPs can play in facilitating desistance.”

More recent studies have characterised NOPs as performing a protective role in safeguarding their children from sexual harm (Galloway & Hogg, 2008), and they are prescribed responsibility for supervising their offending partner's behaviour (Duff et al., 2017; McAlinden et al., 2017; McCallum, 2001). Although explicitly less blaming, this shift in focus towards NOPs' utility as a protective resource has been described as exploitative, as the burden of ameliorating the risk of sexual reoffending is displaced onto the NOP by child protection services and criminal justice agencies (Wager et al., 2015).

It has been argued that the focus on NOPs as protective tools has resulted in their individual support needs being overlooked, as professional intervention fixates on protecting victims and reducing perpetrators' risks of sexual reoffending (Thompson, 2017). Whilst these are vital aims, a comprehensive review of the literature revealed that NOPs' individual support needs are rarely considered independently from the needs of children or perpetrators (Serin, 2018), despite NOPs representing a population in need of clinical intervention (Shannon et al., 2013).

Research has shown that NOPs experience significant psychological distress following the discovery of their partner's sexual offending, and they exhibit

increased levels of depression, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Green et al., 1995; Kim et al., 2007). Additionally, NOPs experience a multitude of losses post-discovery, typically including the loss of their family ties and support networks (Cahalane et al., 2013), which can elicit bereavement-style responses (Dwyer & Miller, 1996). Whilst most research in this area involves cases of intrafamilial offending against children, a growing body of qualitative evidence indicates that NOPs whose partners committed internet and extrafamilial offences experience similar trauma and loss post-discovery (Cahalane et al., 2013; Liddell & Taylor, 2015), suggesting a commonality in response regardless of offence category.

In addition, punishments, both social and symbolic, have consequences beyond the people who have offended (Kirk & Wakefield, 2018; Garland, 1991), and NOPs face similar repercussions to perpetrators of sexual crime. In the UK, a study by Condry (2007) reported that the families of individuals with sexual convictions

“Policies designed to monitor those with sexual convictions in the UK have unintended consequences for partners and families.”

were ostracised and shamed by their communities. This finding is consistent with research that suggests NOPs face “courtesy stigmatisation” (Goffman, 1963) due to their affiliation with someone who has committed a sexual offence (Farkas & Miller, 2007). In addition,

Brown (2017) demonstrated that policies designed to monitor those with sexual convictions in the UK have unintended consequences for partners and families, creating challenges surrounding finding housing and employment.

The victimhood of NOPs and relatives of those with serious convictions is rarely publicly accepted due to their association with the perpetrator (Condry, 2010). However, the commonality in experience between direct victims of crime and NOPs necessitates that NOPs be viewed as secondary victims of their partners’ offending (Stitt, 2007) who are deserving of support in their own right (Shannon et al., 2013).

The study reported here aimed to better understand how NOPs’ lives are impacted by the discovery of their partners’ sexual offences by qualitatively exploring the accounts of NOPs whose partners had committed a sexual offence

in the UK. Almost all the participants were still in a relationship with the offending partner whilst the research was being conducted.

Research questions

- What are NOPs' experiences surrounding the discovery of their partners' sexual offences?
- How does the discovery of their partners' offences impact NOPs' lives? What are the immediate and long-term impacts? How do they cope?
- How does discovery impact upon NOPs' relationships, including their relationship with the perpetrator?
- What support do NOPs receive, if any, and what support is lacking that they think would be useful?

Research methods

The sample consisted of ten participants, nine females and one male, whose partners had committed a sexual offence. The mean age of the sample was 47 years. Further participant information is presented in Table 1 on the next page.

The research was advertised on social media and a support forum for NOPs, and further information was provided to those who notified the research team of their interest via email. The inclusion criteria for the study were that participants must be 18+ years of age and must have been in a relationship with someone who had committed a sexual offence at the time when it was discovered. The sexual offences committed included internet, non-contact, and contact offences against children and adolescents, both within and outside of the perpetrator's family.

This research utilised interpretive phenomenological analysis to qualitatively analyse participants' accounts. This is an idiographic approach concerned with exploring individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

Data were collected using one-to-one, semi-structured interviews, during which each participant was encouraged to describe their experience and how the discovery of their partner's offence had impacted their life. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview schedule was flexible, following Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendation to create *virtual maps* that allow

the NOPs to tell their own story and the researcher to understand how they are giving meaning to their lived experiences.

Table 1. Participant information.

ID	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Current relationship with offending (ex-)partner	Nature of (ex-)partner's sentence	Nature of (ex-)partner's offence
P1	F	62	White British	Married	Custodial sentence	Extrafamilial contact offence
P2	F	32	White British	In a relationship	Yet to be sentenced	Internet offence
P3	F	68	White British	Married	Custodial sentence	Intrafamilial contact offence
P4	F	34	White Non-British	Married	Suspended sentence	Internet offence and non-contact offence
P5	F	39	White British	Married	Custodial sentence	Extrafamilial contact offence and internet offence
P6	F	41	White British	Uncertain of status	Custodial sentence	Intrafamilial contact offence
P7	F	47	White British	In a relationship	Custodial Sentence	Extrafamilial contact offence
P8	F	40	White British	Married	Under new investigation	Internet offence
P9	F	56	White British	Divorce instigated	Suspended sentence	Internet offence
P10	M	54	White Irish	Civil Partnership	Custodial Sentence	Extrafamilial contact offence

Ethical approval was received from Nottingham Trent University, and informed consent was obtained from all participants via a signed consent form. To uphold confidentiality, participants were assigned an ID number, and identifiable details were removed from the interview transcripts.

Results

The results are divided in two sections: themes related to the impact of discovery, and themes related to interactions with intervening agencies.

The impact of discovery

Two superordinate themes were examined in this category: **“The devastation of the discovery”** and **“Making sense of the nonsensical”**. Table 2 presents these first two superordinate themes.

Table 2. Themes relating to the impact of the discovery.

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
1. The devastation of the discovery	1.1. Not my world
	1.2. Mourning your life
	1.3. Navigating tainted identities
2. Making sense of the nonsensical	2.1. Seeing shades of grey
	2.2. Reconciling the man with the actions
	2.3. Damned if I do, damned if I don't

Superordinate theme 1, “The devastation of the discovery”, reflects participants’ accounts of the wide-ranging impact that discovery of their partners’ offences had on their lives. Within this superordinate theme, three subordinate themes were identified: **“Not my world”**, **“Mourning your life”**, and **“Navigating tainted identities”**.

The first subordinate theme **“Not my world”** reflects the recurrent narrative in participants’ accounts that the discovery of their partners’ offences marked a dramatic turning point in which their previous life was replaced with an alien reality, which some struggled to accept as their own. Traumagenic symptomology was evident across all participant accounts, supporting previous research that highlights that NOPs experience trauma following the discovery of intrafamilial, extrafamilial or internet-based sexual abuse perpetrated by a partner (Cahalane et al., 2013; Green et al., 1995; Liddell & Taylor, 2015).

