

**TH-AM-03**

**“Don’t Forget About Us!” It Takes a Village: RSO Family Member Support Groups**

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Family members of RSOs are invisible and collateral “victims” of sex crimes. The psychological, financial, and social devastation to family members is profound, and is called *disenfranchised grief* – a term that applies to personal losses that go unrecognized by others and for which there are no socially acceptable “rituals” (Bailey, 2017). The collateral consequences of SORN and SORR policies complicate the picture, and families are often faced with conflicted loyalties, PTSD, and a sense of hopelessness that permeates all aspects of their lives (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009).

Family members of people required to register experience their own set of emotional responses and social challenges due to the realities of living with the registry. Many feel enormous stigma, isolation, and powerlessness in the face of complex restrictions and public disclosure. This workshop will briefly describe several models that have been developed for family member support groups, and then we will share our experience with trial and error, challenges, and successes.

This workshop engages ATSA members in providing a much-needed service to these families by way of support meetings that focus on healing and resilience. Several strategies for facilitating these types of groups will be described, with suggested topics, formats, and recommended group leadership skills. A question and answer period will allow discussion and brainstorming to help participants design support groups that attend to the unique needs of RSO family members in their own community.

This symposium is rated: Adult | General | Clinical

**Learning Goals**

- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to identify and understand the disenfranchised grief of family members and loved ones of registered citizens.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to design and create a support group that is specific to their own community’s needs and demographics.
- Upon completion of this educational activity, learners should be better able to identify the suggested leadership skills and qualities necessary for effective group management and facilitation

## ***BLENDING VOICES. STRENGTHENING LIVES.***

2020 ATSA Conference | Thursday October 22 | 10:15 AM – 11:45 AM

**Shelley Kavanagh** is Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Doctoral student at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida. She is completing her Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) and is currently studying the effects of SORN & SORR on family members of registered citizens. She provides both individualized and group treatment with clients who have sexually offended and family members of registered citizens in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

**Dr. Jill Levenson, PhD, LCSW**, Professor of Social Work at Barry University in Miami, treats survivors, perpetrators, and family members impacted by sexual offenses. She has published over 100 articles about policies and clinical interventions designed to prevent sexual abuse, including projects funded by the *National Institutes of Justice* and the *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*. In 2019 Jill Levenson was the recipient of ATSA's Lifetime Achievement Award!

### References

- Bailey, D. J. S. (2017, September 17). A Life of Grief: an Exploration of Disenfranchised Grief in Sex Offender Significant Others [journal article]. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9416-4>
- Levenson, J. S., & Tewksbury, R. (2009). Collateral damage: Family members of registered sex offenders. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34(1), 54-68.