



An exploration of the challenges families experience when a family member is convicted of sex offence

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Background

Statistics from the Ministry of Justice (April, 2018) show that there are 83,263 prisoners, 13,562 of whom are male sex-offenders (MOJ, 2018).¹ This is the highest number in custody since 2003 (MOJ, 2016a; 2016b) and represents 19% of the prison population. This trend of increasing numbers of sex-offenders in the prison population follows a spike in historical sex abuse cases, more sexual offences recorded by police, as well as more punitive sanctions implemented by the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 which has resulted in longer average sentences for sex-offenders and more people placed on the (ViSOR) Sex-Offenders' Register (MOJ, 2016b). ViSORs are confidential and can only be accessed by police, the probation and prison service personnel. Nonetheless, a long campaign by the media (especially the now defunct News of the World) to publish the identities of child sex-offenders, where they publicly 'named and shamed' individuals has arguably created a type of 'moral panic' (as described by Cohen 1972). This coupled with a difficulty, in some cases, of retaining anonymity, often due to information gained from court reports, local newspapers, and social media has resulted in more families being drawn into a socially constructed ethical and psychological universe, where public distaste is prominent for these types of crimes (McAlinden, 2007).

Although interest in prisoners' families has grown noticeably in recent years (especially as the connection between family support and their role in reducing recidivism has been increasingly recognised (Mills and Codd, 2008), relatively little is currently understood about the challenges faced by family members who maintain social links with convicted sex-offenders (Tewksbury and Connor, 2012). Jenkins (2004) argues that sex-offenders are reviled by society and evoke feelings of extreme repugnance and disdain. Society's views of sex-offenders then result in a 'ripple effect' for their relatives, who are affected psychologically, socially and financially as a consequence of being related to a sex offender (Condry, 2007; Codd, 2011). This makes these relatives worthy of consideration as they can be viewed as 'forgotten' victims of the crimes committed (Arditti et al, 2010).

Despite the repercussions for families of convicted sex-offenders and the scale of the problem, the challenges that the families face and how they exchange support (and why) remains largely unknown. Research has shown that family members, community members, and also some organisations can be crucial in supporting prisoners through a prison sentence and after their release (Farmer et al, 2015; Daley, 2008). One implicit consequence of sexual offences is that the people who can often help the offender most are those who have been hurt the most, and losing these relationships can induce abomination that can further increase the chance of recidivism (Tewksbury and Lees,

¹ In order to be concise, I have referred to individuals who have been convicted of a sex offence as 'sex offenders'. This is not intended to describe the person, just the offence.

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2006). Nonetheless, some relatives of convicted sex-offenders do choose to maintain contact with their incarcerated family member. This is a significant observation, as the link between family and offender has a distinct consequence for society and potential future victims (Craun and Theriot, 2009).

Research focus

The focus of this study is on relatives who choose to continue a relationship with a convicted family member in some form, to gain greater insight into the collateral consequences of being related to a sex-offender, and how this affects the dynamics of the family unit as a whole. Thus, it is of vital importance to explore the barriers families face and determine what support they desire.

Overall research aim and research questions

There are three primary aims in my research; firstly to explore and identify the challenges families of sex-offenders describe; secondly, to determine their coping mechanisms and strategies, and thirdly to identify and review existing formal support systems (locally and nationally) available to prisoners' families. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a sample group of 60² family members of convicted sex-offenders. The following research questions guided the research:

- What challenges do family members describe?
- Have they received any support? (formal and/or informal)
- How useful was that support?
- How easy is it to access support?
- What other support do they feel would help the most?

The fieldwork was conducted with family members in the visits centre at a Category C male prison, mainly incarcerating men who have been convicted for sexual offences.

Value of this Research

There are relatively few studies on how society views the families of sex-offenders, but the majority of the available research originates from the US, where the laws are far more wide-ranging and punitive (Lieb, Kemshall and Thomas, 2011). In addition, there is a dearth of formal organised support in the UK aimed specifically at the relatives of sex-offenders (Action for Prisoners Families, 2013; Codd, 2011). This study intends to fill a gap in existing UK research, firstly on the challenges experienced by family members related to individuals who have committed sex crimes, and secondly on what coping strategies and support mechanisms they may employ, from the initial discovery and conviction, through imprisonment and to the eventual release of their family member back into society. It is hoped that the findings will be of benefit to third-sector organisations working with families and a valuable source of reference for those seeking to 'tailor' support for them.

² Of this sample group, 35 responded to a questionnaire, while 25 participated in a one-to-one interview and also completed the questionnaire.

1. Literature review

Background

The 'ripple effect'

More than any other category of offenders, sex-offenders are reviled and evoke feelings of extreme repugnance and disdain from virtually every section of society (Jenkins, 1998; Codd, 2011). Research on correctional policy suggests that societal attitudes towards convicted sex-offenders and the sanctions imposed have a far-reaching, pervasive, unintentional impact on the lives of their relatives as a consequence of their familial association (Codd, 2011; Comfort, 2008; Braman, 2007; Christian, 2005; Fisherman, 1990).

Previous research

As early as 1965, Morris, in study of 825 imprisoned men and 469 of their wives, found that imprisonment was experienced as a crisis of family break-up, with the majority of stigma and shame and the acute financial anxiety caused by the crime being felt almost exclusively by their wives (Morris, 1965). Further difficulties Morris documented were a change in wives' perceptions of marriage and their future, as well as a decline in social activity as their relationships with in-laws, neighbours and friends were adversely affected.

Main consequences: sociological, economic and psychological

The sociological, economic and psychological consequences for families that Morris identified (1965) have been supported by more recent research in both the USA and UK, most of which states that imprisonment considerably reduces a family's income, compromises their health, and substantially increases the risk of a family break-up (Arditti, 2012; Codd, 2011; Wilderman and Western, 2010). It is also important to explore how families develop resilience, especially when dealing with their conflicting emotions.

Sociological and Economic Challenges

Visits and maintaining contact

(i) Practical difficulties associated with visiting

Dixey and Woodall (2012) conducted research with 30 families in an English category B prison which examined the significance of visits. Their study identified that prisoners' families tend to view visitation as tense, emotional and often fraught with logistical difficulties. However, it remains unclear what percentage of these are relatives of convicted sex-offenders. A number of barriers were identified in relation to visits, including arrangements for child-care or taking children out of school for visits, travelling distance, high costs associated with travel, and negotiating public transport to reach prisons which are often set in rural, hard-to-reach locations (Kalkan and Smith 2014;

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Murray 2007; Christian 2005; Arditti, 2003). These difficulties may be felt more acutely by the families of convicted sex-offenders, as sex-offenders are mainly housed in specialist prisons (currently eight in England and Wales) or vulnerable prisoner wings within mainstream prisons that may be further placed from home. In addition, the average sentence for a sex-offender is higher than for any other offence (average 63 months); thus, they generally spend more time in prison than other offenders (MOJ, 2015). These difficulties associated with visiting often result in a complete loss of face-to-face contact that may impose a further strain on families (Codd, 2011; Condry, 2007).

(ii) Emotional difficulties associated with visiting

For many female partners prison visits are a confusing mixture of anticipation and happiness, but also stress and sadness (Christian, 2005; Girshick, 1996; Fisherman, 1990). Furthermore, the visits can be fraught and intense, with high levels of anxiety due to their often short duration. Whilst visits are regarded as important for the offenders' well-being, it may not always be particularly beneficial to those on the 'outside' (Codd, 2011), although, Codd argues, 'standing by their man' or 'not giving up on a son' may evoke a sense of pride or satisfaction (2011:26). Chui (2009) also suggests that some prison officers are hostile towards relatives whilst visiting. Although some prisons are working to improve prison visits and make these institutions more 'family friendly', the difficulties of visiting, and the feelings of humiliation, lack of respect and hostility experienced by families, are reported in literature from the UK, the US, and Australia (Loucks, 2004; Arditti, 2003; Healy et al, 2000; Farrell, 1997). Families report that they are often made to feel like criminals themselves, simply for visiting a prison (Cunningham 2001; Cregan and Aungles 1997).

(iii) Children and visiting

Ronay (2011) identified the impact of visits on children by conducting an observational study in a children's play area in an English medium-high security remand prison, where all types of offenders were housed (including sex-offenders). Ronay found recurrent themes of anxiety, anti-social tendencies, confusion and aggression amongst the children observed. However, it is unclear how many times the same children were observed, whether their behaviour changed as they developed over time, and whether their behaviour traits existed prior to coming into the prison environment. Nonetheless, the outcomes for children appear to be generally negative and reinforce Richards and McWilliams' (1996) findings that the stressful emotions surrounding visitation can result in uncharacteristic behaviour before and after their visits.

Economic hardship

It is commonly accepted that there are financial consequences for families of prisoners (Davis 1992; Smith et al 2007), and that the majority of prisoners' families will endure financial loss and/or incur additional expenses (Hairston, 2003). Bath and Edgar's (2010) study of 29 UK families established that 40 per cent of prisoners, and 64 per cent of ex-prisoners believed that their debt had worsened, but perhaps more pertinently over half of their families were forced to borrow extra funds as a result of the incarceration, although the social background of the families in their sample is unclear.

Chui (2009) and Tewksbury and Levenson (2009) suggest that financial hardships experienced by the families of incarcerated men is the greatest and most salient issue families have to negotiate. For families already suffering from monetary constraints, their relative's crimes can have a calamitous impact on the family unit, accelerating their descent into genuine poverty (Farkas and Miller, 2007). It could be argued that this impact is even greater for families of sex-offenders due to the fact that custodial sentences are generally long. Imposing financial hardship on family members often causes relatives to disengage with the offender, frequently as a coping mechanism, or to minimise and manage their own experiences (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009).

Housing

The social shaming, stigmatisation and diminished social support that families of convicted sex-offenders can experience may result in a decision to re-locate to an area where they are not known, in an attempt to distance themselves from the offender (Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009; Farkas and Miller, 2007; Condry, 2007). This can fragment families and may result in the breakdown of wider familial relationships (Arditti, 2012). Many individuals released from prison return to their family residence; however for released sex offenders this is not always a viable option since they often have registration and various licence conditions which prevent them from returning to their family or pre-prison residence (Farkas and Miller, 2007). Housing a returning sex-offender also requires regular notification of their whereabouts to the authorities as a condition of their placement on the Sex Offenders Register (SOR) (Farkas and Miller, 2007). Where the sex-offender has been placed back with their families, the disruptive impacts of housing them can significantly reduce the family members' quality of life, increasing their emotional hardship and sense of isolation (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009). Often community opposition directly influences where families choose to reside (Zevitz and Farkas, 2000). Family members may experience repercussions such as harassment, vigilantism and the notoriety that sex-offenders bring with them (Levinson and Cotter, 2005, Condry 2007). For example, Tewksbury and Levenson's (2009) online survey of 584 family members in the US found that a quarter of their sample had experienced damage to their property and alienation from their community, and over half of family members feared for their own safety. The opposition, anger and resentment engendered within communities often increase when their housing placement becomes common knowledge (Farkas and Miller, 2007).

Employment

In addition, the restrictions of being placed on the SOR after a prison sentence is completed can result in 'unemployability' (Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009). Obtaining employment for the prisoner upon release is a difficult hurdle for both the prisoner and their families to negotiate (Farkas and Miller, 2007). Many businesses and civil institutions (such as schools and hospitals) are extremely reluctant (or refuse) to employ a sex-offender, often for genuine legal reasons, but also due to their own views and attitudes towards these offenders, and a perceived disruptive impact that their employment may impose upon their workforce (Zevitz and Farkas, 2000). This situation

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inevitably places a much greater financial burden on other family members, and an economic hardship that was absent before their conviction and often causes resentment, frustration and anger within their families (Harman et al, 2007).