Discovery can be characterised as a traumatic event that exposes NOPs to information that is incompatible with their fundamental assumptions about the world, overwhelming their ability to cope and provoking a stress response (Horowitz, 1986). To mitigate the debilitating impact of trauma, participants employed several psychological defence mechanisms, including avoidance, denial, and dissociation from day-to-day events (Horowitz, 1986).

The second subordinate theme, **“Mourning your life”**, focused on the participants’ experiences of loss following discovery. Participants expressed grief surrounding the psychosocial death (Doka & Aber, 1989) of their partner’s previous image, which was replaced by a “deviant” master status (Goffman, 1963), and some mourned the physical loss of their partner via imprisonment. The grief expressed was deemed socially unacceptable by those surrounding the participants, resulting in most receiving a lack of support from friends and family. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that NOPs experience disenfranchised grief and social isolation (Bailey, 2018). Participants similarly grieved the loss of their planned futures due to the ongoing restrictions placed on their partner, which can limit life choices for years (Bonnar-Kidd, 2010). Such restrictions were conceptualised by the participants as a joint punishment and life sentence that presented significant challenges for family life. This supports previous findings that the stringent monitoring of those with sexual convictions can stifle vital family ties (Kilmer & Leon, 2017).

The third subordinate theme, **“Navigating tainted identities”**, focuses on the way participants’ identities shifted following the discovery of their partners’ sexual offences. All participants reported facing stigmatisation due to their affiliation with their partner,

“Participants suffered, or feared, backlash similar to that faced by people with sexual convictions in the community.”

supporting earlier findings that the family members of individuals with sexual convictions face courtesy stigma (Farkas & Miller, 2007; Goffman, 1963). Participants suffered, or feared, backlash similar to that faced by people with sexual convictions in the community (Evans & Cubellis, 2015), including discrimination, threats, and social ostracization. As a result, some participants made efforts to conceal their new social identities and their partners’ offences

from others as a way to protect themselves from stigmatization. However, concealment can have negative outcomes, such as increasing social isolation and feelings of distress due to the constant cognitive effort required to protect a hidden identity (Camacho et al., 2020). The courtesy stigma experienced was internalised by the participants, who exhibited self-blame, guilt, and shame, all of which are associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Duncan & Cacciatore, 2015). This process of internalisation provoked shifts in participants' self-identities, leading some to question their own morality and decision-making, especially as the distinction between the participants and their offending partners was blurred by others who perceived and treated them as one.

Superordinate theme 2, "Making sense of the nonsensical", reflects the ways in which participants sought to make sense of their decision to remain in a relationship with their partner following the discovery of their offending behaviour. Within this superordinate theme, three subordinate themes were identified: **"Seeing shades of grey"**, **"Reconciling the man with the actions"**, and **"Damned if I do, damned if I don't"**.

The subtheme **"Seeing shades of grey"** reflects the cognitive adjustments each participant undertook to maintain a positive view of their partner. Participants rejected society's stereotypical labelling of those with sexual convictions and instead adopted more nuanced perspectives surrounding those who sexually

"Participants rejected society's stereotypical labelling ... and instead adopted more nuanced perspectives."

offend that saw beyond their offending behaviour. For most, this represented a significant move away from the views they held prior to discovering their partner's offence. The participants utilised neutralisation techniques outlined by Sykes and Matza (1957) to alleviate the stigma surrounding their relationship with

their partner, often transferring negative focus away from their partner towards the ignorance of society or those who commit more serious crimes. This finding supports earlier research outlining the techniques NOPs use to rationalise their decision to remain in a relationship with someone who has committed a sexual offence (Rapp, 2011). For some, the cognitive shifts undertaken were sufficient to accommodate their partner's crimes, but not other categories of sexual offence,

suggesting cognitive flexibility was necessary only to the extent that it facilitated the continuance of the participants' relationships.

The subordinate theme **"Reconciling the man with the action"** focuses on the participants' difficulties reconciling their partners with their offending behaviour. All participants experienced cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) stemming from a conflict between the image of the partner they knew and their offending actions. For most, this conflict was alleviated through separating their partner from their offence, focusing on their positive qualities, or minimising their partner's culpability, which is consistent with previous research demonstrating that NOPs exhibit cognitive distortions surrounding their partner's offences (Iffland et al., 2016).

Minimisation has been demonstrated to perform an adaptive function for those convicted of sexual offences (Maruna & Mann, 2006), and it is possible it is similarly adaptive for NOPs, allowing them to move forward with their lives and alleviate psychological distress. It is of note that the participant who had instigated divorce proceedings against her partner did not exhibit such minimisations, possibly indicating the protective nature of distortions for those who choose to remain in a relationship. Another way in which participants sought to resolve their internal discrepancy surrounding the image of their partner was by seeking knowledge to help them understand why their partner committed an offence, representing a form of sense-making following the loss of their assumptive world (Beder, 2005; Park, 2013).

"Minimisation [may] perform an adaptive function ... for NOPs, allowing them to move forward with their lives."

The final subordinate theme **"Damned if I do, damned if I don't"** focuses on participants' worries about what would happen if they were to leave their partners, with many fearing that their partner may not survive without them. Even though participants were aware of the social consequences they would continue to experience due to remaining in their relationship, their narratives conveyed the sense that they were responsible for their partners' wellbeing. Assuming this new role in the relationship could assist NOPs in making sense of their decision to

remain in the relationship, through the creation of a valued global goal between both partners (Hirsh, 2013; Michaels et al., 2013; Park, 2013). However, this scenario additionally represents an incredibly difficult position for NOPs to be in and raises concerns about the reasonableness of intervening agencies putting pressure on NOPs to end their relationships.

Intervening agencies

Two additional superordinate themes were revealed surrounding the participants' interactions with agencies and their views on the support available for NOPs: **"Left in limbo"** and **"Suspected and scrutinised"**.

The superordinate theme **"Left in limbo"** reflects the prolonged period of uncertainty each participant experienced following their partner's arrest, as they waited months or years for the police investigation to be completed. Coping with the constant painful expectations regarding whether their partner's case would be reported in the media was an exhausting struggle for the participants, who expressed anxiety surrounding the prospect of violent community retaliation; this is a finding that supports research highlighting that NOPs fear media exposure (Vaz, 2015).

"Participants voiced anger at the lack of aftercare available for families following the police arrest."

Participants voiced anger at the lack of aftercare available for families following the police arrest, and many felt forgotten by the police due to the lack of effort to keep them updated or signpost them to support services. The months and years that participants waited without answers and information were characterised as a

large void that opened up in their lives, reflecting feelings of emptiness, isolation, and of being left in the dark. Participants expressed how they spent hours looking for support and information online and by phoning charities. They reflected on how important it could be to have a signpost in the right direction towards safe spaces, with information and support being given in the initial contact with the police. This finding is consistent with literature exploring the experiences of victims of crime, which highlights how a lack of contact from the police can evoke re-traumatising feelings of distress, frustration, and isolation (Victim Support, 2011).

