

Research and new charity helping families cope with trauma of 'the knock'

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Ground-breaking research into the impact on family members when someone is arrested for accessing indecent images of children has now spun off into a charity that helps families after they receive what is

known as 'the knock'.

The work by the University of Huddersfield, led by Professor Rachel Armitage, has highlighted the trauma for loved ones of witnessing the arrest of a family member.

Arrests normally take place at the [family home](#) when the rest of the family is present, and such is the impact of this that Professor Armitage is calling for the families of those arrested to be reclassified as direct victims in order to receive better support from various statutory and voluntary agencies.

As a response to the research and recognizing the trauma and [lack of support](#) for families, she has teamed up with several passionate individuals to launch a charity called Talking Forward.

Based in Leeds, it supports families when a loved one is arrested for accessing indecent images of children, from the warrant and through the criminal justice process. It is a period described by those impacted as 'limbo', with the forensic analysis of technology averaging 18 months and sometimes up to three years.

"There is a re-traumatisation over that period after the knock," says Professor Armitage. "Families of offenders are currently seen as secondary victims, but this excludes them from the support available to direct victims—including anonymity in the media, therapeutic interventions and communication regarding the criminal justice process."

"With the introduction of the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act, children are now considered as victims if they have witnessed the effects of domestic abuse. When a child witnesses the warrant, what they see is extremely distressing. This trauma and the 'aftershocks' that follow should lead us

to at least consider some parity between the these offense types."

"When a suspect is arrested and Children's Services have conducted safeguarding checks, because the family are unlikely to be direct victims, all support—emotional, financial, physical and any form of advocacy—disappears. Partners are expected to cope with a sudden single-parent status, school, solicitors, [social services](#) and many other challenges in a state of trauma. This simply isn't acceptable."

The research has also led to an opportunity for a Ph.D. that will see a researcher embedded within Talking Forward to assess the real-world impact of the charity's work with the families who have received 'the knock'. Applications are being taken until 26 May .

The University's Professor of Cyber Security, Simon Parkinson, is also researching on how technology could improve the process that follows the knock.

"We have been investigating ways and published a paper on how to process a higher number of cases simultaneously, through a better use of available computation resources that are prioritized automatically as indecent images are discovered," says Professor Parkinson. "This can help allocate resources to cases where indecent images are being discovered, reducing the [processing time](#) and having faster outcomes for the investigators and victims."

Professor Armitage is also working with [police forces](#) to improve their consideration for families when the warrant takes place—be that the time of The Knock, how to support partners and children and where to signpost them for further support.

West Yorkshire, Humberside and Merseyside Police now refer families to Talking Forward at The Knock. Lincolnshire Police have established a

Family Liaison Officer role specific to this offense and West Yorkshire Police are exploring the possibility of developing this role.

"As well as supporting the families of suspects, these changes are helping police who find conducting the warrant and blowing families apart extremely difficult. Some even describe this as more traumatic than viewing or categorizing the indecent images of children. Providing agencies that can support families after the police leave allows them to focus on the [criminal investigation](#), while others act as advocates for the [family](#) whose lives have been impacted by this offense."

Professor Armitage's research has been published in the *Journal of Sexual Aggression*.

More information: Rachel Armitage et al, "We're Not Allowed to Have Experienced Trauma. We're Not Allowed to Go through the Grieving Process"—Exploring the Indirect Harms Associated with Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Offending and Its Impacts on non-offending Family Members, *Victims & Offenders* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/15564886.2023.2172504](#)

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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