

## Public Understandings of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Abusers

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What follows is the transcript of an online debate that was part of a broader Knowledge Exchange project in the United Kingdom (UK). The online debate involved criminal justice policy makers and managers and practitioners with leading UK and international academic institutions; examining learning from the recent UK pilots of a Sex Offender Public Disclosure scheme (see Kemshall, Wood, et al., 2010; Chan, Homes, Murray, & Treanor, 2010).

The limited disclosure of sexual offender information scheme was piloted in England and Wales, all the police forces were English and none Welsh, having been rolled out by early 2011. A similar pilot study was undertaken in Scotland, leading to a rapid implementation of a similar scheme prior to the end of 2010. There are no plans, as of writing, to develop and/or roll out a pilot study in Northern Ireland (McCartan, 2012). Hence, child sexual abuse policy and legislation in the UK seems to differ based upon which country of the UK it is based (i.e., England, Wales, Scotland, and/or Northern Ireland), and is quite conservative, tentative, and constantly adapting (McCartan, 2012). This UK-wide disparity led to the establishment of the Knowledge Exchange network, as a means to share good practice, discuss common/specialist issues, and develop a coherent national framework.

The online debate presented here is part of a wider programme—a knowledge exchange network—of work on the public disclosure of sexual offender information in the UK. The Knowledge Exchange Series is funded through collaboration between the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), our respective universities (*University of the West of England, De Montfort University, and Cardiff University*), along with 10 statutory and third sector partners. These are: *Circles-UK, National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers (NOTA), Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Risk Management Authority Scotland, Stop it Now!, WCCSJ, Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland, Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation, Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, and DHSS Northern Ireland*. Since the Knowledge Exchange programme started, we have had new organisations come on board as associate partners, including [Centre for Law and Criminal Justice \(University of Strathclyde\)](#), [Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice \(Queens University, Belfast\)](#), [One In Four](#), [Wales Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#), [Leicester and Rutland Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#), [Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research](#), and the [Centre for Forensic and Criminological Psychology \(University of Birmingham\)](#). These partners and associate partners, as well as the other invited event participants form the basis of a knowledge exchange network aimed at providing stronger links between academic research, policy development, and practice.

In addition to online debates—like that included below, the Knowledge Exchange series will host four events in 2012, with the first having been in February 2012 in Paisley hosted by the Risk Management Authority Scotland; the second event was held in May 2012 in Belfast, hosted by PPANI; the third event will be September 2012 in Cardiff hosted by the WCCSJ; and the final event will occur in Birmingham in November 2012, hosted by SWM Probation. The series will also have a dedicated YouTube channel with video streams and audio content, as well as a website which will contain presentations, outputs and hosted online debates on related issues (<http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/sexoffenderpublicdisclosure.aspx>).

The debate included below is the first of four discussions scheduled to take place throughout 2012-13 as part of this Knowledge Exchange network. These debates will examine public understandings of sexual abuse and sexual abusers. Public knowledge of the dynamics and manifestations of sexual abuse is an important starting point for understanding the reality and impact of the disclosure of sexual offender information, for two reasons;

1. How well educated are the public on the reality of sexual abuse and sexual abuses and, therefore, how much does this engagement inform their need to obtain, and how they use/may use, sex offender information?
2. How well do, and should, practitioners engage with the public on issues relating to sexual abuse, as well as sexual abusers, and how does this impact the public's willingness to obtain and use sexual offender information?

The debate included here occurred over a two-week period through an online social networking site. All six of the participants were invited to take part because of their expertise in the areas of public engagement on sexual offender disclosure, as well as public education on the reality of sexual offending generally. The participants were selected from a range of academic backgrounds, non-governmental organizations, and practitioner groups:



Dr. Kieran McCartan



Professor Hazel Kemshall



Dr. Kirsty Hudson

- Senior Lecturer in Criminology from University of the West of England—**UWE**
- Professor in Criminal Justice from De Montfort University—**DMU**
- Professor in Criminal Justice from Leeds Metropolitan University—**Leeds Met**
- National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers and National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—**NOTA/NSPCC**
- Northern Ireland Association for the resettlement and Care of Offenders—**NIARCO**
- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers—**ATSA**
- Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation—**SWM Probation**).

All participants are identified below only via the institutions or organizations on whose behalf they spoke.