The subordinate theme “**Suspected and scrutinised**” focused on participants’ experiences of being treated by intervening agencies as if they were guilty, even though they had done nothing wrong. Most participants felt dehumanised by the police, who they perceived behaved in an unfeeling and process-driven way on the day of the arrest. However, some participants detailed positive interactions with police on the day of the arrest, with police officers who expressed empathy being perceived as particularly supportive.

There was an overall dissatisfaction with the approach of child protection services, who participants perceived as blaming and lacking knowledge surrounding sexual offending, undermining confidence in such agencies.

Participants felt under unfair scrutiny and suspicion when their protectiveness as a parent was being assessed by child protection services, supporting previous reports of NOPs feeling jointly punished for their partners’ crimes (Farkas & Miller, 2007).

“Participants perceived [child protection services] as blaming and lacking knowledge surrounding sexual offending, undermining confidence in such agencies.”

Furthermore, participants who sought for contact between their (ex-)partners and their children to be approved felt judged by child protection services.

For several participants, feelings of being judged also extended to interactions with charity staff; NOPs expressed that some professionals assumed they were going to leave their partners or questioned their decision to stay, increasing their feelings of shame. These findings are consistent with research highlighting that NOPs perceive intervening agencies as blaming and insensitive (Cahalane & Duff, 2018), which could have implications for their engagement with services (Cahalane et al., 2013).

Implications of the research

This research investigated the lived experiences of the non-offending partners of individuals who have committed a sexual offence. Each of the participants felt that they had been thrust into an unfamiliar world following the traumatic event of discovering their partner’s offence, and traumagenic symptomatology was

present in all participants' accounts. They mourned the loss of family relationships, the partner they knew, and their planned futures, and the disenfranchised nature of their grief meant that many lacked meaningful support. Participants experienced shifts in their own identities, largely stemming from the actual or perceived negative treatment directed at them from others due to their association with their offending partner.

This research provides greater insight into NOPs' support needs; they suffer significant psychological, emotional, and financial impacts that are similar to

“A shift towards viewing NOPs as secondary victims is necessary to ... help them cope with the ongoing devastation of discovery.”

those experienced by victims of crime. Alongside honing their protective capabilities, it is vital that interventions assist NOPs in managing the stigmatisation, trauma, and loss they experience due to their partner's offence (Shannon et al., 2013), and a shift

towards viewing NOPs as secondary victims is necessary to provoke a greater provision of services that help them cope with the ongoing devastation of discovery.

Participants reported that their partner's offending was a source of psychological conflict, and the majority undertook significant cognitive adjustments to help them maintain a positive view of their partner and make sense of their own decision to remain in the relationship. All but one participant exhibited minimisations surrounding their partner's offending, supporting the findings of previous research (Iffland et al., 2016). Whilst reducing such minimisations is a target of interventions for NOPs, the current research argues that minimisations may be an adaptive tool NOPs use to protect themselves from psychological distress, labelling, and shame. It is possible that, rather than being evidence of a lack of protectiveness, minimisation is a normal response to the discovery of a partner's sexual offending. In addition, because maintaining a relationship can reduce the risk of sexual reoffending (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015) – and NOPs protective distortions likely help facilitate the maintenance of such relationships – it may be counterproductive to focus on dismantling distortions in the absence of evidence that they reduce protectiveness, especially if they enable NOPs to move on with their lives.

Many participants felt responsible for their partner's wellbeing, which they perceived would suffer if they ended the relationship. This sense of responsibility puts NOPs in an incredibly difficult position and raises questions about the reasonableness of intervening agencies putting pressure on NOPs to end their relationships. Indeed, professionals within the police and child protection services giving their personal opinions, passing judgments, or directing NOPs to end their relationship was regularly cited by participants as unhelpful and distressing, and is something we recommend professionals avoid. This finding supports previous research indicating that intervening agencies may inadvertently compound the distress of NOPs (Cahalane et al., 2013).

“Police and child protection services giving their personal opinions, passing judgments, or directing NOPs to end their relationship ... is something we recommend professionals avoid.”

It is important to recognise that the criminal justice processes and professionals that NOPs deal with in the aftermath of discovery can influence their experiences of trauma, grief, shame, and isolation. Participants felt overlooked by the police, who the majority reported showed a lack of consideration for family members and failed to provide information about the case or avenues of support. Participants who were satisfied with the police stated that officers had been available to contact throughout the investigation, provided information about the investigation process, and were empathetic towards their family.

It is important that the police understand the traumatising impact that the day of arrest can have on NOPs, and how negative interactions can inadvertently increase their feelings of stigmatisation, making it even harder for them to look for future support. Regular contact throughout the investigation can protect their wellbeing as secondary victims, as has been shown with direct victims of crime (Victim Support, 2011). In addition, a more formalised and consistent approach to dealing sensitively with perpetrators' families would be beneficial, especially as the treatment and aftercare received varied hugely between participants and police forces.

Whilst the involvement of child protection services in the lives of NOPs with children is a necessary precaution and protecting children is vital, the participants felt that the lack of knowledge displayed by child protection services surrounding sexual offending encouraged the application of blanket restrictions to all those under investigation or with sexual convictions, regardless of the nature of their offence. Participants' expressed that this "one size fits all" approach had a profound impact on them, their children, and family life, as the stringent restrictions kept their families apart and struggling for many months.

Research suggests that the restrictions put in place to prevent the risk of future offending may make it more challenging for a perpetrator to reintegrate and maintain supportive family bonds (Kilmer & Leon, 2017), which can increase the

“Research suggests that the restrictions put in place to prevent the risk of future offending ... can increase the risk of sexual offending.”

risk of sexual offending (Walker et al., 2017). The importance of family ties for desistance is inarguable, and there is a need to balance protective precautions against the negative consequences that families experience when they are

separated by child protection services (Walker et al., 2017). In addition, evidence surrounding reoffending risk for specific offences should inform decisions about the application of restrictions; this will avoid unnecessarily stringent or irrelevant conditions being placed on families.

A limitation of this research is that most participants were recruited from one online support forum for NOPs, potentially skewing the data towards a group who had actively sought online support and opportunities to discuss their experiences. In addition, the participants in this study were each at different stages of their post-discovery journey, and future research should consider following NOPs' journeys longitudinally to determine how their experiences change over time and the various stages at which different types of intervention may be appropriate.

Recommendations

Support needed in relation to the ongoing impact of discovery

The following represents a summary of the support needed by NOPs as a result of the discovery of their partners' offending.

1. Many of the participants expressed a need to acquire an understanding of sexual offending and why people commit sexual offences. NOPs should be signposted to relevant support organisations that can provide them with information as soon as possible after discovery of the offence.
2. The majority of participants expressed that their feelings of isolation were partially alleviated through connecting with others in a similar situation to their own, either on courses/group interventions provided for NOPs or through online forums. The sharing of experiences with other NOPs appeared to help alleviate stress, and the participants felt safer and less stigmatised when sharing with people who understood what they were going through. NOPs should be made aware of the different ways they can connect with others impacted by a partner's sexual offence if they so desire.