Invasion of privacy

A major problem families face is intrusion on their privacy (Farkas and Miller, 2007). Being associated with a sex-offender can raise a family member's profile in the community, resulting in a closer scrutiny into their lives that can affect the normalcy of their daily existence (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009). This intensified surveillance can worsen the sense of shame and stigmatisation for families (Condry, 2007). This 'shaming gaze' and intrusion into their lives from friends, neighbours and colleagues can induce negative consequences such as social isolation, and changes to both their behavioural patterns and personal relationships within their communities. Comfort (2009) suggests that these families are 'secondarily prisonised' whereby the impacts of concentrated community and authoritarian surveillance and corporeal confinement are remarkably similar.

Psychological challenges

Trauma and stress

The experience of coping with the impact of a family member's arrest, conviction and imprisonment can cause extreme stress and trauma (Arditti, 2012; Codd, 2011; Condry, 2007). The psychological trauma inflicted on the sex-offender's family can be further exacerbated by the nature of these crimes, especially if a family member has been a primary victim (Codd, 2011). Some family members describe heightened stress levels and periods of lethargy, hopelessness, isolation and frustration (Farkas and Miller, 2007). The enormity of upheaval and the subsequent realisation by family members that 'one of their own' has committed this type of offence can induce initial shock and heightened feelings of anger and frustration, often followed by on-going periods of depression, especially amongst those who choose to assist or remain in touch with their convicted family member (Shapiro and Shwartz, 2001). Furthermore, there are increased risks of debilitating psychological outcomes, such as depression (Wildeman, Schnittker, and Turney, 2012), developmental and unfavourable behaviours amongst related children (Wakefield and Wildeman, 2014; Geller et. al, 2011) and divorce (Lopoo and Western, 2005). Roberts et al (2012) and Phillips et al (2002) posit that children of offenders are also vulnerable to emotional and behavioural difficulties often due to their own abuse and neglect. Tewksbury and Levenson's (2009) US study of 584 family members of Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs) further supports this outlook by finding that 58 per cent of children of RSOs were treated differently by other children, and 78 per cent conveyed suffering ridicule, teasing, anxiety, depression, broken friendships and bullying at school.

Some research has found that family members may be unwilling to become involved and are unsympathetic towards the convicted family member, and the deterioration of

their pre-conviction relationship can become absolute (Braman, 2002). This can lead to some family members cutting off all communication (more common amongst extended family members), and reluctance to admit to the wider community their relationship to the wrongdoer (Condry, 2007). However, severing all ties with the offender is often accompanied by feelings of guilt, loss and a sense of stigmatisation (Condry, 2007; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000). Patently, family members suffering adverse outcomes themselves are often called upon to provide support for the offender during and after their incarceration. Attempting to safeguard or 'cushion' the hardships encountered by the offender, whilst suffering from their own marginalisation and disadvantage clearly requires the employment of specific coping strategies (Codd, 2007; Arditti et al 2003). Carlson and Cervera (1992) place great emphasis on the length of the sentence and the effectiveness of their own family members' support when contextualising their coping strategies. A more recent study by Johnson and Easterling (2015) chose to focus on the way in which adolescents develop coping mechanisms. Neutralising, or lessening the gravity of the offence, and distancing themselves from their offending parent were common behavioural characteristics. Braman (2004) suggests that limiting contact, whilst avoiding the complete severance of ties, was a perhaps obvious, but effective coping strategy. Paradoxically, Comfort (2009) found that some families focused on the release date, in an attempt to build hope for a successful reconciliation. A renewed positivity for a changed 'better life' helped lessen the pain of separation.

Stigma

Condry's (2007) study of thirty-two close relatives of sex-offenders in England found that, given the fear and revulsion sex-offenders engender, the family members are often forced to cope with a secondary stigma or a kind of 'contamination', often, in the case of children, purely for sharing a genetic heritage with the offender. Goffman (1963) describes this secondary implication for family members as a 'courtesy stigma' attached to family members and can marginalise them socially, and inhibit their behaviours due to this enhanced exposure to observation, and a perceived negative judgement of themselves by the community, especially when they have chosen to support the offender (Condry, 2007; Goffman, 1963). Much of the available literature clearly indicates that stigma has a significant effect on the emotional well-being of prisoners' families, who are very often seen by much of society as being 'guilty by association' (Codd, 1998:152). Condry (2007) goes on to emphasise the significance of stigma on families by indicating that the spectrum of emotions involved include anger, embarrassment, humiliation and sadness, and suggests that shame is *the* defining experience of being associated with an offender.

Farkas and Miller (2007) argue that sex-offenders' families often suffer challenges to the previous normality of their lives more acutely, shamefully and more publicly (due to the nature of their crimes) than the families of non-sexual offenders. This notion is supported by research which suggests that the collateral consequences of being related to a sex-offender and the effects of stigma are major causes of individual and collective crises for the offenders' family, along with shame (Braman, 2007; Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999). Much of this research indicates that families are aware of a discredited status,

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and a feeling of being somehow culpable, along with a feeling of discrimination towards them that was not previously there (Hannem and Petrunik, 2007). In an ethnographic study of the impact of conviction on the families of serious offenders (including sex-offenders) Condry (2007) found that relatives felt 'blamed and shamed' by their relative's offence. While the family members experienced a range of emotions, including anger, embarrassment, humiliation and sadness, the overriding emotion was one of unreserved shame. In a smaller study in the US by Comartin et al (2010) of four sex-offenders' mothers, stigmatisation, negative changes in their personal relationships, and social isolation were prominent outcomes. Although this study is small, the findings nonetheless mirror those of Condry (2007).

Family coping mechanism

The experiences of prisoners' families are similar to those at the time of Morris' 1965 study, except they are now set against a backdrop of an ever-rising prison population caused by a socio-political swing towards harsher penal punitiveness (Codd, 2011). Predictably, this means more people are experiencing the undesirable (often unwarranted) impact of a family member's conviction, incarceration and release. Therefore, the ameliorating influences of formal and informal support structures and services are now even more vital (Codd, 2011; Light and Campbell, 2006).

Accessing Support

Prisons have an obligation to consider the impacts of imprisonment on families' whilst not compromising prison security. One way they consider this is through facilitating family visits and allowing other types of communication, such as letters and prison email. It is recognised that supporting RSOs is a considerable responsibility which can severely affect the lives of those who choose to support an offender (Arditti, 2012; Condry 2007, Farkas and Miller, 2007). Also, given that familial support for the offender has arguably been successful in reducing recidivism, sympathetic, helpful family members are an important population to study. Yet despite this, relatively little is known about how these individuals choose to access their own support, be it formal (through the prison, voluntary groups or charitable organisations), or informal (by relying on other supportive community members, or empathetic friends and extended family members). One major problem that could arise when seeking wider community support is that some families may be reluctant to seek solace from 'official' support groups due to their own fears and feelings of stigmatisation (Light and Campbell, 2006). However, more recently, with the general acknowledgement that 'official' support mechanisms are effective tools against recidivism, there has been an emergence of prison-based initiatives promoting familial ties and relationships, such as purpose-built visits centres, 'family-fun days', play areas for children, and parenting classes.

Informal support

Seeking support through social networks involving extended family, friends and neighbours is one way of coping with a stressful situation or family crisis, such as the imprisonment of a family member (Codd, 2011; Moelker, et al, 2006). This may negate the need to seek more formal, professional help. Arditti (2012), Braman (2004), Comfort (2009) and Chui (2009) all found that wives in particular relied on family, friends and neighbours for financial and emotional assistance. Similarly, in Carlsen and Cervera's (1992) study of thirty-nine Canadian wives of offenders, around half emphasised the importance of sympathetic support from neighbours, friends and colleagues, especially with regard to alternative caring duties, such as babysitting, and often financial assistance (although they note this can diminish if the incarceration is perceived to be partially the woman's fault). A number of other studies have reported strikingly similar results about the significance of families' and friends' ability to assist positively with families 'surviving incarceration' (Bartone, et al, 1994). In many cases immediate and extended family may be able to meet many of the wife's needs for emotional support and can assume some of the roles of an absent parent. However, the extended family can also have limited resources, and often, family relationships are strained due to the incarceration (Carlson and Cervera, 1992). Carlson and Cervera (1992) go on to highlight the possibility that many family members may encourage a partner to divorce or leave the prisoner and actively discourage maintaining contact. It should be noted that these studies did not include sex offenders, which makes it problematic to generalise the findings to their families, and the nature of the offence may arguably cause greater conflict within the family unit and as such a potential reduction or closing of informal support (Davis, 1992). Nonetheless, this research suggests that, for some people, informal support remains vital, albeit the nature of the crime has a major influence on the type of assistance people are prepared to contribute, and the absence of informal support may embolden families to seek out more formal support.

Formal support

(j) Support agencies

Formal support tends to be accessed when family members are unable or unwilling to offer their assistance (Chui, 2009). Most of the help given to the prisoners' families in England and Wales is provided by organisations within the not-for-profit sector under the umbrella of Action for Families (such as Offenders Families Helpline, Ormiston, PACT). These commonly consist of 'self-help support groups' providing a help-line with trained counsellors offering advice and support in conjunction with official agencies and institutions, such as the Prison Service (Codd, 2011). Although different agencies may focus on different types of criminality, these services can provide advice on benefits, relationships, housing, and employment opportunities. In addition, they can impartially address the impacts of drug abuse, the protocol surrounding visiting a prison, provide information on prison regimes and their activities and on training workshops, and can recommend self-help groups as well as provide advice to health professionals, teachers, family service workers, and housing professionals who are administering their

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own support (Grimshaw and King, 2002). Although these agencies offer valuable support, no *one* organisation is directly responsible for the co-ordination, oversight and management of services to prisoners' families in the England and Wales (HMIPP, 2001; Prisoners Families, 2013). The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has recognised that working with offenders' families has a significant impact on re-offending, family breakdown, debilitating outcomes for children, and inter-generational offending (MOJ; 2010; MOJ, 2009). Despite this, very little funding appears to be allocated to these third-sector organisations and this, coupled with very little sympathy from the general public, means they generally operate with a high degree of uncertainty (Codd, 2011).

(ii) Support and self-help groups

Much qualitative research supports the considerable benefits of accessing support from self-help groups for family members (Codd, 2002; May 2000; Condry, 2007). These studies suggest that drawing on the experiences of others in similar situations can be useful in providing relevant information with regard to assisted prison visits, emotional support and dealing with stigma. As Condry (2007) notes, their shared experiences shape a collective narrative, which often provides meaning and therefore a 'way' of understanding the problems they have been forced to confront. *Aftermath* was the last national support group that targeted families of serious offenders (see Howarth and Rock, 2000 for more information on *Aftermath*) but is now defunct, which, according to Condry (2007), is regrettable, as the voluntary sector is often at the vanguard of developing innovative, preventive and coping strategies, which arguably makes the current lack of funding for these agencies a matter of concern.

(iii) Financial Support

The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS) provides financial support (to encourage socially disadvantaged families to maintain contact) and is managed by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). This is available only to immediate family members in receipt of benefits or on a low income and excludes extended family members or friends who may be able to provide valuable support. Furthermore, there are no government statistics available to gauge the efficacy of this scheme effectively, or how many people make use of it. Indeed, research by Dixey and Woodall (2012) and Loucks (2004) expressed some concern that many families are unaware of the eligibility criteria for accessing this provision.