The debate below is a faithful representation of what was said, nothing has been otherwise altered (except in a very few places where minor adjustments were made for clarity—Editor). The format includes an opening statement, in this case by the representative from Stop it Now!, followed by an open discussion including all participants. Readers are reminded that this was originally an online discussion, and that grammar, etc. were of lesser importance in favor of free expression of thought and opinion.

<p><b>Stop it Now!</b></p>	<p>Before addressing the matter of public understanding directly, I do feel that a comment about the Disclosure Scheme is needed. And then I'll move on.</p> <p>It is undoubtedly the case that the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (a.k.a. Sarah's Law) has assisted 160 parents and carers better protect their children from known (i.e., previously convicted) sex offenders against children. What I find strange, however, is that so few (relatively speaking) applications have been made across the first year of operation. Somehow this interest in applying to the police to be told if someone in contact with a child is a known sex offender made more sense before we could apply than afterwards. Of course, there is also a relationship with the local and national marketing of the scheme, which has not been massive, and therefore the public understandings of what it all means.</p> <p>Looking at the applications made over the year and "strike rate" (i.e., where the person about whom an enquiry is made is indeed a convicted sex offender), tells us a number of crucially important things. Some applications were made because there had been gossip about the past, variously confirmed or not. But in rather a large proportion of cases either behaviour was noted that caused concern or something somehow didn't seem right—a "gut feeling". It is the case that applicants don't need to have particular or even general worries—but a fair percentage most definitely did. I dearly hope the effort is made to capture any pattern of concerns expressed by applicants, most particularly when a disclosure was made, as other parents and carers may learn a lot from the example of those who have gone before! And any analysis and publication of such data would certainly help to generate much-needed publicity for the scheme.</p> <p>Despite the merits of the Disclosure Scheme, I have to acknowledge massive doubts about the scale of benefits it can ever deliver. Even if we were to see an explosion of applications. I say this simply because most people who pose a sexual risk to children are not known or convicted; are not on any Sex Offender Register. So there is nothing to disclose. And this may of itself provide false reassurance to the parent who applied.</p> <p>It is the case that all applicants are given "empowerment information" to complement whatever the police do or, more likely, do not tell them. The value of this information has not, to my knowledge, been recently evaluated. We don't know if it is read or simply recycled! I hope the former but fear the latter.</p> <p>When Sarah's Law was being piloted the Home Office asked Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Stop it Now! to develop and pilot a means of educating parents and carers about what they should know and do in order to keep their children safe from sexual abuse. The result was and still is a website <a href="http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk">www.parentsprotect.co.uk</a> and workshop materials for delivery of information to groups of parents, carers, grandparents and others. We worked d*****d hard through focus groups and other means to craft the materials and messages and then get them out to parents and carers. But I cannot tell you how hard it has proved both 3 years ago and now to get people to turn up; to want to think about the issue before it becomes an issue within their family.</p> <p>There are difficult issues to grapple with—including the fact that convicted and registered offenders are likely to be the smaller risk when compared with the risk posed by un-convicted family, friends and neighbours, both young and old alike. Those few who do attend a workshop invariably say the information is invaluable and why are not more people interested? So what do they find "invaluable" and what difference does this really make?</p> <p>Clearly the media plays a pivotal role in the education of the public, and such education in regard to child sexual abuse tends to headline horrific and tragic circumstances around vulnerable children exploited and abused by predatory monsters, often strangers (and they are to the reader anyway). Yet studies of the reality of abuse, often un-convicted, indeed unreported, tells us that most children who are abused know their abuser, often very well as family member, worker or friend. These features make telling all the more difficult. Just as they make the betrayal and the consequences for the victim so much worse. I have rarely seen newspaper coverage of a conviction tell other parents what they can learn from the circumstances of the case in order to better keep their own children safe. Yet that is precisely what is needed if the prevention of child sexual abuse is ever to be achieved.</p> <p>So "Parents Protect" workshops and website insists that child sexual abuse is preventable, but acknowledges the reality that at least one in nine children experiences such abuse. That such abuse is normally done by a known, often trusted individual who is highly unlikely to be known to the police. That whilst adult males are responsible for the majority of abuse, children and young people commits a third or more. And not to forget adult females, of course, as "Little Ted's" reminds us. But our focus groups told us how important it was to be helped to understand the "process of abuse" using the model developed by David Finkelhor for professionals 25 years ago—the "Four Preconditions for Abuse" or "hurdles" model as it has become. To understand that sex offenders are largely not born but made, and that childhood adversity has a major part to play in their future behaviors. To understand the "sense" they often need to make of their behaviour to justify it to themselves, often involving struggles with conscience before as well as after abuse. But also acknowledging that some, probably many, who have sexually offended do stop. Being caught helps, of course! But others stop for other reasons or of their own accord.</p> <p>Understanding the fact of and typical features of "grooming" is perhaps the most valuable part of the "process" that parents grapple with. On the basis that, having their eyes opened not just to the fact of who might abuse but also how they might go about it and what some warning signs may be, ought to help parents and other protective adults identify risk or the potential for abuse beforehand and take preventative actions.</p>