“Feelings of isolation were partially alleviated through connecting with others in a similar situation to their own.”

3. It is important to acknowledge that some participants expressed negative experiences surrounding the online support forums, including finding reading about others' experiences upsetting, the forums highlighting potential negative outcomes that they had not yet considered or were not relevant to their case, and being overwhelmed with too much information. Therefore, informal group support should be an option available to explore **alongside** professional support.
4. However, a key barrier to NOPs accessing the professional support available to them is cost. Access to therapists, counsellors, or specialist courses and groups for NOPs is dependent on them having the financial means to pay for these services, which represents a significant financial

burden, especially over the long term. This is concerning, as NOPs typically experience significant impacts to their financial standing following the discovery of their partners offence, for example due to losing half of their household income or reducing their working hours to accommodate increased childcare responsibilities. Many NOPs are therefore simply unable to pay to access the services they require. This highlights a severe need for more funding in this area.

5. NOPs with children have significant restrictions placed upon their family life by child protection services, who typically recommend that the partner under investigation can only have supervised contact with the children, which prevents the partner staying overnight in the family home or being left alone with their children at any time. This places enormous pressure on the NOP as a parent, who may be physically unable to manage all childcare responsibilities alone whilst maintaining a job and dealing with a sudden loss of income and support.

In the context of this increased stress, NOPs who need to seek support from mental health services may be prevented from doing so by their fears about how a social worker could perceive their struggles; the pressure of presenting as a “perfect

“NOPs who need to seek support from mental health services may be prevented from doing so by their fears about how a social worker could perceive their struggles.”

parent” represents a real barrier to NOPs accessing support, putting children at greater risk of harm. When applying restrictions, child protection services should consider what support (practical, financial, or emotional) could assist NOPs in adjusting to the drastic changes to their family circumstances, in the interests of the children’s welfare. Additionally, they should reassure NOPs that seeking support with mental health concerns is reasonable and appropriate.

Recommendations related to intervening agencies

Participants reflected on their experiences and made suggestions surrounding what approach intervening agencies could have taken to make their experience less traumatic. These suggestions have formed the basis for the recommendations of best practice outlined below.

1. For all professionals who work with NOPs, a non-judgmental attitude and compassionate approach is vital. Professionals should have an understanding of the negative ramifications that NOPs suffer as a result of their partner's offence and recognise them as secondary victims. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge and to remember that NOPs are, in almost all cases, innocent of any wrongdoing. Continuing to support their partner does not mean that they approve their partners' offending behaviour. Sharing personal opinions unless asked is unhelpful, whereas listening and showing genuine concern for someone's wellbeing is paramount. Examples of unhelpful opinions include telling the NOP they should leave their partner, discussing what you (think) you would do if you were in their position, opinions about whether their partner has the capacity for change, and passing judgments on the quality of the NOPs relationship with the suspect.
2. Professionals working with NOPs should understand that, due to the levels of distress, shock, and confusion NOPs experience immediately after discovery, they are likely to be too overwhelmed to make significant life decisions, and should not be expected to do so until they have time to process their situation and any information they have been given. It is important to allow people time to ask questions and think through decisions. They should not be pressured to leave their partner.
3. On the day of arrest, the police should be sensitive to the traumatic impact that the arrest can have on the partner and family of the individual they are arresting. They should provide NOPs with a contact number on which they

“[NOPs] are likely to be too overwhelmed to make significant life decisions ... they should not be pressured to leave their partner.”

can be reached to provide updates about the case. They should monitor NOPs' behaviour to look for any signs of distress that could indicate that they may harm themselves, and they should endeavour to not leave the NOP alone after the arrest if this is the case. Arranging for someone trusted to keep them company could be of benefit.

4. Alternatively, an impartial family liaison officer could be appointed to the families of people who have sexually offended. This liaison officer should be available answer questions, act as a source of information, provide updates of the case, and check in with family welfare and wellbeing. The impartiality of a family liaison is preferable, as some participants understandably expressed

concerns about receiving support from the same professionals who were investigating their partner, who they may have a negative relationship with or be reluctant to trust.

“Some participants expressed concerns about receiving support from the same professionals who were investigating their partner.”

5. Providing accurate information for NOPs to access when they feel ready is vital throughout all stages of the post-discovery journey. Ideally police would leave a comprehensive handbook of information on the day of the arrest, which signposts NOPs to charities, organizations, or agencies that can provide them with support and information. This would mirror the service provided to victims of crime.

Some examples of the information NOPs may require include:

- a. Information about the investigative process, legal processes, procedures, and conditions, and what to expect in court, as well as different possible case outcomes and sentences. An explanation of terminology relating to the offence, for example, the distinctions between offence categories, or between “sharing” and “creating” images.
- b. The different agencies that will be involved in the lives of NOPs who have children under 18, and the processes they may be involved in

- (e.g. risk assessment, setting restrictions/conditions, vetting, approving contact).
- c. Where partners, children, and people who have sexually offended can go for emotional, practical, and financial support.
 - d. Educational information regarding sexual offending, offence types, motivations for offending, preventing sexual reoffending, and services to contact for this information.
 - e. Age-appropriate information for children, and advice on how to disclose the offence to them.
 - f. Where to access online support forums.
 - g. How to access relevant mental health services.
6. Several participants received conflicting opinions from different agencies regarding their partner's risk level, compounding their confusion and distress. It is advised that any professional working with NOPs and individuals who sexually offend should keep abreast of the **evidence base** surrounding reoffending rates for different types of sexual offence, and the risk of non-contact offenders going on to commit a future contact offence. By focusing on up-to-date evidence, professionals increase the likelihood of providing consistent and accurate advice about risk.
- “Any professional working with NOPs should keep abreast of the evidence base surrounding reoffending rates.”**
7. It is important that the police seriously consider the necessity of sharing information about cases with the media, keeping in mind the backlash and stigmatisation that NOPs and their families face when their details are made public and any danger posed to any children residing in the family home. For example, dissemination of an address or photograph of the family home may cause feelings of exposure and vulnerability. Information should be shared according to public protection guidelines and consideration given to the welfare and privacy of families of people who have sexually offended. This is particularly relevant in cases where children reside at the house of the person who have sexually offended.

Dissemination of Research

The current report focuses on how NOPs' lives are impacted by the discovery of their partners' offences and forms part of a wider body of research investigating the lived experiences of NOPs. It is hoped that this report will lead to several research papers that will be published in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, this report will be shared with relevant stakeholders (charities, governors within prisons, and police forces) and other institutions that are partnered with SOCAMRU. It is hoped this information will help organisations who work with NOPs to improve their policies, practices, and services. Following on from the current research, a quantitative study specifically exploring trauma and the police "knock on the door" event is being conducted to provide deeper insight into NOPs' experiences surrounding this method of discovery.