(iv) Support for children

Grimshaw and King (2002) comment that effectively communicating sensitive topics, such as a parent's sexual offending and incarceration, to children is particularly difficult. Much available research suggests that the children of imprisoned parents cope better with the collateral consequences of imprisonment when they know the truth, and have a satisfactory explanation for the crimes committed (Arditti, 2012; Boswell and Wedge, 2002). The research makes little reference to the specific challenges that children and young people face after their parent's incarceration, although it is evident that a child's behaviour can be negatively affected. Moreover, in a recent study (North-West England) which examined the perspectives of eight primary school head teachers working with the children of male prisoners, O'Keeffe (2013) identified that the lack of knowledge

about good practice, and pastoral care amongst this group of children was a consistent theme, and that schools were often unaware of the situation some children found themselves in. Although this research is a small-scale study, the findings are significant.

(v) Failure to access support

Several factors may prevent some families from accessing support in its various forms. Feelings of shame, shock, and fear of stigmatisation can lead to reluctance to reveal that a close family member is in custody (Codd 2011; Condry 2007). This theme is expanded on by McEvoy et al (1999) who recognised that seeking support increases many families' anxieties with regard to their own identification, along with a heightened sensitivity towards perceived critical or condemnatory attitudes that may be directed toward them. Grimshaw and King (2002) also state that protecting professional and personal confidentiality is the major influence in blocking the path to service provision, and some families even fear their children may be removed if an official service identifies that they are associated with a sex-offender (Condry, 2007; Clayton and Moore, 2003). Equally, schools can unintentionally increase the tensions within families by labelling them as a 'problem' or as 'needing help' that may also create a barrier to accessing further support (Goodman and Adler, 2004).

2. Research design and methodology

Introduction

The research was undertaken with family members in the visitors' centre at a category C prison, with a population of 1,200 adult males, 90 per cent of whom have been convicted of a sexual offence. Central to the prison's ethos is a focus on training intended to expand prisoners' skill-sets and increase their employability upon release. In a 2015 report by the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB), it was observed that there was an unusually high proportion of prisoners over the age of 50 (34 per cent). The visitors' centre is located in the car park of the prison and is run independently by the Ormiston Trust charity, operating six days a week.

The site was selected as it houses a large number of prisoners convicted of sex offences, providing an exceptional opportunity to reach the desired sample population of family members through the visitors' centre. Access was sought through NOMS, the Governor of the prison, and an operational manager within the Ormiston Trust (with whom I had previously worked as a volunteer). NOMS sanctioned the study, although it took several months to negotiate access. However, once this was granted my affinity with the staff and with the environment gave me an advantage in allowing a degree of familiarity that was of great use when I embarked on the process of recruiting participants for this study.

Research strategy

This research employed a grounded theory approach, whereby the primary data collected have been influenced by referencing relevant empirical literature to reflect some of the challenges faced by the research sample group. This iterative process of examining previous evidence and analysing existing theories whilst collecting new data symbiotically can allow for explanations to be satisfactorily reached throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2013). This interactive, collaborative approach, where the participant and researcher cooperate in constructing and understanding meanings, is intended to augment any conclusions and develop an authenticity and reality to the findings (ibid.).

A cross-sectional design using QUAL-QUAN exploratory sequence strategies was adopted to strengthen any findings (Creswell, 2010). I used an inductive approach in the main but included some elements of deductive analysis. I gathered data through questionnaires, with 'closed' questions (using a Likert scale) and semi-structured interviews that employed 'open' questions, to allow for more flexibility and to glean more extensive, detailed responses (Bryman, 2012). From an explanatory perspective any links or variables between certain behaviours were sought, or whether there were any

'cause and effect' relationships that emerged from any identified consequences. This mixed-method approach is designed to offset any weakness in each research technique, increasing the validity and reliability of the findings (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Bryman, 2012). The cross-sectional element provided a snapshot of the 'here and now' which gave an 'up to date' reflection of the outcomes for families at the time of the research (Bryman, 2012). The quantitative element was based on questionnaires that provided an understanding of 'what' the impacts of being related to a sex-offender are, whilst the qualitative element gave a more detailed explanation of 'why' these challenges exist. This triangulation method of collecting data using various techniques and combining them is a recognised process that improves the validity of research (Davis et al, 2011). Overall, the aim was to consider how each individual family member interprets their social environment and constructs their personal 'worldviews' (Charmaz, 2013).

Sample

Sixty family members of incarcerated sex-offenders took part in the research, the sampling strategy was opportunistic, relying entirely on volunteers. This sample was recruited following advertising using posters and leaflets placed around the visitors centre before my arrival, and by staff members making potential participants aware of the impending research within the centre. Consequently, this relied heavily on the willingness and availability of individuals to take part, so the strategy was the convenience sampling (non-probability) of individuals who met the eligibility criteria (Bryman, 2012). This recruitment method proved extremely fruitful, and more participants would like to have been involved than I was able to include, given time constraints. A wish to minimise disruption and interference upon families' visiting times were a constant preoccupation. Given these relatively few hindrances, the sample was representative of this population and a diverse sample was attained, with the mean age of the participants being 50. Consistent with previous research (see Codd, 2011:64), most of the supportive relatives were also female in this study. Furthermore, the sentence lengths involved in the study ranged from 2 to 18 years with four of the offenders on indeterminate sentences (IPPs), where the prisoner and his family would have no idea of the release date. This may mean the challenges for the families involved are even more extensive than for others in terms of maintaining contact.

The following tables 1, 2 and 3 portray the demographics of the research sample.

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Table 1: Relationships with the prisoner

Family Member	Number in study	% of total sample
Wives	12	20
Mothers	10	16.6
Sons	7	11.3
Fathers	5	8.3
Daughters	5	8.3
Partners	4	6.6
Sisters	3	5
Cousin	2	3.3
Godson	1	1.6
Girlfriend	1	1.6
Uncle	1	1.6
Unknown	4	1.6

Table 2: The age of family members

Age	Number in study	Percentage of total sample
20/30	7	11.6
30/40	6	10
40/50	7	11.6
50/60	13	21.6
60/70	18	30
70/80	5	8.3
Unknown	4	6.6

Table 3: The ethnicity of family members

Ethnicity	Number in study	% of total sample
White/British	40	66.6
Black/British	5	8.3
English	2	3.3
Caribbean/Black	3	3
African/Black	1	1
Filipino	1	1
Unknown	8	13.3

Data collection

The research used a mixed methods strategy. The processes of data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and interactively, congruent with the grounded theory approach (Bryman, 2012). The data collection phase was undertaken over eight afternoons, with a total of 40 hours spent conducting fieldwork. It combined quantitative data from 35 questionnaires with qualitative data gathered from 25 semi-structured interviews. Consistent with grounded theory research approaches the formulation of both the questionnaire and interview schedule (See appendix B) were influenced by the literature review (Bachman and Schutt, 2014). Before entering into the fieldwork, pilot interviews took place with other researchers to check that the questions would work well (Glock, 1988).

Initially, I embarked on recruitment by approaching family members in the visits waiting area, the purpose of the research was explained and interested participants were handed an information sheet, consent form (for both see appendix D) and questionnaire. Every effort was made to speak to a diverse range of family members, in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. Most family members who were approached were willing to take part and the number who declined was only *four*. It was not uncommon to hear statements such as 'thank god there is somebody I can speak to' or 'yes, I am more than happy to take part, somebody needs to do something to help us'. However, I was at pains to make no assurances that I could change their situation. I nevertheless wanted them to know that their contribution was valuable, and could be used to inform policy and practice. This method of recruiting was effective. Often the personal dialogue between researcher and visitor established a rapport that, in many cases, encouraged individuals to take part in the research. Given the sensitive and understudied subject matter the techniques were appropriate and the number of participants willing to contribute was both a pleasant surprise, and subsequently effectual in generating rich data. Family members who did take part were asked, firstly, to complete a questionnaire and for those who wanted to speak further there was the option of an interview, which was designed to fit around their waiting time. Some family members were a little concerned that their identity might be compromised; once reassured, however the conversation flowed and the majority expressed their gratitude for having the opportunity to speak to somebody independent.

Twenty-three of the interviews were conducted face to face in a private room within the visits centre, this was not possible for two of the participants - so a telephone interview was arranged for one relative and the other family member posted their questionnaire response back to the visits centre. All apart from the postal response were digitally recorded (with consent). The participants were encouraged to speak freely and use their own terminology, whilst discussing their thoughts and beliefs in detail. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, and the exploration of new ideas as they arise in the conversation, which is particularly useful in research dealing with sensitive subjects as it allows the participants to raise issues when they wish (Patton, 2015) and is described by Kahn and Cannell (1957), as a 'conversation with purpose'. The interview process followed the constructionist tradition, which allowed participants to

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become active agents in giving substance and meaning to their social worlds (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). From an epistemological standpoint, the researcher and the participant engaged in a collaborative effort to build knowledge and accurately reflect the complexity of the participants' experiences (Ibid.). The alliances built during this process became a great re-iteration of the necessity to attend to the challenges of this group.

The interview process presented different emotions. Due to the dearth of literature exploring this group, there was no prior insight on how to navigate this process, so I was a little unsure about what to expect. However, my familiarity with some of the family members, having worked as a volunteer at the visits centre, proved to be an advantage in facilitating the interviews, as I had some experience of discussing the problems faced by this group of people. For the most part, many of the participants seemed extremely keen to expound their thoughts on the often life-changing events that had transpired, and I wanted the interviews to flow naturally, although as mentioned, some of the interviews became extremely emotional (perhaps unsurprisingly), and at times the stories were so unfortunate and heart-rending that both the interviewer and the interviewee were reduced to tears. I steadfastly tried to remain neutral, professional and non-judgmental throughout, but on one occasion I felt it necessary to console the participant with a hug, after a particularly sad interview. From my perspective the mutual, collaborative effort to gain understanding felt rewarding. In some interviews it felt as if I had acquired the role of a counsellor, although as Liebling (1999) in Mann (2012) states 'research into any human environment without subjective feelings is almost impossible'. This sentiment resonated with me throughout this part of my research.

Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews has been transcribed word-for word in full. The interview duration ranged from seven to thirty-nine minutes. This process was informed by adaptive theory that 'shaped' the data that arose from the research. With this in mind, the questions formulated for the interviews were open-ended which allowed for flexibility and the exploration of new ideas as they developed (Brinkmann, 2013). The data from the interview transcripts was examined which involved describing, interpreting and conceptualizing the interactions (Bryman, 2012). Hand coding was incorporated into the research, and was useful in allowing the researcher to link data and identify recurrent themes (ibid.). Quantitative data analysis utilised basic statistical analysis, including percentages relative to population size presented in tables to compare and contrast the responses (ibid.). This research also included elements of iterative analysis where data deduction was employed, concepts and methods were developed and patterns searched for (ibid.). This integration of mixed methods endorsed the cogency of the data analysis, and gave a greater insight into the challenges these families face.

Ethics

This research includes primary data gained from individuals, therefore an application for ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Criminology, and then NOMS, and adheres to the various protocols set out by the British Society of Criminology (BSC, 2015). Sensitivity and empathy were paramount given the often extremely personal nature of the research questions, which were asked of a potentially vulnerable population who may be susceptible to psychological and physical affects. This has been recognised and informed consent from every participant was sought, and they were notified verbally and in writing that their involvement could be withdrawn at any time.

The protection of the data collected during the research is a key ethical consideration, and this was given appropriate deliberation. Information remained confidential. All the participants have been anonymised (pseudonyms are used for all family members) and all the research data is held on an encrypted computer protected by password access. It should be emphasised however, that ethical considerations are set out to protect all concerned.

