

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

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## Recommendations for practitioners and stakeholders

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## Introduction

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 These early mother-blaming narratives within academia have since been replaced by a focus on what role NOPs can play in facilitating desistance and preventing sexual crimes (Shannon et al., 2013).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Research questions

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

## Research methods

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

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

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

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

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

**Table 1.** Participant information.

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

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

# Results

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

## The impact of discovery

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Minimisation has been demonstrated to perform an adaptive function for those convicted of sexual offences (Maruna & Mann, 2006), and it is possible it is similarly adaptive for NOPs, allowing them to move forward with their lives and alleviate psychological distress. It is of note that the participant who had

instigated divorce proceedings against her partner did not exhibit such minimisations, possibly indicating the protective nature of distortions for those who choose to remain in a relationship. Another way in which participants sought to resolve their internal discrepancy surrounding the image of their partner was by seeking knowledge

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to help them understand why their partner committed an offence, representing a form of sense-making following the loss of their assumptive world (Beder, 2005; Park, 2013).

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

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

### Intervening agencies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Implications of the research

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Recommendations

### Support needed in relation to the ongoing impact of discovery

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

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

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

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

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

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

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parent” represents a real barrier to NOPs accessing support, putting children at greater risk of harm. When applying restrictions, child protection services should consider what support (practical, financial, or emotional) could assist NOPs in adjusting to the drastic changes to their family circumstances, in the interests of the children’s welfare.

Additionally, they should reassure NOPs that seeking support with mental health concerns is reasonable and appropriate.

**Recommendations related to intervening agencies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some examples of the information NOPs may require include:

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

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

## Dissemination of Research

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

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