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Supporting children & families of people in prison/on community sentences

Speaker: Corrina Thompson

Senior Mentoring Coordinator for Pillars New Zealand

"PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY"

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR
METRO VANCOUVER WEST COMMUNITY
CORRECTS, A DIVISION OF
CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA



Presentation overview:

- Lack of support for children and families of people in the justice system
- Wraparound support from Pillars
- Compounding risk is significant for these children
- 4x Case studies from the front line
- Evidence based calls for action from youth, families & practitioners on the frontline



Pillars New Zealand: A contextual overview

- Pillars is a NZ based charity that supports children & families of people in prison, and on community sentences.
- 2x core programmes: In home social work support for parents and caregivers & youth mentoring for children and adolescents aged 5 to 17.
- Youth development and family engagement
- Wrap-around, trauma-informed intervention and prevention

Pono-Manaakitanga-Ako-Whanaungatanga-
Rangatiratanga- Ahurutanga

Strengths based approach

Strengthening the village around
the child

Advocacy

Having another "Ask-able adult"

Intervention and
connection

Positive role modelling

Wrap around whanau support

Quality one on one time
having fun

Whanau Social
Work

Mentoring
Programme



Pillars

Ka Pou Whakahou

Supporting children and families with
whanau in prison



Sexual and serious harm: NZ context

NZ punches above our weight in many confronting stats:

- High prison population per capita
- Rate of family violence, sexual violence & youth suicide
- Overrepresentation of indigenous Māori whanau
- Māori women are the most imprisoned indigenous population in the world
- Hokai Rangi (NZ's current justice strategy) admits systemic racism and bias

• Source (4 & 5)



1 in 3 women
1 in 8 men

Have experienced sexual violence



**People in prison –
Most serious offence**

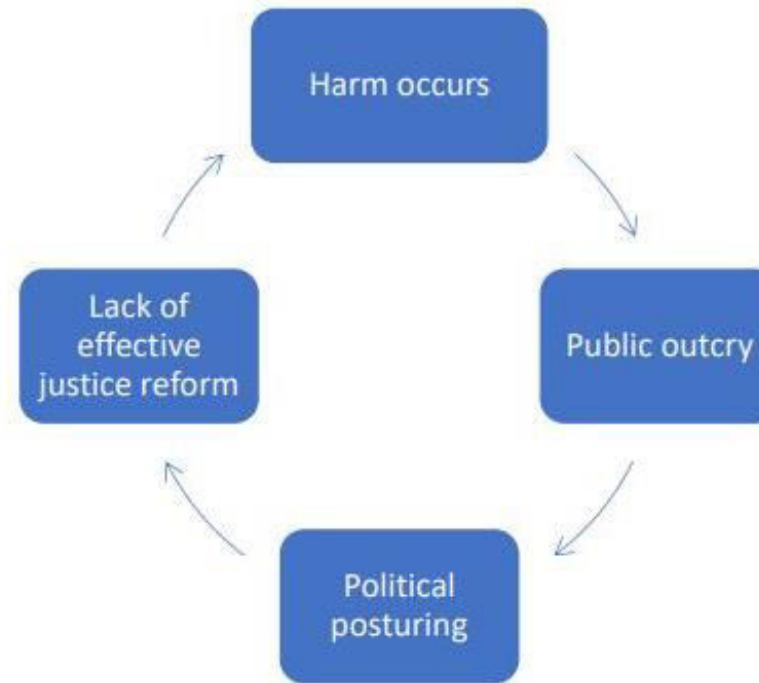
AS OF DECEMBER 2018

SOURCE: Department of Corrections (2018).
Prison facts and statistics – December 2018.

The level of need vs. the lack of support

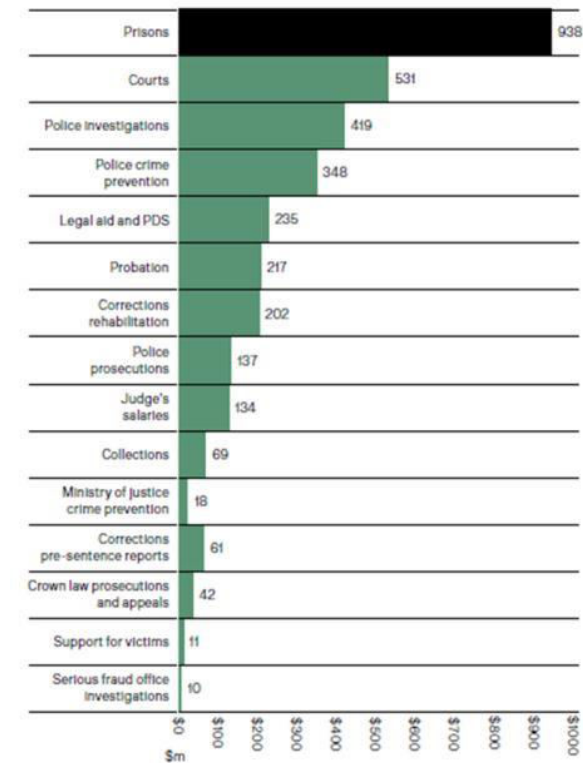
The enduring barrier of public opinion is under-appreciated, given it's power & political influence on justice reform.

Source (7)



Source (7)

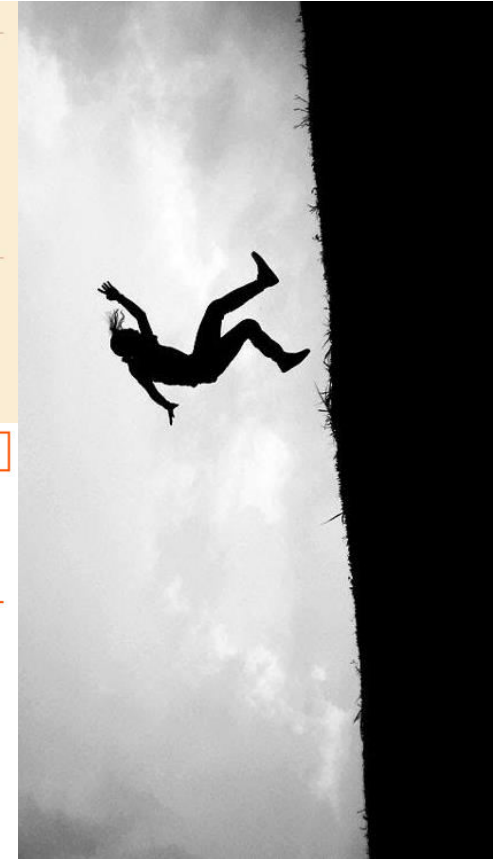
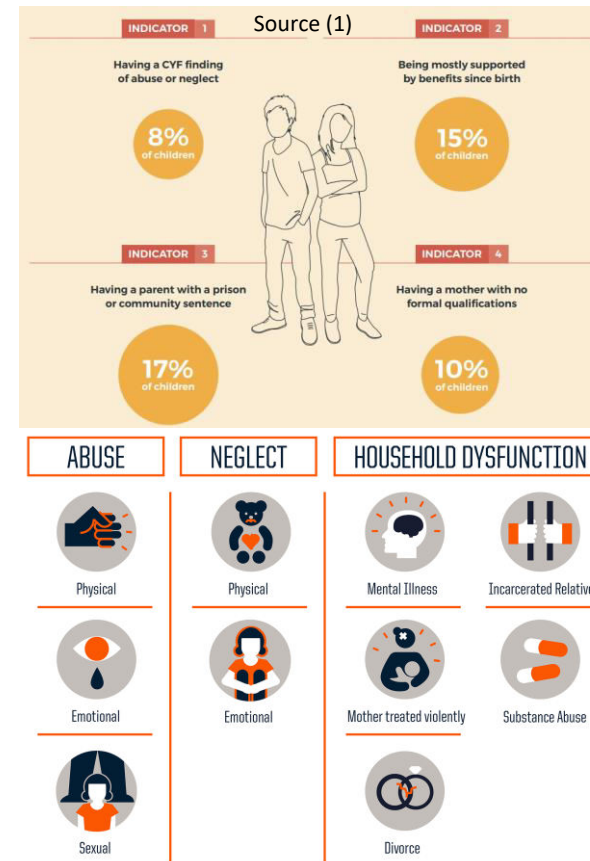
Aotearoa's spending per annum on the justice system (in millions) (Te Uepū, 2019c, p. 29)