Strengths, limitations and potential problems

While the considerable benefits to the mixed method approach to research have been outlined above, it is accepted that some limitations are unavoidable. As Bryman and Cramer (2011) state, quantitative research can be abstract and general. A limitation in this study is that due to the relatively small numbers involved, and a lack of homogeneity within the sample group a certain degree of ambiguity resulted in the quantitative analysis. Therefore a larger sample group would have been preferable (although this could have been achieved if the study period had been longer). A further limitation was the design of the questionnaire; it was not until fieldwork was underway that there was a realisation that a yes or no response would work better for some answers than a Likert scale. Whereas qualitative research is far more time consuming and subject to researcher interpretation (Creswell, 2007) in this case it gave a more defined, in-depth representation of how each of these family members demonstrated their resilience, agency, and the complexity of emotions each endure whilst fulfilling often multiple and competing moral obligations. The mixed-method research approach gave the families the opportunity to 'voice' their experiences and to convey their hopes, fears and expectations for the future, and an opportunity to discuss which (if any) systems of support best suit their needs, or what might prevent them from seeking it. Furthermore, sexual offences encompass a wide spectrum of crimes ranging in seriousness, which means the offenders are not a consistent group falling under a single category. This study concentrates solely on those who wish to remain in contact with their relatives through convenience sampling, therefore it may not be possible to generalise the findings to the population under scrutiny as a whole (Bryman, 2012).

3. Research findings: Description, analysis and synthesis

Social and economic challenges

The data from this study found that prisoners' families commonly experience social and economic difficulties. This mirrors the findings of Arditti (2012); Lösel et al, (2012); and Codd (2011). In particular, the data suggest that these difficulties relate to the maintenance of contact, economic impacts, and challenges related to housing and employment.

Maintaining contact whilst in prison

(i) Geographical location

Almost one-third of family members interviewed (7/25) found that the distance to the prison represented a major difficulty due to the long distances travelled, coupled with short visiting times. Participants commented that often they spent the whole day travelling for a visit (with visiting time often being less than two hours, due to the time taken up with the procedures associated with prison security). For example, Anne (mother)³ commented "today I left the house at 7am for a 2pm visit. Will get home about 8.35–8.45pm. By the time I have gone through security I end up seeing my son for an hour and half". This dissatisfaction with the amount of face-to-face time during visits is also described by Jane (partner) who explains, "all the time you're clock-watching, how long you've got, and if you're late and the prison is late ... well that's less time you've got".

However, not all the participants in the study experienced difficulties with visits. Interestingly, family members who were retired or unemployed did not find visits so much of a disruption. As, Alan (brother) states, "I have to travel 120 miles to visit ..., although I don't mind, I have time".

(ii) Benefits of visiting

Grimshaw and King's (2002) study suggests that difficulties with maintaining contact and visits represent some of the most common difficulties for families. Whilst these challenges were evident with some of the participants in this study, the findings also show that some participants saw maintaining contact as positive experiences, both for themselves *and* the offender, and an effective method of mutual support. For example, Elizabeth (mother) states "He is what keeps me going, there is not much help elsewhere. We give each other strength, visits are so important to me". Suzie (mother) also explains how visiting her son helps her "it sets my mind at ease that he's OK in a sense, and it's also giving him that encouragement and the strength to go on, seeing me here to support him". This is an unexpected outcome from the study; whilst much

³ Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect the identity of research participants. The information in brackets denotes their relationship with the prisoner.

literature looks at visiting from the offender's perspective (especially with regard to its effect on possible recidivism (Mills and Codd, 2008; Niven and Stewart; 2005; Shafer, 1994), little is known about the experiences of the families involved (Codd, 2011). This study showed that rather than considering visiting as a moral obligation, there was genuine belief that visits were mutually supportive, as such although visiting is often stressful and difficult these relatives felt it benefitted them in some way. Nonetheless, this study reflected the findings of Mills and Codd (2007) regarding the idea that the longer the period of imprisonment the greater the strain in relation to visiting. Rosie (wife), who has been visiting her husband for the past 16 years commented that the on-going stress caused by the problems associated with visiting has had a cumulative effect over the years, which has worn her down, with the result that she feels "the people doing the biggest sentence are the families".

(iii) Forms of contact

As Mills and Codd (2007) posit, brief visits to a prison, under surveillance, do not present an ideal situation in which to engage in complex familial interactions. Consequently, not every visit goes smoothly, family matters can remain unresolved, and some conversations are left unfinished. Therefore other forms of communication are often fundamental to the prolonged continuation of many family relationships. Lynsey (wife) discusses this issue:

It's the phone calls that frustrate me; sometimes I'd almost rather not have them because I don't choose when that phone call comes, and you feel like you should always try to be positive, and if that's his only contact with me, then he doesn't want that to be bad.

Suzie, Anne and Joanne, also commented on this restriction of 'waiting for the phone'. The consequences of imprisonment altering a family's domestic, personal, and social worlds (predominantly for the intimate female partners of the prisoner) mirror the concept of 'secondary prisonisation' where the routines, priorities, and social lives of a prisoner's family become disordered as they shape their lives to reflect the procedures within the prison (Comfort, 2008).

Lynsey goes on to describe how each of the different modes of communication generates different dynamics within her relationship with her husband:

It feels a bit false, and it's like we've got two different relationships going on, there's the one in the phone calls and there's the one in the letters, and the one in the letters, you've got time to think what you want to say and to write it down carefully and they've been much more honest on both sides. But it's like two different relationships – and then even a third one because the visits, nearly always either my son or my daughter or both come with me; I've only had one visit on my own, so there's kind of three different relationships going on.

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Gemma (wife) also feels that she gains most benefit from communicating via letter, on the basis that her husband's letters to her have greater bearing:

... having his letters to me where he's saying sorry and that sort of thing – to be able to have those, to re-read those; it has a lot of impact and stays with you much longer than anything else. You know it's been thought out carefully; it's not just saying something on the spur on the moment.

These findings relating to the benefits of letter writing reflect those of Fisherman (1988) who found that the use of letters can create “new romances and joint daydreaming” (Fishman, 1988:49). Similarly, the participants in this study felt that letters enabled them to re-visit the ‘conversation’ and had the effect of reaffirming their relationship. Participants generally felt that effective, productive communication could be better expressed in letters and emails, and this then had the effect of reducing anxiety during visits. However, not all the participants found the use of letters a positive experience. Delia (wife) feels she has to be guarded when she writes, as she says:

... you've got to be careful what you say, because I'm told that the letters are read [by the prison authorities] when they come in and when they go out and I find that quite restrictive and impersonal.

Consistent with the findings of Fisherman (1990) these outcomes suggest that the lack of confidentiality (which necessitates guarded comments) coupled with the longer sentences sex-offenders typically receive, can negatively impact on partnerships and family relationships.

Economic impact

The literature in this field overwhelmingly cites financial hardship as the greatest impact on families of having a relative in prison (Smith et al, 2007; Davis 1992). To explore this issue further, participants in this study were asked if their financial situation had been negatively impacted since their relative's imprisonment.

The quantitative data are as follows:

Table 4: Economic impact

<i>Since my family member went to prison...</i>	<i>Disagree and strongly disagree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Agree and strongly agree</i>
My financial situation is worse	38.3% (23/60)	11.6% (7/60)	50% (30/60)

Surprisingly, the quantitative data only partially supports the findings of previous studies, as just over 38 per cent of the sample did not report being negatively impacted upon financially. In this study, whether or not financial hardship was an issue arising from the imprisonment of a relative appeared to pivot upon individual financial circumstances. For example, Alan (brother) comments “I am retired so I have my

pension and my earnings are not impacted upon”. Lynsey (wife) also felt financially secure, stating “I’m lucky because we moved before conviction and we made money from the sale of the house, so that is how I have managed”.

Nonetheless, almost 50 per cent of the participants (12/25) felt that maintaining contact had had a negative impact on them financially and in some cases it was a barrier to them visiting more frequently. As Mary (daughter) explains:

I’m not getting paid for today, so it’s a loss of a day’s wages by coming, so financially it does affect me.

Amy (girlfriend) concurs:

I see him every two weeks. I couldn’t afford to see him any more ... It’s a tank of petrol there and back, so I’m looking at 50 pounds to come.

As only half the sample felt that financial circumstances were now more difficult for them than before, this study does not wholly support the research literature that places financial hardship as one of the most distressing impacts of incarceration (Davis, 1992; Hairston, 2003; Smith et al 2007). While these studies suggest that financial hardship is a very real collateral consequence of incarceration, the same may not apply to the families of sex-offenders. This difference in reported economic impact on the families of sex-offenders by comparison to families of other offenders may be because the families of sex-offenders are arguably drawn from a broader social demographic group and tend to be older, with the consequence that there may be higher percentages of those who are more financially stable.

Housing and employment

Arditti (2012); Lösel et al (2012) and Codd’s (2011) research suggests that prisoners’ families experience challenges related to housing and employment; the participants in this study were asked if there have been any differences in their housing and employment situation since their relative’s incarceration.

The quantitative findings are as follows:

Table 5: Housing and employment impacts

Since my family member went to prison...	<i>Disagree and strongly disagree</i>	<i>Agree and strongly agree</i>
Work colleagues have behaved differently towards me	67.7% (21/31)	32.2% (10/31)
My work situation has changed negatively	82.9% (34/41)	17.0% (7/41)
Neighbours have behaved differently towards me	77.7% (28/36)	22.2% (8/36)
I have had to change my housing situation	81.1% (43/53)	18.8% (10/53)

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This question did not apply to 24 participants, due to unemployment or retirement, and so these participants have been excluded from the calculations in this section.

Most of the sample either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the questions. This suggests that each different family relationship is affected with varying degrees of gravity. For those family members who live in another area of the country, or not in the same abode, the impact is perhaps far less likely to significantly disrupt their lives. However, the participant's comments highlight the issues faced by those whose employment prospects or opportunities were affected. For example, Amy (girlfriend) commented "I lost my house and I lost my job in a week". Amy was working with children and was no longer able to continue in this field, even though the conviction was not related to her workplace. She explains:

... the children that I was working with were not anything to do with the accusations...I've had to change my job. I'm looking at a new career. I moved to an entirely different area of the country.

Other participants who worked with children reported similar experiences. Gemma (wife) explained, "I used to be a teacher, and I don't feel I can go back into teaching any more ...it's a bit like stepping into the unknown". Lynsey (wife) had also been a teacher for 22 years and was now working in a supermarket, she states:

I know I would have [been asked to resign] because the new legislation came out; it's risk by association, anybody living with somebody that committed a sexual offence – I guess it's because it was connected to children; whilst I'm living with him, I can't work in the school, and I wouldn't get a clear DBS.

Lynsey does not feel that she would be able to return to her teaching career in the future: "the risk is that you'd apply for a job, go through the interview, and then they apply for the DBS.⁴ If it came back that I didn't get it, then they'd know about it and the whole thing would be awful, so I'm not even going to try."

This is consistent with the findings of Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) that suggests disclosure of identity is a barrier to employability experienced by both a sex-offender and their families - 'by association'. For relatives living in small communities, work with children, or cases exposed to media-coverage the decision about retaining anonymity is taken out of their hands, with a consequent impact on the individual's employment. Condry (2007) suggests the main motivation for disclosure (about the crimes) is to relieve the strain of concealing one's association to the offender. Whilst for some participants disclosure is necessary, for others, remaining secretive about their relationship can be a coping strategy. As Jane (partner) explains, "They don't even

⁴ The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) helps employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups including children. It replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). DBS is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Home Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service).
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

know at work or that I'm engaged, or with anyone. I just don't want them to know, basically, they don't need to know".

The threat of reduced employment prospects was not the experience for all participants however. Paradoxically, for *four* of participants interviewed, support came from their employers and work colleagues. As Kelly (wife) explains, "My manager was actually really supportive, and without him I wouldn't have been able to get through it". Mary (daughter) reports a similar experience; "I've got three good friends at work, including my manager and they've all been really supportive over it."