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	<p>What is of interest is that the few hundred parents who attended “Parents Protect” seminars stated at the end that they were less interested in knowing who was on the sex offenders register in the light of what they now knew. They only wished others had access to the same information and may then, perhaps, become less absorbed with and influenced by media headlines that too often enabled little learning that would afford better protection. The news is too often about the next tragedy; the next identified monster; the next nightmare. The prevention of such things struggles to get a mention.</p> <p>I am perpetually alarmed by the pretence of politicians and some statutory agencies that we are “on top of the problem” of child sexual abuse. The true scale is rarely acknowledged; equally the real ability of “thesystem” to protect children and prevent abuse before it has happened. The public has the most important role to play but rarely recognizes this. I hope dialogues such as this will help make an impact.</p>
DMU	<p>I note Stop it Now!’s interesting comments about the low take up public disclosure, and it is also worth mentioning the low conversion rate—that is, from initial enquiries, to applications, and finally to the very low number of disclosures actually made. The pilot evaluation attempted to address some of these issues and is available at:</p> <p><a href="http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeof...">http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeof...</a></p> <p>More recently we have reflected on marketing and publicity (see <a href="http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/01/1748895811433190.ab...">http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/01/1748895811433190.ab...</a>)</p> <p>And also the types of barriers that members of the public may perceive when thinking about using such a scheme (see <a href="http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/01/1748895811433190.ab...">http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/01/1748895811433190.ab...</a>)</p> <p>Marketing has real challenges in reaching BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups, and also in reaching what might be termed marginal groups. This resonates with UWE’s points that there are many publics and communities, with differing perspectives, fears, anxieties and worries, and there may need to be different communication strategies to cope effectively with this.</p> <p>Significant barriers were also experienced in Scotland about approaching the scheme either through social services or through police—and Scottish developments have tried to rectify this—I hope Willie Manson the Scottish public disclosure coordinator will make a post addressing this. And I invite readers to visit Willie Manson’s presentation to the Scottish seminar available at:</p> <p><a href="http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/sexoffenderpublicdisclosure/outp...">http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/sexoffenderpublicdisclosure/outp...</a></p> <p>Fundamentally, I was left with a number of thoughts following the evaluation of the public disclosure scheme, and one was ‘does the public really want to know’ who these people are?’ The media may think they do, but this is actually quite different from testing whether they really do. I also wonder whether what the public want (and I agree with UWE that there are actually many different publics) is to know that the relevant professional bodies are actually doing their job properly rather than knowing who individuals in their communities actually are.</p> <p>I was also struck by the low take up on public awareness campaigns about sexual offending, including the Lucy Faithfull Foundation pilot Stop it Now! refers to. Again this contradicts the media presentation of a public eager to know. That is not actually borne out by the facts, yet politicians and policy makers have acted as if it were a true presentation of public views. Should more care be taken in formulating public policy?</p> <p>Finally, I wonder if public awareness has to take different forms—forexample through existing groups, community leaders and community ‘opinion formers’, we certainly recommended this some time ago in an evaluation of Stop It Now! For example, should we use schools, teacher-parent forae, Women’s Institute groups, and so on? Groups that are well rooted in communities and that can provide a conduit for information to pass to those who might use it? What do others think? And what would be the role of practitioners, academics and experts in this public communication?</p>
UWE	<p>Following on from the previous two posts I wonder if the public actually want to know about who their local sex offenders, or any type of offender, are? I think that it seems to be more about the having the reassurance that they have the ability to access the information when they need it/want it, this could explain the low take up. From conversations with American practitioners, at conferences like ATSA, I got the impression that public attendance at community meetings around sex offender disclosure (either because new offenders were being released or the disclosure mechanisms were being changed) decreased the longer the scheme was in place. This seems to give the impression that the public are aware of the scheme and use it as needed, if at all.</p> <p>I also think that the type of disclosure scheme that we have in England, Scotland and Wales may not be what the public actually wants and that is why they do not use it. Maybe they do not see it as being fit for purpose (mainly because the scheme that is currently in place is not the original Sarah’s Law, but rather a variation of it)? This was the impression that I got when doing some focus groups in Wales and Northern Ireland on disclosure;</p> <p>Public Disclosure &amp; Sex Offenders in the UK: Social Evil or Community Empowerment?</p>