Source (5)

Compounding risk: The cliff analogy

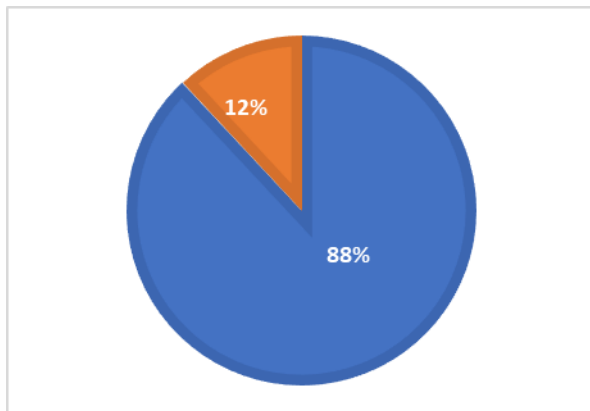
- “Instability, financial hardship; emotional distress; long-term negative health and education outcomes; and high risk of intergenerational offending” (Source 9)
- No opportunity to heal- ricochet back into the community
- Ripple effect that compounds over generations



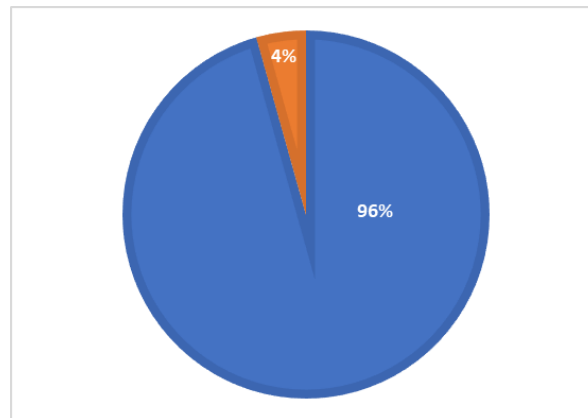
Pillars families: Complexities at a glance:

- Children of prisoners serve an invisible sentence of social adversity and stigma.
- The harm they face is often intergenerational: They are significantly more likely to be incarcerated one day themselves (1) and face compounding risk due to their circumstances (2).

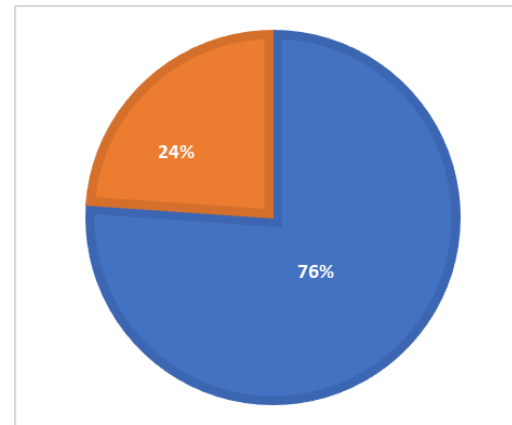
(3): 88% have experienced family violence and/or sexual violence



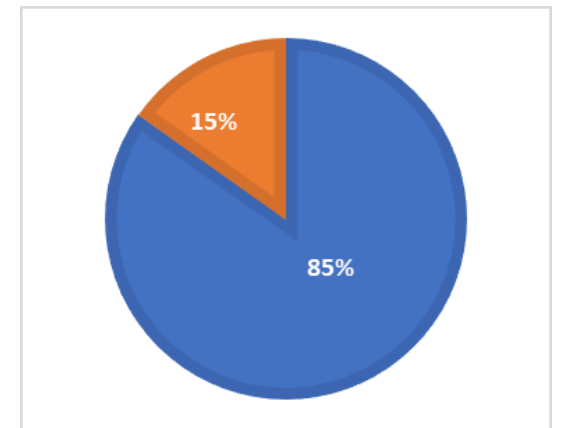
96% are struggling emotionally (e.g.: depression, anxiety, aggression, defiance, withdrawal)



76% have experienced challenges associated with substance abuse and addiction



85% are struggling at school



Case studies from the front line

A. (15 years old)

Dad's release back into the home has identified significant gaps in the system; gaps which leave vulnerable young people to fend for themselves.

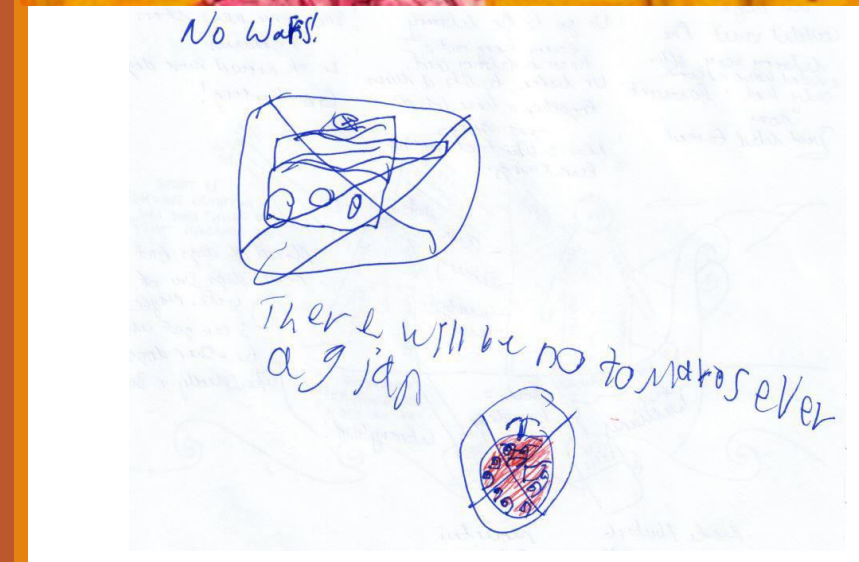
These are complex circumstances; finding a safe solution can be very challenging.