Previous research has identified that employment prospects for sex-offenders are at best seriously diminished, and at worst eradicated (Farkas and Miller, 2007; McAlinden, 2007). It is unclear what the immediate and long-term impact on family members is in this area. This study shows that the identity as a spouse or partner of a sex-offender can *also* negatively affect their career, especially those who work with children. For partners who had careers in education, the link to a sex-offender ultimately resulted in the loss of their employment. For this reason those who had supportive colleagues, or remained silent about their predicament, seemed better able to cope.

Much research has told us about the impact on housing for sex-offenders, and that anyone associated with a sex-offender, especially a child sex offender, experiences considerable negative impacts (Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009; McAlinden, 2007). Housing a sex-offender, significantly reduces a family's quality of life, increases their financial and emotional hardships, and can isolate them socially (Zevitz and Farkas, 2000). As Annie (mother) states:

... it was big in the press; it was in national press as well as local but we'd only been living here for a year, so nobody really knew us before that. Then we were served with a notice to quit where we were living, and we had problems with old mates of his coming up, banging on my door saying where is he? They were waiting for him to beat him up; I rang him and told him not to come home.

Family members suffer emotional trauma following their relatives entering custody, many feel morally obliged to assist the offender, with the main motivation being decreased recidivism (Farkas and Miller, 2007). Joanne (daughter) describes how, after her father's conviction, people in the community treated both her mother and sister differently:

She was uninvited to weddings, things like that. Certain people were like that, because they'd read the paper, and those people didn't know my dad years ago. Because this crime happened 32 years ago, before I was born, they were treating mum as if she'd done the crime. My sister lived near my parents, she had to take my nephew out of playgroup (he was four at the time), other parents were whispering in the playground and sort of out-

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casting them, even though it was nothing to do with them. Obviously, we all support my dad, and they don't like it.

It seems that this commitment has a considerably negative impact on the lives of the relative, and this research illustrates how effective support from communities and employers can be in reducing the psychological turmoil for families.

This section has examined the issues surrounding maintaining contact, the financial impacts and challenges surrounding employment and housing. It is clear that when the identity of a sex-offender enters the public sphere, their families' identities are often also revealed. This can mean that the processes of segregation, classification and exclusion that society imparts upon those surrounding sex-crimes can begin (Thomas, 2008; Levenson and Tewksbury, 2009).

Psychological impacts

Family bonds can be irretrievably damaged by the experience of coping with the impact of the arrest and conviction of a relative, and psychological distress is common, especially given the revulsion that surrounds sexual crime (Arditti, 2012; Codd, 2011; Condry, 2007). This section will examine trauma and stress, the effects of stigma, the impacts of managing resettlement and the stresses that arise from coping and building resilience.

Trauma and stress

Farkas and Miller (2007) identified that it is not uncommon for families of sex offenders to experience heightened stress levels, hopelessness, lethargy, isolation, frustration, and hopelessness. To explore this further, relatives were asked if the sentence had negatively affected their physical or psychological health.

Table 6: Psychological and physical health impacts

Since my family member went to prison...	Disagree and strongly disagree	Undecided	Agree and strongly agree
My health has been affected negatively (psychological or physical health)	28.3% (17/60)	13.3% (8/60)	58.3% (35/60)

The quantitative data suggest that over half the participants (35/60) agree or strongly agree that their health has been negatively affected. These findings reflect the outcomes of studies by Shapiro and Shwartz (2001) and Wilderman, et al (2012), which identify an increased risk of debilitating health conditions for prisoners' families. Almost one-third (17/60) of the participants, however, do not consider that their psychological or physical health has been affected. The length of sentence and nature of the relationship may explain this with the family member (i.e. whether this was a partner, sibling or parent). For example, a study by Carlson and Cervera (1992) suggests that a shorter

sentence length and family members who are less emotionally involved report reduced risk of trauma and stress, with these relatives having a greater ability to cope in these circumstances.

Impact on psychological/physical health

Shapiro and Shwartz's (2001) study suggests that those who choose to remain in touch with their convicted family member can experience initial shock and heightened feelings of anger, frustration that can lead to the onset of depression. This is reflected in the findings from the present study where eighteen (18/25) participants described how they have also struggled with stress, anxiety, depression, worry and sleepless nights as a result of the impacts of the sentence and coming to the prison. Sue (partner) explains how her partner's conviction resulted in her suffering from depression, the pressure around court resulted in her not been able to 'handle life', and, as a consequence, she attempted suicide.

This clearly shows the effect that trauma and stress can have on an individual's well-being. Psychological problems, however, represent only part of the impact on health. Seven (7/25) of the participants described how the sentence has also affected their physical health. Lily (wife) talks about how the extreme worry and stress caused by her husband's sentence had affected her:

My health has deteriorated. I mean I've had three heart attacks; I've got angina and a leaking valve in my heart. I think these health conditions are the result of stress.

Elizabeth (mother) feels that there has been deterioration in both her psychological and physical health: "It's made my arthritis worse and I cry a lot".

These statements clearly show how the relatives' health is affected, and reflect the theory of 'ambiguous loss' described by Boss (1999), where feelings of uncertainty and trepidation arise.

The impact of conviction

As Christian (2005) and Loucks (2004) suggest, the sudden change in a family's situation is a major source of anxiety. The majority of the participants (20/25) expressed these sentiments as being a particularly traumatic, emotional and stressful period for them. Similar themes were described as being feelings of loss and bereavement, shock and a sense of frustration and displeasure with the criminal justice system. Clearly then, the passing down of a sentence is often a highly distressing life-event. Anne (wife) explains how the initial separation affected her:

I have been married for 50 years, it's an extreme sense of loss and I am constantly worried sick about him, you're on your own; you're upset all the time, and you can't just ring in and ask how he is or anything, just awful.

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Sudnow (1967) and Condry (2007) both compare incarceration to bereavement (due to the sense of loss at this point) and posit that these feelings are particularly acute at the point at which their family member was sentenced. This current study reflected these findings with Amy (girlfriend) expressing her sense of bereavement:

I mean when he went, it was like he'd died. It was horrific.

Twenty-one (21/25) of the participants stated that they had experienced shock at the point their relative had received a custodial sentence. A 'realisation' that their relative has been found guilty begins, and the manner in which family members accept this is often a pivotal point in processing the events. Kelly (wife) stressed how this felt for her: "We [the family] could have all committed suicide, we were all so stressed out". Daisy (wife) was also significantly traumatised by the experience and claimed that the conviction came as a total shock (it was a first offence, and involved another family member). She commented:

... the fact that he was sentenced was a complete and utter shock, I had no family or friends supporting me, no concept of the process or where my husband would be taken and was simply left to go home. It felt like my world had ended, I was subsequently informed that he attempted suicide whilst in the court cells.

Penny (2002) acknowledged that, for those unaccustomed to the procedures of the criminal justice system, concise information is vital (especially concerning the whereabouts of the prison) and was clearly a major concern for family members. Moreover, the interviews suggest that conviction is a difficult period and practical problems are evident. The lack of information and support available to family members at this time is a key issue for many families and increases the intensity of their trauma substantially. This study has identified that nothing has really changed in the ensuing years.

Often at this point the trauma is further exacerbated when other family members are involved, as is often the case. Much research suggests that sexual offences and child sexual abuse are often perpetrated by a person known to the victim (Vanzile-Tamsen, Testa and Livingston, 2005). In a study on adult and adolescent victims 98 per cent knew their attacker and that almost half of the offenders were family members, whilst only 5 per cent could be characterised as strangers (Snyder 2000). This research suggests that animosity directed at the criminal justice system is a common theme at this juncture, a notion corroborated by Braman, (2004); Christian, (2005); and Comfort (2009).

Impact on children

Gemma's husband was convicted for a historical sex crime that took place long before they met. They have three young children. She explained how the prison caused her family extra distress. She felt that the prison authorities put pressure on social services to stop her children from seeing their father. She stated:

The trauma that caused my children is not quantifiable and I just think it's indicative of how the prison views visitors and how they view people coming into the prison.

Gemma explained how her children have all been affected by the sentence in various ways:

This has affected all of my children. I would say they've all been traumatised in one way or another by what's happened. The middle one was just in pieces from when my husband went away. The middle one is withdrawn and does not say much, where the little one – I mean it's really sad, I don't think she remembers my husband being at home and the relationship that she has with him has been damaged.

Lynsey (wife) has adolescent children and explained that her husband's conviction has hugely affected them:

My son went to counselling, and I think that did him good; the case is complicated because the conviction is partly to do with my husband looking for young men online, and my son is gay, and so there was all sorts of feelings and complications around that, but you don't know what permanent damage has been done.

Roberts et al (2012); Comfort (2009); Braman (2007) and Christian (2005) all identified that troubling psychological and developmental problems amongst children are common when a parent is incarcerated, whilst Shaw (1987) and Christensen (2005) recognised that for children and adolescents the first days and weeks after arrest are the worst.

Some general themes emerged throughout this research. Wolleswinkel (2002) and Roberts et al (2012) stress that specialist support is essential for children from the point of arrest. This research mirrors these opinions.

Table 7: Impacts felt in local communities

Since my family member went to prison...	Disagree and strongly disagree	Undecided	Agree and strongly agree
I feel stigmatised and labelled because of the crimes	45% (27/60)	16.6% (10/60)	38.3% (23/60)
I tell people why my family member is in prison	65.4% (36/55)	N/A	34.5% (19/55)

Family members described how they experienced stigma in their local communities. It is not uncommon for the media to report on convictions associated with sex offences. When this happens, family members are frequently subjected to heightened levels of stigmatisation and ‘labelling’ (Goffman, 1963). This study reflects the findings of Goffman: for example, Graham (father) explained the impact surrounding the media reporting of his son’s crimes.

He was on TV so that hit us quite hard at the time, and we felt like it was almost like a bunker, we didn’t go out very far for a few days after that. My daughter was massively affected when it first happened, and she came off Facebook completely. She couldn’t stand all the messages and all the comments being sent round. She couldn’t deal with it, she was really, really upset. There were lots of nasty things being said.

Amy (partner) also feels stigmatised by her community:

People have said some nasty things and implied that my partner must’ve manipulated me in the relationship as that was the sort of person he was in their opinion, also because I am still associated to him, I must be criminal. They feel he must have done something really, really bad because he’s in prison, therefore you’re obviously also a really bad person because you’re still talking to him.

Joanne’s (daughter) family was also affected by stigma in the local community as a result of media representation:

Oh God, it was awful. Me and all my family were signed off work, because at the time I worked for a major company, my father and my mum’s picture was all over the front page of our local newspaper, so yeah it was very hard.

However, not all participants in this study felt stigmatised by their connection to a convicted sex-offender. This seemed to depend whether or not they lived in the same community. For example, Brian (brother) commented:

Nothing’s really changed since he’s been in here. Because we’re so far apart, we’ve got no worries about neighbours talking about it, the only thing I keep thinking about is when he comes out, how hard he’s going to find it.

Goffman (1963) refers to stigma and its impact as a 'spoiled identity'. The present study research reveals that the effects of stigma are an overwhelming concern for virtually every participant. This 'contamination by association' often manifests itself through heightened paranoia, where people remain silent, or only tell people they trust about their dilemma. Parents especially, but everyone generally, felt shame and had feelings of culpability.

At point of release/resettlement

Tewksbury and Levenson (2009) state that sex offenders' return to the pre-prison home is not always possible, especially if the offences involved other family members or victims in the local community. The impact of stigma on post-release life, as well as difficulties with housing (Farkas and Miller, 2007) and employment (Nelson et al, 1999), were all concerns expressed by 23 of the 25 participants. For example, Bella (mother) explained how she worries about what life will be like for her son when he is released, due to the stigma associated with his conviction:

There's such a stigma attached isn't it. People really aren't interested in the true story, they just see this –well paedophile, don't they – that's the word, and judge everyone the same.