	<p><a href="http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/sexoffenderpublicdisclosure/part...">http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/hls/research/sexoffenderpublicdisclosure/part...</a></p> <p>The participants indicated that they felt under suspicion themselves as they had to have a background check done, be interviewed by the police and sign a confidentiality agreement. Which was particularly true in the Northern Ireland sample who worried that previous contact with the police or past convictions may trump child protection and result in them not being told the truth? This led both Welsh and Northern Irish participants to say that they would not use the scheme and if they did they would be careful about how they got to access it and that they would break the confidentiality regardless of signing the form. Therefore maybe the public do not access the scheme because they think that it is full disclosure to the public of all reoffender information where in reality it's the disclosure of specific child sexual offender information to named care givers, which is not the same thing.</p> <p>Some of the confusion around the scheme and the reality of public understanding comes from the fact that there are many publics, many practitioners and numerous view points on sexual violence/abuse.</p> <p>McCartan, K. F. (2011). Professionals' contemporary theories and understandings of pedophilia. <i>International Journal of Police Science and Management</i>, 13, 322-335.</p> <p>McCartan, K. F. (2012). Professionals' understanding of government strategies for the management of child sexual abusers. <i>Probation Journal</i>, 56, 124-137.</p> <p>If we look at Jenny Kitzinger's (2004) work on health promotion as well as past work on risk and child protection it reinforces this perspective. The issue then becomes how professionals who work in the field of sexual violence and related fields (criminal justice professionals, practitioners, media representatives, psychologists, academics, policy makers and charities/NGOs) create a semi-coherent dialogue on sexual violence, especially child sexual abuse, that a broad public can engage with, understand and respond to?</p>
SWM Probation	<p>There are a few things I would like to note in response to the points raised so far. Firstly, if the disclosure scheme is being used as a fallback position for people who <i>already</i> have concerns about an individual, then that is probably a very good thing—in that it empowers the public and gives them a right to act on suspicions, but does not encourage widespread suspicion and vigilantism (elements of which have been noted in the U.S.). The protections noted in UWE's post seem to be very sensible ones. Disclosure of this type must be carried out in a careful and controlled manner for the above reasons. Risk of recidivism can be reduced amongst those who have committed sexual offences—but there is evidence that 'disintegrative' attempts to shame individuals serve only to increase risk.</p> <p>Secondly, I note Stop it Now!'s earlier comments that such a scheme is unlikely to reduce overall rates of sexual offending (although I note that in specific instances it may do so) because it will not target all potential abusers. Indeed post hoc solutions such as this will only ever go some way towards resolving the problem. As Stop it Now! quite rightly points out, sexual offending for many abusers is determined as a result of early childhood experiences, attachment deficits, and so on. Therefore the real solution to reducing sexual offending for future generations lies in improving the lot of children now, particularly those at risk of developing the vulnerabilities to become abusers themselves. This is where we should be investing (as well as solutions that seek to reduce recidivism amongst those already convicted). We already have very good solutions to reduce recidivism amongst known sexual offenders, including sex offender treatment programmes with good evidence as to effectiveness that are constantly evolving and improving. But such programmes (including the disclosure scheme) will only work for offenders who we already know about (I realize here I am simply repeating Stop it Now's earlier comments).</p> <p>Finally, I was really interested in DMU's comments concerning whether the public actually <i>wants</i> to know about abusers. I suspect (although I am not as conversant with the literature on this as I should be) that many of the people targeted by the pilots are people in new relationships, or existing long term relationships. It is a hard thing indeed to face up to the fact that a new or existing partner may be an abuser, and raises all sorts of conflicting loyalties that people may simply not want to face up to. I think the way that the media portrays sexual offenders, and the terminology used in much media reporting of sexual crimes, is so far removed from the reality of most sexual abuse, that the public simply do not recognize it in friends, neighbours and partners. This I guess emphasizes the need for proper public education about the nature of sexual abuse of children.</p> <p>Lots more to say but hopefully the debate will enable more comments to be made.</p>
NOTA/NSPCC	<p>A lot of very useful and sensible postings here already. I struggle with the dilemma of providing the public with what they think they want—a true 'Sarah's Law' for example, when the experience from North America is not only that such a measure (based on the experience of 'Megan's Law' in New Jersey [Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro, &amp; Veysey, 2008]) adds little to child protection but also uses significant resources to administer—resources which would seem to be better used in more effective ways.</p> <p>I agree with SWM Probation that it is hard indeed to face a new or existing partner possibly being an abuser. One of the first pieces of sexual abuse related group work I did was with mothers of children who had been sexually abused, mostly by partners. That gave me a profound and memorable insight not only into the appalling emotional turmoil of many women whom we used to stigmatize as having 'failed to protect' but also how incredibly difficult it was to recognize indicators of concern in someone who you had invested your trust and affection.</p> <p>The current scheme therefore offers the potential to allow concerns at an early stage to be checked out and known</p>