Case studies from the front line

T's story: (8 years old)

- "I know what my Dad did... The scary thing for me is that part of me hates him, but part of me still loves him. So, I'm scared that I might be sick in the head... Because what kind of boy would love a man who does things like that?"



Case studies from the front line

T. (6 years old) & Mum's story:

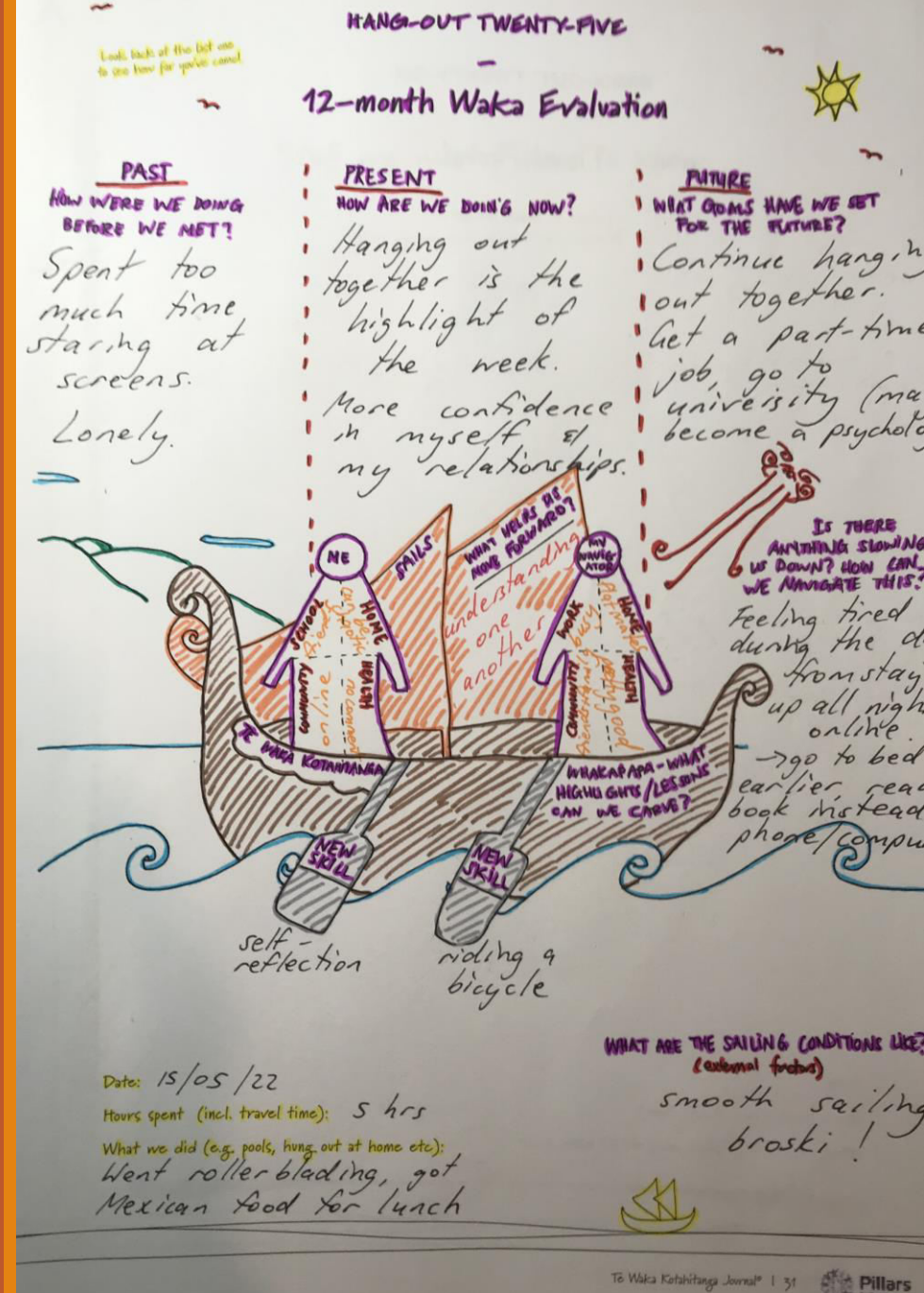
- “On the morning of the crime, the police [removed] any decision making from me. That was really helpful. I had no choice to back out. I think it was about removing the responsibility off my shoulders, knowing that they were [pressing charges] and I hadn't actually done it. Knowing that, despite how much I wanted to do it, that made it easier for me, that they did it.”
- “I've requested more support around his release, cos I know I'll struggle. I can't tell you why I'll struggle... I think in some ways it's because my safety net has been knowing that he's inside. But when he's out in the community, I think about whether or not I'll be looking over my shoulder. I know that he's gonna be far away from me, but that doesn't stop the fear. Because [for so many] years I've been sheltered from that reality.”



Case studies from the front line

N.'s story: (16 years old)

- *“Even though he had done these horrible things, he was still my Dad and we depended on his money to survive... My mum now must work overtime all the time. She wants us to not worry about money, but we have to. If we’re not worried, we’re poor. If we’re not poor, we’re homeless.”*
- *“I was 11, my brother was 8 and my mum had to work so I had to take care of my brother. Extended family wouldn’t help because of their hate for my father. We lived, and still do, eating uncooked noodles, living off snacks, rationing milk.”*
- *“My brother and I both developed an eating disorder because we learnt that if we ate food, we would waste money and we weren’t worth it, so we starved ourselves.”*



Where to from here?

- Public safety through support and accountability
- Family support a priority
- Public awareness and education
- Bipartisan agreement on evidence-based policies
- Protective legislation that safeguards children
- Strengthen communities

• (Sources 1 to 11)



Pillars Youth Advisory Panel

Est 2022



Call for action: Legislation, policy and fundamental thinking shifts



Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern Prime Minister, Hon Kiri Allan - Minister of Justice & Hon Kelvin Davis - Minister for Children

Tēnā koutou,

Pillars - Ka Pou Whakahou (Pillars) youth advisory panel is calling for urgent legislative action and policy change regarding the implementation of Children's Care Plans (CCP) for the children of incarcerated parents or community sentences.

Pillars is a charity that works with the children and whānau of people in prison. Pillars has a youth advisory panel that is led by youth aged 15 to 23. According to Pillars data, 96% of Pillars children are struggling emotionally, 85% are struggling at school, and 88% have experienced family harm.¹

Pillars know first-hand that protective legislation for our youth is lacking. The tragic death of Malachi Subecz is a reflection of inadequate and lacking legislation to protect and safeguard children. Evidence clearly indicates that the impact on children whose parent(s) are sentenced to prison there is significant. Disappointingly though, children of incarcerated parents still receive little to no support². The absence of a legislative framework predisposes children of incarcerated parents to ending up in the criminal justice system themselves, and ultimately, leads to intergenerational harm.