Alan was anxious about the media continuing a campaign of vitriol if they find out where his brother is when eventually released; he hopes they do not know where he locates to, and hopes he is left to rebuild his life. Thus, Alan has lied to friends about his brother's whereabouts and is worried if this is leaked. Amy (girlfriend) was also concerned about the community's reaction as well as employment prospects for her family member post-release:

I worry about him getting a job. I worry about him re-integrating. He couldn't go back to the kind of job he did before. My friend had their house petrol bombed, they had windows smashed, tyres slashed repeatedly; they ended up with a police panic button in their house. It was a similar crime. I worry that the stigma's just going to carry on and he's not going to be given a chance. There's going to be very little that we can do because of the associated stigma.

Amy is also concerned how her boyfriend will be accepted in her family following his release:

He's really sort of like, "I'm going to get your parents on-side", and I think my mum will go for it, and I don't think my dad will. I think it'll be really difficult. I said, "I don't want to be in a position where I have to pick between you and my family."

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Brian worried about what will happen to his brother when he is released due to the stigma. His brother is retired, so finding employment is not a concern, but he does say that:

... he's going to find it very hard when he gets out, I know he will, because some of his family have said they won't want to know him, so he's going to find it very hard. In fact I think his life's ruined now, to be honest; it's ruined.

Graham (father) was also worried about what will happen when his son is released:

He'll have no social network; he'll need to try and get a job somehow, but he's got a criminal record now, don't know how we're going to help him find a job. So we've got a lot of challenges when he comes out.

Lynsey (wife) had concerns over her husband's employment post-release due to the nature of the conviction:

He has to put down that he's got a criminal conviction and then he has to put down that it's sexual, so just think who on earth is going to choose to employ him.

Many of the participants expressed concerns about where their family member will be able to live following release. For example, Alan was concerned that his brother will not be able to return to his house where he was living before:

The guy who owns the house that he was living in works for Ofsted and he has to fill in a form that says nobody in his house has a criminal conviction for child sexual ... well actually any sex offence I think.

A number of participants expressed concerns about the terms of the release and whether this meant that their family member would be unable to return home or be required to live in a hostel. For example, Anne (wife) commented:

When he's released he'll be on licence. I'm just hoping he will be able to come home because there's so many of them that can't come home, they have to go to hostels, so we just don't know.

Tammy (sister) expressed similar concerns that her brother will have to live in a hostel post-release:

I'm not sure that a hostel's the right place for somebody that could potentially be going out and be quite vulnerable, in terms of "I haven't been out for however many years, who's going to support me?"

Suzie (mother) similarly had concerns about her family member being vulnerable if placed in a hostel:

Think about it. If you know that that hostel there is for ex-offenders, whatever, then who do you think's going to be targeting that? Drug dealers, you know, why wouldn't they? You're kind of, in some respects, just setting people up to fail.

In addition, worries about 'labelling', hopelessness (especially regarding their futures), denial and outright anger at their situation all emerged.

Resilience and coping mechanisms

Participants described a number of coping mechanisms, including defensive behaviour, outright denial of the crimes committed, taking medication, and distancing and separating oneself from 'social negativity'. For example, when individuals from the local community approached Amy to ask if her partner's conviction was true, her response was:

Well, does it really matter? Is it any of your business? Is it going to have a massive impact on your life? I was like, "Well, I don't want to have this conversation with you." Oh my God, I was massively defensive...

Elizabeth (mother) said that when people talk about her son or ask her questions she lied. She justified this as a way to protect both of them:

I say, "My son's working overseas at the moment", I have to lie a lot. And that's something I do not like doing; I have to lie to protect my son and me. As a mum, I'm just protecting my son, to me he has an illness.

Tammy (sister) explained how she has coped with her brother's conviction:

I went through the grieving process, in terms of initial shock and denial – but you've got to keep strong; you've got to keep focused, because if you don't, you go under, and what then happens to him?

A number of participants believed in the innocence of their family member, and this theme of 'denial' was relatively common throughout this research. Joanne (daughter) stated "The hardest thing is seeing your family member go away for something they didn't do"; Delia (sister) declared: "Obviously I believe the person in here is innocent, as I suppose 95 per cent of them [other relatives] think they are".

Self-preservation and 'coping' are essential elements to personal wellbeing. The reduction of heightened stress and anxiety often induced by a dramatic change in circumstances, such as incarceration, gains greater import. To combat this, individuals can devise various psychological strategies. Zevitz and Farkas, (2007) suggest that 'distancing' or 'separating' oneself from the offender, often followed by a complete

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termination of a relationship, is ‘one way’ of managing or coping. Developing resilience strategies whilst dealing with competing emotions is an undeniably difficult proposition, with little known about how these demands are managed. Difficult decisions on how best to develop strength and agency whilst devoting time and emotional resource to the prisoner on the inside is an inevitable, depressing consequence of incarceration (Comfort, 2008; Braman, 2007; Christian, 2005;), as this study reiterates.

Accessing support

Accessing support for families can be informal or formal, indirect or direct. Family members may ‘rally round’, providing financial help, babysitting, and assisting with chores which, although helpful, differ in emphasis to ‘formal’ support. The emotional aid through more official pathways is often delivered with less judgemental bias, and the obligatory aspect many family members are prone to feeling is removed (Codd, 2011; Condry, 2007; Farkas and Miller, 2007). The overwhelming amount of research in this area examines support mechanisms from the offender’s perspective (McAlinden, 2007; Marshall et al, 2006; Harris and Hanson, 2003). Despite this, there is very little is known about how relatives choosing to support their loved ones are themselves supported, especially given the often complex, intra-familial nature of many sexual crimes, and the public distaste these crimes engender (Farkas and Miller, 2007; Travis and Waul, 2003). To explore these issues further, sixty participants were asked the following questions. These calculations have omitted participants who answered ‘undecided’.

Table 8: Accessing support

Since my family member went to prison...	<i>Disagree and strongly disagree</i>	<i>Agree and strongly agree</i>
Some family members have been supportive	12.5% (7/56)	87.5% (49/56)
Some friends have been supportive	11.5% (6/52)	88.4% (49/56)
Support from family or friends has helped me	7.2% (4/55)	92.7% (51/55)
My relationships with close or extended family have been affected negatively	64.1% (34/53)	35.8% (19/53)
Support from agencies is easy to access	65.9% (31/43)	27.9% (12/43)
Support from agencies has helped me	75.7% (25/33)	24.2% (8/33)

Here the quantitative data strongly suggest that the majority of participants (49/56) seek support more informally through family and friends; however, this was not felt to be the same for formal support, where participants were less sure how easy agencies were to access and what help they could offer to them. Interestingly, the findings show that, although over one-third (19/53) of close family relationships are affected negatively, two-thirds (34/53) of relatives disagree or strongly disagree that their relationship had

been affected negatively. Light and Campbell (2006) posit that it is unclear how prisoners' families make use of sympathetic 'others' when gaining emotional and practical support. This study gives some clarity as to *how* this happens. Three main themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: strong kinships, selective support, and support gained through their incarcerated family member.

Some participants were fortunate enough to have strong kinships, as Sue (partner) explained: "my family have been really supportive, especially my family members, I feel lucky to have such a close-knit family". This type of support from both immediate and extended family members was echoed by a further eight (8/25) participants interviewed; however, this can have implications for extended family members who choose to be supportive. As Graham (father) stated:

It really upset my mum, but she's 90 so it would do. She came to see him a couple of months ago. She found that quite hard, she's getting very frail now, she couldn't bear the thought of not seeing him again – bit of a tearjerker really – but she's glad she came to see him.

For six (6/25) participants, informal support was more limited it was sought only from those they trusted the most. Suzie (mother) gave an insight on *why* she controls from whom she chooses to gain support:

I've got a very close friend that I'm able to talk to, and family, yes, but beyond that I just deal with it in a closed circuit, otherwise sometimes they're giving me advice but that's not the type of advice I want, and then maybe it spreads out so wide that it makes the situation more difficult to cope with.

Gaining informal support is not without its complications, and close relationships at times can be affected negatively. Gemma (wife) stated that "it's difficult, and after a while people forget about what you're going through, and they forget about your other needs when their things come up". Lynsey described how this was problematic and how the dynamics of support have altered within her immediate and extended family members:

My teenage children have been fantastic. My parents have tried to be supportive, but they're so angry with him, they find it very hard to understand why I've stayed. I think that sort of affects the whole relationship, they do not want to see him again, I don't know how that's going to work once he's out. We have been married for 25 years.

When asked about extended family members, Lynsey added,

My mother-in-law has been very lovely and supportive, but my sister-in law has two children so the subject is not mentioned – family gatherings are awkward. It's like the elephant in the room, it's completely avoided.

Amy (girlfriend) reiterated these sentiments: "I get the most support from my boyfriend who is in prison but my own family are different, they are not supportive that I see him

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and there is an underlying pressure for me to end the relationship". Amy discussed her anxieties as she plans to get married and she does not want to choose between her boyfriend and her family when this time comes.

Nonetheless, not all the participants were successful in gaining support from the family. As Condry (2007) posits, this often results when family ties have been broken due to crimes involving another family member. For three (3/25) of these relatives this was the case, and they turned to friends or work colleagues for help. Daisy (wife) stated:

I am not supported by family, they [my daughters] made me choose him or them, following the arrest he [my husband] tried to commit suicide. I found I could not walk away after forty years when he was in that state, the accusations just did not add up. I have no contact with my children or grandchildren, he is the only family I now have ... If it wasn't for a handful of wonderful friends I would not've been able to carry on.

As in Amy's case relatives who are unable to gain strength from those on the outside sometimes find that their support is obtained through their family member in prison. Stronger, loving and more appreciative relationships were described by four (4/25) of the participants. Woodward (2003) posits that disapproval of an offence can lead to the termination of wider social and family support.

Although the quantitative data suggest that relatives lean more towards informal support mechanisms, the data from interviews suggest that this is not always a straightforward decision. As Shaw (1987) suggests, 'how much' appears to depend on the closeness and trust within these relationships prior to conviction. This notion was a consistent theme throughout for the relatives interviewed in this study. Codd (2011) affirms that when offences are of a sexual nature, intra-familial or crimes that occur in the local community, it can induce the 'withdrawal of friendships' and some relatives may retract their support completely. This reflects the consequences for some participants in this study, who find themselves isolated and turn to more formal methods for emotional assistance.

Formal support

Most support for prisoners' families is provided by the voluntary/non-profit sector and is typically delivered by trained individuals attached to charitable organisations whose intent is to provide help or be of service to the family (Codd, 2011). Forty-three participants responded to the question 'Has formal support been easy to access?' The data from the quantitative analysis show that almost 66 per cent (31/43) of the sample disagreed or strongly disagreed that support was accessible to them. This concurs with the literature, which suggests that both research in this area, and the availability of support services dedicated to families of sex-offenders, are scarce (Action for Prisoners Families, 2013; Codd 2011). Nonetheless, around 23 per cent (12/43) agreed or strongly agreed that formal support was useful and not difficult for them to access. Themes that emerged were benefits of support, difficulties with support, and the types of support relatives desired.

There are a number of reasons formal support can be beneficial for families in this situation. Counselling, support teams within the community, and empathetic staff within the visits centre can all play a significant role in relieving some of the duress, and have a positive therapeutic influence on family members. Lynsey (wife) contacted two charities, and explained how this helped her: "I definitely couldn't have managed on my own. The best thing for me was the 'Stop It' campaign helpline." The police made her aware of this agency and she has been contacted at various stages throughout the sentence. Lynsey stated that the Helpline talked her through the process of what was going to happen:

*... and because they're dealing specifically with sexual crimes, it just felt that they had the knowledge **specifically**, and they knew the whole process, and they could empathise with what I might be feeling, and I felt I could say anything to them – I mean obviously the case is pretty awful stuff – and I could talk about those kind of things. I also went through Mind [the mental health charity] for counselling.*

Daisy (wife) explained how emotional support was received from the psychiatric team that was looking after her husband:

They were brilliant. "Is she OK?" It's fine. It's nice that somebody wants to know because I don't think people realise the implications. The whole thing has had a really huge impact on the wider family members.

