

**Experiences of the Family Members of Individuals with Histories of Sexual Offences:
A Content Analysis**

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Background: Most research on sexual assault and sexual abuse concerns the impact of these crimes on victims, and to a lesser extent, perpetrators. However, recent research has suggested that the family members of individuals with histories of sexual offences are “secondary victims” of these crimes. These family members are left to manage psychological difficulties (e.g., guilt, shame), social stigma, isolation, and fear for safety, often with minimal supports (Bailey, 2018; Tewksbury et al., 2009). Due to the integral nature of family members in the re-integration of individuals who have committed sexual offences (Farkas et al., 2007; Hanson et al., 2004), further examination of the challenges they face is needed.

Online support groups are a commonly utilized resource for individuals who are experiencing stigma and isolation (Zhang et al., 2018), including those whose loved one has been convicted of a sexual crime (Bailey, 2017). The anonymity offered through online communication is an appealing avenue of support for disenfranchised groups (Gilbert et al., 2011). Using data collected from an online open-source support group, the current project identified key concerns and unmet needs of individuals whose family member has committed a sexual offence.

Method: Study material was collected from online forum discussions by family members of alleged sexual perpetrators (e.g., parents, children, romantic partners), resulting in 490 posts from 2018 and 2019. The NVivo encapture tool was utilized to code all posts and establish themes from a grounded theory approach (Tie et al., 2019).

Results: Four themes were identified using content analysis: (1) Dealing with practical issues resulting from the offence (e.g., legal restrictions, housing concerns, and problems with the registry); (2) Seeking support handling distressing feelings; (3) Supporting a loved one in the aftermath of the offence; and (4) Relational difficulties (e.g., managing the attitudes of others and resolving trust issues).

Implications: A further understanding of family members’ experiences will shed light on the consequences of attitudes and stigma surrounding sexual offences and will provide insight into unmet needs. Findings will help inform the design and implementation of services for highly stigmatized and understudied individuals. Results from this study will help increase well-being among family members and help prevent relapse among perpetrators by developing and maintaining positive supports.

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Kathleen (Katie) Cassidy is in her first year of the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program at the University of New Brunswick (UNB). Under the supervision of Dr. Scott Ronis, her current research focuses on the collateral consequences of sexual crimes. Specifically, Katie is interested in identifying positive and negative predictors of psychological adjustment among the non-offending romantic partners of individuals with histories of sexual crimes. Currently, she is working on her Master's dissertation which focuses on psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction in non-offending partners.

Laura Kabbash is currently completing a doctorate degree in clinical psychology at the University of New Brunswick under the supervision of Dr. Scott Ronis. Her current research is focused on child sex trafficking and the content of online support groups for families of alleged sex offenders. Ms. Kabbash graduated with an Honours Bachelor's degree in Psychology at University of British Columbia, Kelowna, while completing research on the mediating effects of personality factors on the association between child abuse experiences and adult outcomes.