Aotearoa needs whānau-centred CCP's alongside the establishment of a Whānau Outreach Liaison roles (beyond Family Court Navigators). We believe Whānau Outreach Liaison should be established in every court across Aotearoa. To future proof these changes, we are seeking bipartisan agreement on CCP's to place children's safety and wellbeing before political populism which will also ensure we meet our international law obligations.³

"The court has an obligation under art. 3 of UNCRC to ensure the best interests of the child is the primary consideration in all actions concerning children".⁴

[Why do we need Children's Care Plan legislation and policy.](#)

¹ Dixon, C. (2022). *Complicities at a glance: Current datasets of Pillars whānau* [working document].

² Gordon, L. (2009). *Whānau children: First year research report: A study of the children of prisoners*. Pillars. Available at: <https://www.pillars.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/study-of-the-children-of-prisoners-year-1-report-2009>

³ Above at 1

⁴ Meakin, F., & Minson, S. (2022, p. 371). What about the children? Sentencing defendants who are parents of dependent children. *New Zealand Law Journal*. Available at: https://www.nzlii.org/nz/other/nzlii/other/nzlii_nzlj/nzlj_2022_02/2022_02_01_01.html

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To future proof these changes, we are seeking bipartisan agreement on CCP's to place children's safety and wellbeing before political populism which will also ensure we meet our international law obligations:

"The court has an obligation under art. 3 of UNCRC to ensure the best interests of the child is the primary consideration in all actions concerning children".

Thank you

He taonga rongonui te aroha ki te tangata

Goodwill towards others is a precious gift.



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Pillars
Ka Pou Whakahou



JustSpeak

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern- Prime Minister, Hon Kiri Allen- Minister of Justice & Hon Kelvin Davis-
Minister for Children

Tēnā koutou,

Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou Youth Advisory Panel is calling for urgent legislative action and policy, regarding the implementation of Children's Care Plans, for the children of people in prison and on community sentences.

Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou is a charity that works with the children and whānau of people in prison, whose Youth Advisory Panel is comprised entirely of Pillars youth aged 15 to 23. According to Pillars data, 96% of Pillars children are struggling emotionally, 85% are struggling at school, and 88% have experienced family harmⁱ. Pillars knows first-hand that protective legislation for our cohort is lacking. For Malachi Subecz, this absence of safeguarding legislation allowed tragedy to occur. The evidence is clear: for every child whose parent is sentenced, there is a resounding impact upon them, yet they receive little to no supportⁱⁱ. This paucity of protective framework compounds the intergenerational harm of the justice system. Aotearoa needs whānau-centred Children's Care Plans, alongside the establishment of a Whānau Outreach Liaison role (beyond Family Court Navigators) established in every court throughout Aotearoa. "The court has an obligation under art. 3 of UNCRC to ensure the best interests of the child is the primary consideration in all actions concerning children" ⁱⁱⁱ. To futureproof this legislation, we are also seeking bipartisan agreement on Children's Care Plans, to place children's safety and wellbeing before political populism ^{iv}.

Why do we need Children's Care Plan legislation and policy:

Children with a parent in prison are an often-forgotten cohort who themselves serve an invisible sentence^v of adversity, trauma, and intergenerational harm. "Instability, financial hardship; emotional distress; long-term negative health and education outcomes; and high risk of intergenerational offending" ^{vi} mean that NZ children with a parent in prison are significantly more likely to go to prison themselves ^{vii}. These adverse child experiences compound- and without intervention- perpetuate poor social outcomes that at worst can lead to early death ^{viii}. What happened to Malachi Subecz must never be allowed to happen again. Governments need to "lead and coordinate support efforts", place the wellbeing of children and whānau in the centre of justice decision making and "facilitate meaningful whānau connection" ^{ix}.

What is a Children's Care Plan and how we should implement them:

A Children's Care Plan would be a wraparound plan regarding the care, supports, and positive pathways needed for every child with a sentenced parent. Each plan would be unique to the needs of every child and would be written in consultation with whānau from a child-centred lens. These plans would cover acute needs like ensuring every child has a safe and supported place to live,

through to mid and long-term needs like counselling, healthcare, education supports or pathways to employment.

Children’s Commissioner Justice Eivers recently called for the incarceration of a parent to trigger an automatic notification to Oranga Tamariki. While some of the answers may be found in the state, (namely resourcing and accountability) we do not believe that all the answers are found in Oranga Tamariki. Rather we encourage the establishment of a Whānau Outreach Liaison role to consult with whānau to co-design their Children’s Care Plan. This would be an automatic process that occurs through the courts. The Whānau Outreach Liaison would then refer whānau to the most appropriate local service providers based upon each child’s unique Care Plan. This Whānau Outreach Liaison role may be enacted through Whānau Ora, or potentially even through the growth of Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou. A similar role is already in action within the Family Court (Kaiārahi – Family Court Navigators). We are requesting that this specialized Whānau Outreach Liaison role be established in every court across Aotearoa, because “...in terms of the criminal jurisdiction — distinct from family — there is no express incorporation of a wellbeing and best interests’ assessment of dependent children in the Aotearoa sentencing framework.”^x

Trust and rapport are vital for effective whānau outcomes, through a mana-enhancing and strengths-based process that empowers families as experts of their own lives^{xi}. Documentation of Care Plans would then be included into offenders’ cultural/background reports and could influence the sentence that a parent receives^{xii}, and will certainly influence the support every child receives. An accessible nationwide directory of service providers is an actionable measure needed to enact Children’s Care Plans. Referral to Oranga Tamariki may be a secondary action if the Whānau Outreach Liaison is unsuccessful in engaging with a particular whānau.

Glennis Phillip-Barbara (Assistant Māori Children’s Commissioner) stated that “governments need to see children in the context of their family, and the family in the context of community, and support the development of those”^{xiii}. We are calling for urgent action on Children’s Care Plan legislation, policy, and implementation. Follow your promises made by Hokai Rangī. Acknowledge your responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Protect our human rights as children and young people- that we deserve to be safeguarded from resounding harm of the justice system. We need action now to instate this legislation, which can then be perfected in the coming months with multi-organisation consultation.

“Our hardship is real. Please- look at us, listen to us.”^{xiv}

This legislation will save lives, today and generations from now. Let’s work together towards a safer tomorrow for all children of incarcerated and sentenced parents.

Yours Sincerely,

.....

Corrina Thompson (*née Dixon*)

Senior Mentoring Coordinator and Lead Researcher/Whānau Kai-āwhina at Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou

In collaboration with:

Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou Youth Advisory Panel:

Sharn Te Whiu, Orla Angi, Jarhley Angi, Nathan Ah Siu, Juliann Pura-Desai, Kingston Hancy and Amethyst Edwards

With support from:

Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou and JustSpeak

.....
Maxine Gay

General Manager at Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou

.....
Aphiphany Forward-Taua,

Executive Director at JustSpeak



References:

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