Amy (girlfriend) added that counselling was beneficial for her (this had been arranged through her employer). In addition, she described how she found comfort within the visits centre:

My boyfriend was previously held at another prison and the level of empathy [within the visits centre] was not the same, it was just awful – the girls here [current visits centre] are so much more friendly, they don't make you feel like a criminal ... they really care and they don't make you feel judged, they certainly don't make you feel like scum which was what his last place did.

Amy mentioned how she has made friends with another woman who also visits:

We don't talk when we're not here but it is nice to just speak to somebody who understands exactly understand how you're feeling and it is helpful in reducing some of stresses associated.

Positive sentiments about staff in this visits centre were also mentioned by a number of other participants, as Elizabeth (mother) reiterated:

Some of these [other families] are really nice people, really nice but the staff are brilliant, they're really, really lovely.

She felt they've done a lot to support her through this time:

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They're there to help you, but if you have a bad day, they're there for you. So I do get the support here as well.

Difficulties with formal support

Almost half the sample (27/60) were unaware that any support was available. These findings concur with published research which has identified that many families do not join support groups as they do not know about them or what is available nationally in their scope (Codd, 2002). Another common theme was a reluctance to source formal help.

Moreover, thirty-one (31/43) of participants were frustrated with the difficulties of accessing formal support; with twenty-five (25/33) stating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that it had helped them. Daisy (wife) explained her frustrations:

I phoned up the Offenders Families' Helpline, they weren't particularly helpful; I did, one desperate day, phone the Samaritans and the little man at the other end, his reaction was, I can't help you; you need more help, but he couldn't advise me where to go. Accessing support is a massive problem, it's like trying to find your way through a rabbit warren – it's affected absolutely everything. The only thing that's probably come out of it is that my husband and I are probably closer now than we've ever been. He is so pleased to see me, so loving.

Elizabeth (mother) sought support from her GP:

I did not know where to go for help, I did break down at my doctors, one of them was really brilliant but the other ones, they don't talk about any of it, it really depends who you get, and how sympathetic they are, it's a bit of a lottery really.

The difficulties for GPs having to deal with complex emotional issues are well chronicled (Lucas et al, 2006). Therefore, arguably more specialist support networks would be of benefit to this population.

Furthermore, financial support proved to be a challenge for some of the interviewees. For example, the Assisted Family Visits Scheme (AFVS) provides some financial support for immediate families in receipt of benefits; however, this can be complex to negotiate, as relatives receive only a contribution towards their travel and this is reimbursed after a visit. Consequently, this proved to be a major burden, as many are already suffering financial hardship.

Eight participants (8/25) also found this a barrier as they could not visit as often as they were entitled to, due to the costs involved with travel. The issue for these relatives were that they were either not entitled to financial help or they had to add their own financial resources to any benefits in order to make the journey possible. Despite the APVS efforts to support immediate families in financial adversity, many make financial

sacrifices in other areas to be able to keep in touch and support their relative. In addition, extended family members (who may be the only supportive link with the prisoner) are not entitled to any financial reparation. There appears to be a paradox in the support system. One of the key priorities of the 'reforming rehabilitation' initiatives is concerned with keeping families together and promoting the maintenance of family ties. In reality, this is not possible when prisoners are placed further from their homes, and the amount of financial support remains limited.

Types of desired support

Codd (2007) suggests that these prisoner's families endure a 'social invisibility'. This notion is echoed by the findings in this study, where it has identified that obtaining formal support presents numerous barriers and challenges for relatives.

Many participants (18/25) commented on their frustrations with prison security. Gemma (wife) felt the prison could do a lot more to support families visiting:

So take for example today, when we got into the visitor's hall, it was after quarter past two, and the visit was supposed to start at 2 o'clock. And we were the first group to be called up. So the first thing they could do is they could be efficient in their timekeeping.

Support from the visits centre

Lynsey (wife) suggested that visits centres could play an active role in facilitating a support group where other family members can meet:

I'm never brave enough to, kind of, make the first contact. I feel like it needs that mediation, which is where a support group would be great. I am sure I must not be the only person who feels like this.

A support group with other family members was a notable recommendation: around a third (8/25) of the relatives in this study mentioned this as something they would approve of.

Support around conviction

Condry (2007) noted that the passing down of a sentence is often a highly distressing life-event. Participants interviewed clarified that this is a particularly difficult, stressful and traumatic time for family members. A 'realisation' that their relative has been found guilty appears to begin, and the manner in which family members accept this (or not) is often a pivotal point in processing the events that have befallen them. Three themes emerged among a majority of the participants (23/25): a lack of information; support; and, knowing where to turn. Gemma (wife) declared that support is very much needed at the point of conviction:

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... when my husband first went to prison and I was told that my kids wouldn't be able to see him, I didn't know where to go to, and there was nowhere that could help me, tell me how to get through this or what to do, or what the next step was.

She continued:

The conviction has a bearing on the children and the less traumatic it can be for them, the better in general, I would say, it would be for the society as a whole. Because if they're traumatised it has an effect on their mental wellbeing.

However, she feels that, whatever the type of formal support was available, she would still be apprehensive about accessing it. Participants felt that support is needed for families in the courtroom, especially where the crime is a first offence and there have been no previous dealings with the criminal justice system. Sexual crimes are often complex, intra-familial, and may have been concealed for many years; as a result the outcomes for families can be even more traumatic.

Support for families linked to historical sex crimes

An increasing number of offenders are entering the prison estate for historical sex crimes (Mann, 2016). Nine (9/25) participants stated that support for the family members affected was also central to helping families process the circumstances that they were forced to endure. Kelly (wife) expanded on this:

Often in historical sex cases it is family members that are affected, but there's nothing available to help families build bridges, and you do need the support of your family, and this is where we've had so many problems. And there's nobody that we can go to, you know, to help us. So some sort of formal support would be really good for that, often the people like me – the wife – isn't aware of what's gone on; it's a total shock, and you're in the middle, trying to support your husband until he's convicted, you've got family members that are vulnerable.

When asked what type of support would be useful at this time, Kelly replied:

There isn't any support for, because it's relatively new [becoming more a phenomenon in society], and there isn't any support groups out there because I've already looked into it, and I've asked my doctor to look and he couldn't find any. It's just there's nothing there. I feel strongly that support groups and counselling services are made available; it is impossible for family members to deal with the complexity of these issues on their own, we need help!

Support surrounding release

The literature identified that the release of a convicted sex-offender is often a complex and stressful period for relatives to navigate (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009; Farkas and Miller, 2007; Condry 2007). This is reflected in the present study, where the majority of the participants (23/25) stated that this was an exceptionally anxious time. Themes such as strict licence conditions, concerns about accommodation (most sex-offenders go to controlled housing before returning home), employment prospects and stigma are found to be particularly distressing worries for relatives. The need for targeted, specific support around release was a sentiment overwhelmingly expressed by twenty-three (23/25) relatives. The 'realisation' that the sentence has 'not ended', but rather, another one is beginning, can be extremely demanding emotionally. For example, Amy (partner) agreed that access to formal support is crucial at the point of release:

If there's like a magic job fairy, then that would be good. I don't know, in all honesty. I just want people to give him a chance and see that he's not some horrendous criminal; I mean he's really not.

Lynsey (wife) stated that a further concern was that support given to her might wane after her husband's release:

I just think, well, even the people that have been supportive – they've been supportive to me, but that's easy because I've done nothing wrong, but how'll they be to him, I don't know. I did struggle – I really wanted a group to be able to meet with other wives whose husbands were in for sexual offences, and I searched the internet and the MIND counsellor looked for me, but we could find nothing.

4. Conclusion

Existing research

Overall, the literature review has identified a significant lack of research exploring the impacts on sex-offenders' families. However, the findings from this study were more nuanced, with the degree of the impact on family members being contingent upon the nature of the pre-conviction family relationship (i.e. whether it was wife, brother, mother, etc.), financial dependence, and personal economic status (retired, independently wealthy). The limited research available suggests that the families of sex-offenders experience substantial economic, sociological, and psychological challenges (Tewksbury and Levenson 2009; Condry 2007; Farkas and Miller, 2007). However, much of this research has been conducted in the US, and thus the findings may not be generalisable to the UK. The laws relating to sex-offenders in the US may be considered more punitive as sex-offenders' identities are more readily accessible (Thomas and Thompson, 2012; Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009), so the consequences differ in nature and severity. Thus, there is a gap in knowledge from a UK perspective and this research project has explored these unresolved questions.

Recommendations and implementations for future research

It has been established throughout this study that there is a need for effective formal support as a family progresses through each phase of their loved ones' 'journey'. Therefore a recommendation would be to place a family support worker, or counsellor, with a family, firstly at the arrest, then at the courtroom stage, at the prison visits centre, and on to release. Given that people are 'already there', the convenience and accessibility of this support should be/is relatively straightforward. Furthermore, this may alleviate some of the reported disparity in empathy across the different professions working within the criminal justice system, such as lawyers, barristers, courtroom workers, visits centre staff, and the various prison sites. At present it would appear that many family members must rely on the goodwill of sympathetic individuals (which is not always forthcoming) who may inadvertently offer the wrong advice. At the courtroom stage, basic information about what may happen, and where their loved one may go, was a concern for many of the participants; access to more information at this stage would be beneficial to families and courtroom workers alike. Additionally, specialist training for possible support networks such as teachers, GPs, employers, and charities would be beneficial for many family members, especially given the vast rise in the number of historical sex-abuse cases coming before the courts, the sheer complexity of many sexual crimes, and the traumatic impacts of intra-familial abuse over many years. 'Aftermath' was the last assigned national self-help group for families of serious offenders, and this closed in 2005 due to lack of funding. At the time of its demise 1285 families were members. Given that the rise in convictions for sex-offences is now running at unprecedented levels, an organisation managing and operating along similar lines to Aftermath would be both forward-thinking, and of even greater benefit to people who are arguably suffering from considerable social injustice.

Future Research

This study has offered some preliminary explanations of families' challenges; however, future research should endeavour to examine how families of imprisoned sex offenders access support. Firstly, given that the research findings explicate that the point of release and resettlement is a period of great anxiety, future research might examine licencing conditions and how they affect family life. Increasing numbers of offenders are being placed on the Sex Offender Register, and the negative outcomes for their family members require additional assessment, as they have no culpability and are 'innocent' (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2009).

Secondly, identifying *what* support services should deliver, and *how* they would work, is essential. One recommendation for future research would be to pilot a focus group with family members, with the intention of developing an effective support network. The family members would devise a best model of practice, and create the format and content for this possible venture, with a researcher as a facilitator. This would provide valuable further knowledge, and therefore greater understanding for practitioners on *what* support best suits these families.

Thirdly, further research into the impact on the relatives of imprisoned sex-offenders might be useful, with a larger sample population, across more sites, and inclusive of *all* family members, to determine whether any common patterns develop within the different familial relationships. For example, do mothers share common experiences? Are siblings less affected? Are extended family members prone to similar levels of stigma? This would give an even more reliable insight into their challenges.

Limitations

A limitation of this research was the relatively low number of contributors, and a lack of homogeneity within the sample group. It should be noted that more participants could have been gained if the research timeframe had been longer. A larger sample size over a number of different sites would have increased the reliability and validity of the research. Furthermore, the design of the questionnaire was a limitation. On reflection, some of the questions only required 'yes' or 'no' answers, which would have reduced the ambiguity in some areas. Also, the study is not generalisable to the target population, as this study examined only the experiences of those who chose to stay in touch with their relatives. As Codd (2011) stated, there is no official register of prisoners' families: therefore, these particular individuals are the only point of reference in this area.

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Appendix A: Participants' characteristics

	Name (all pseudonyms)	Age	Ethnic origin*	Travel time to prison	Relationship to prisoner	Conviction	Length of sentence	Length of sentence remaining	Interview duration (minutes)
1	Alan	60/70	White/British	2 hrs	Brother	Historical sex abuse	5 yrs	2.5 yrs	18
2	Amy	20/30	White/British	> 2 hrs	Partner	Sex offence	2 yrs	7 months	21
3	Anne	60/70	White/British	> 4 hrs	Wife	Sex offence	5 yrs	6 months	18
4	Bella	70/80	White/British	> 1 hr	Mother	Internet crimes	8 yrs	2 hrs	22
5	Graham	50/60	White/British	> 1 hr	Father	Sex offence	> 6 yrs	8 months	23
6	Jane	50/60	White/British	2 hrs	Partner	Historical sex crimes	Not known	Not known	10
7	Joanna	30/40	White/British	2 hrs	Daughter	Historical sex crimes	4.5 yrs	1 yr	12
8	Kelly	50/60	White/British	3 hrs	Wife	Historical sex crimes	10.5 yrs	< 2 yrs	16
9	Elizabeth	60/70	White/British	3 hrs	Mother	Sex crimes	4 yrs	1.5 yrs	29
10	Delia	60/70	White/British	1 hr	Sister	Sex crimes	3 yrs	5 months	8
11	Sue	20/30	White/British	2 hrs	Daughter	Sex crimes	> 2 yrs	< 6 months	11
12	Elsie & Andrew	60/70	White/British	2 hrs	Son	Internet crimes	9 yrs	5 yrs	26
13	Brian & Anne	70/80	White/British	2 hrs	Brother & sister-in-law	Historical sex crime	2 yrs	< 6 months	20
14	Anna	60/70	White/British	4 hrs	Wife	Historical sex crime	5 yrs	2.5 yrs	22
15	Billy	30/40	White/British	4 hrs	Sister	Sex crimes	7 yrs	> 1 year	22
16	Annie	60/70	White/British	4 hrs	Mother	Sex crimes	7 yrs	> 1 year	24
17	Daisy	50/60	White/British	1 hr	Wife	Historical sex crimes	8 yrs	7.5 yrs	25
18	Suzie	70/80	Caribbean/Black	3 hrs	Mother	Rape	10 yrs	4 yrs	39
19	Tammy	50/60	Black UK	3 hrs	Sister	Rape	10 yrs	4 yrs	39
20	Gemma	40/50	Mixed race	> 1 hr	Wife	Historical sex crime	> 9 yrs	1.5 yrs	22
21	Minnie	60/70	White/British	3 hrs	Wife	Sex offence	3 yrs	1.5 yrs	18
22	Mary	20/30	White/British	4 hrs	Daughter	Historical sex crime	14 yrs	11 yrs	12
23	Rosie	40/50	White/British	3 hrs	Wife	Sex crimes	18 yrs	> 2 yrs	N/A**
24	Lily	60/70	White/British	2 hrs	Mother	Sex crimes	9 yrs	2 yrs	6
25	Lynsey	50/60	White/British	1 hr	Wife	Internet crimes	2 yrs	1.5 yrs	39

* Self-ascribed ethnicity **Postal response

Appendix B – Sample questionnaire and interview schedule

MICHELLE BROWN
MPhil Student Criminological Research



Questionnaire

Since my family member went to prison.....

1. Some family members have been supportive

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Some friends have been supportive

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. Support from family or friends has helped me

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Support available from agencies is easy to access

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Support available from agencies has helped me

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. Work colleagues have behaved differently towards me

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7. Neighbours have behaved differently towards me

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. My financial situation is worse

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

9. I have had to change my housing situation

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. My employment situation has changed negatively

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

11. I feel stigmatised and labelled because of their crime

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

12. I tell people why my family member is in prison

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

13. My health has been negatively affected (psychological and/or physical health)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

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14. My relationships with close or extended family have been affected negatively

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

15. My relationships with close or extended family have been affected positively

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Interview schedule - 'An exploration of the challenges families experience when a family member is convicted of a sex offence'

Interview questions

General opening questions

1. Have you have a good journey?
2. How far have your travelled?
3. How often do you visit?
4. What relationship do you have to the offender?
5. How far into the sentence is your relative/partner?
6. Do you have children?
7. Do you look forward to your visits?
8. What do you like/dislike about visiting?
9. How do you stay in contact when you are not visiting?

Semi-structured open-ended questions

1. What kinds of adjustments have you had to make to your life since your family member has been imprisoned?
2. What barriers to maintaining a relationship do you face since your family member has been imprisoned?
3. What is life like since the conviction? Do you or your family face any particular challenges that they did not before?
4. If you have children, do you feel that they have been affected by the sentence? If so, in what way?
5. Have you received any form of positive support? If not, do you think it would be helpful? If yes, what type of support and how easy was it to access this?
6. How is life in your local community? Does anybody know you have a family member in prison, and how does this affect the way people are towards you?
7. When looking towards the future, what are your expectations? Do you envisage any particular challenges when your family member is released?
8. How do you think your family would be best supported when your relative is released?

Appendix C – Information sheet for participants and sample consent form

MICHELLE BROWN
MPhil Student Criminological Research



‘An exploration of the challenges families experience when a family member is convicted of a serious offence’

Who am I?

I am MPhil student, studying for a Masters in Criminological Research at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge. I do not work for the Prison Service, and this study is part of a thesis project.

Why are we doing this study?

I would like to find out more about the experiences of family members who have a relative convicted for a serious offence. I am particularly interested in what specific challenges you face and what support systems are available in helping you cope. This research will help other families in your position with the intention of informing third-sector organisations working with families to help ‘tailor’ their support strategies.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve a short interview, where I will be asking questions about your experiences surrounding the journey up to and through the prison sentence and your hopes for the future. I will also ask you about your thoughts on what can be done to help other families in your position.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

Are there any risks involved in taking part?

During the interview you will be asked to discuss your background and your experiences of your current situation. Some questions might also ask you to think about things you have not previously thought about, or choose not to think about. Depending on your circumstances, this might trigger some unhappy or upsetting thoughts. However, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and time will be given at the end of the interview to discuss anything you may have found difficult. If you find the interview distressing, you can stop at any time, and I can advise you on whom you could talk to about your feelings.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

You may, however, feel that talking about your experiences is useful or helpful to you. Some people have welcomed the chance to speak to someone neutral.

You will also be contributing to our understanding of the specific challenges families face and thus inform practitioners in delivering 'tailored' support to families in a similar situation.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The information you share in the interview will normally be kept completely confidential. However, the researcher will be obliged to pass on to a member of prison staff any information regarding:

- A breach of prison security
- Any further offences you know about
- Any breach of prison rules that occur during the interview
- Anything you say that implies a threat to yourself or to others

In all other circumstances, everything you say will remain confidential. The information you provide will be stored securely, until September 2016 and then deleted. The only persons who will have access to your interview will be myself and a transcriber within the University.

Will my contribution remain anonymous?

If you agree to the researcher using quotes from the interviews, this will be done in such a way that you cannot be identified. I will give you a different name and will change any details about your life which would 'give away' who you are.

How do I agree to take part in the study?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete a consent form, confirming that you understand what the study involves and have had a chance to discuss any questions with the researcher. You will also be asked to state whether you are happy for the interview to be recorded.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop an interview or refuse to take part in any further interviews at any stage during the research process, without having to explain why you want to stop. You can also insist that the content of your interviews so far is excluded from the study, without having to explain why. You may make this decision at any point up until 31st July 2016, when I will begin writing the research findings. If you make this decision, I will destroy your interview recording and any associated material. Making this decision will not be held against you or disadvantage you in any way.

Where can I go for support should participation in the research cause me anxiety?

If, once you have finished the interview, you feel that some of the things that you have talked about have made you feel anxious or distressed in any way, there are a number of organisations from whom you can access support:

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- You can speak to a member of staff within the visits centre, or I can ask to contact a member of staff who you would like to talk to.
- You can contact the Samaritans Tel: 116 123
- Prisoners Families and Friends Services Tel: 020 7403 4091
- Offender's Families Helpline Tel: 0808 808 2003

What will happen to the results of the study?

Your interview will contribute and form part of an MPhil thesis. The findings may also be discussed in other academic publications. Again, this would be done in such a way that you could not be personally identified.

What if I want more information about the study, or want to complain about some aspect of it?

The study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge. If you would like more information or have any questions or complaints about the research please feel free to speak to me directly. If you do not wish to pursue your question or complaint in this way, you should contact Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe, at the Institute of Criminology.

Thank you for your time in reading this information. If you have any further questions at any stage of the research, please do not hesitate to ask me.

**Michelle Brown
MPhil Student**

The Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge

Consent form

Researcher: Michelle Brown, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge,

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the following three statements.

		YES
1.	I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the study, and have had chance to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I do not have to answer any of the researcher's questions if I do not wish to, and that I can withdraw at anytime, without giving reasons , until 31st July 2016.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I agree to take part in the study, which means being interviewed by the researcher or/and answering a short questionnaire.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer YES or NO to the following two statements by ticking the appropriate box.

		YES	NO
4.	I agree to our interviews being recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I agree to let the researcher use quotes from our interviews and conversations, as long as this is done in such a way that I cannot be identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant:	
Date:	
Signature:	
Name of researcher:	
Date:	
Signature:	

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to express my gratitude to all the families who participated in this research. Sharing such personal accounts of your difficult encounters understandably takes courage and trust, so I am extremely grateful to you all for sharing your stories with me. I hope this paper has gone some way to getting your voices heard. Many thanks also to the staff at HMP Littlehey and Ormiston for accommodating my research.

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About the author

Michelle was born and raised in Cambridge and continues to live in Cambridgeshire with her two teenage children. She attended a state secondary school, leaving school at sixteen with just a handful of GCSEs. Michelle's working life has included roles within the NHS, education and research-focused environments. She decided to return to education in 2012 as a mature student. She attended Anglia Ruskin University and graduated with a first class BA Criminology in 2015. Following this she was awarded a scholarship from The Isaac Newton and Churchill College Trust to continue her education at The Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, where she graduated with an MPhil in Criminological Research in 2017. Her most recent work includes articles on the consequences of crime on the relatives of sex-offenders, and the sociological and psychological impacts of living with an indeterminate sentence.

About the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. It is the oldest penal reform charity in the world. It was established in 1866 and is named after John Howard, the first prison reformer.

We work with parliament and the media, with criminal justice professionals, students and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change to create safer communities.

We campaign on a wide range of issues including short term prison sentences, real work in prison, community sentences and youth justice. Our legal team provides free, independent and confidential advice, assistance and representation on a wide range of issues to young people under 21 who are in prisons or secure children's homes and centres.

By becoming a member you will give us a bigger voice and give vital financial support to our work. We cannot achieve real and lasting change without your help. Please visit www.howardleague.org and join today.

Chief Executive: Frances Crook
Research Director: Anita Dockley

About the John Sunley Prize

The John Sunley Prize celebrates excellence and the impact of post graduate research into penal issues. Each year thousands of exceptional Masters dissertations are researched and written but few are even lodged in university libraries or shared with the wider penal affairs community. Many will be of publishable standard and would contribute to the pool of knowledge about penal issues. The John Sunley Prize has been established to ensure that the best of these dissertations now get the recognition they deserve.

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