	<p>abusers to be identified.</p> <p>However, my understanding is that the greater problem we face in protecting children is not from known offenders (which either the current or any modified disclosure scheme would identify) but from those without a conviction who abuse.</p> <p>The difficulty of recognizing that someone we know may be a sexual risk to a child is immense—and yet combating easy stereotypes of offenders and providing public education would seem to be the most productive area for us to encourage resources to be directed to.</p>
ATSA	<p>I consider myself someone who tries to solve the problem of sexual abuse by working with offenders—helping them to make important attitudinal and lifestyle changes that will ultimately lead to a better life and less (hopefully, no) offending. As a field, I think that we have done a good job of researching what is or is not likely to achieve our collective goals of increased offender accountability and increased public safety. However, as a discipline I think we have done a quite lousy job of sharing those findings with average citizens—and I include myself in that group of all-too-quiet professionals. I believe it is time for us to speak up and to take primary roles in the discussions leading to sexual offender public policy. The former practices of shying away or merely reacting to already established policy are tired and old.</p> <p>As a scientist-practitioner (SP) in the field of sexual abuse treatment and prevention, I typically work with offenders, but have also done work with those who were victimized. I am as guilty as the next SP of failing to properly inform average citizens about what I have learned. We conduct research on this incredibly important public safety issue, but we publish those findings in obscure research journals largely accessed by others of our ilk (SPs). The only time any of those findings hit the street is when there is some journalistic “hook” to the piece, which is decidedly rare.</p> <p>The challenge to me and my peers is to take more of a role in the shaping of public opinion regarding sexual violence. To borrow from general criminology, I consider the effects of punishment on crime to be an “answered question”. We have several meta-analyses with strikingly huge sample sizes all saying the same thing: More sanction does not reduce reoffending; the application of human service (e.g., treatment programming) reduces reoffending. Yet, as a society, we seem completely complacent about our governments instituting mandatory minimum sentences, increased sentence lengths, and reduced opportunities for treatment (via funding cuts). This is a perfect example of the research indicating that we should choose a particular line of practice, but what we get/got was the opposite. Whose fault is that? Do we blame the politicians for not doing their homework? Perhaps. Do we blame the public for being woefully misinformed about our research? Perhaps. Or, do we blame ourselves for failing to bring important findings about human nature and conduct to the very humans who need to know most? Absolutely.</p> <p>Attachments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Aos et al. WSIPP outcome 2006.pdf</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Smith Goggin &amp; Gendreau 2002.pdf</a></li> </ul>
Leeds Met	<p>The problem of the person with no previous convictions—the ‘greater problem’ as NOTA/NSPCC says—has parallels with criminal record checks—if it comes back ‘blank’ we all relax—regardless of what other evidence might be around—and what might happen next. Public Disclosure might go the same way—‘but you [the police] told me he was alright’—that takes us back to the wider education aspect of disclosure.</p> <p>Marketing these public disclosures also seems to be fraught with problems.</p> <p>Applicants may well dislike the idea of going to the police in the first place—especially people from ‘hard to reach communities’—despite the police’s best efforts not everyone trusts them. We have always understood that child sexual abuse is not class related but trust in the police might well be.</p> <p>The 2010 Home Office circular (ref. 007/2010)—guidance on the implementation of disclosures (para. 5.2.3)—recommends that face to face applications should be dealt with where possible by officers with child protection experience or sex offender management experience. But this is only a recommendation and one can easily imagine what will happen if (for various reasons) these officers are not available and inexperienced officers have to do this work.</p> <p>I did not realize that applicants were also subjected to criminal record checks themselves—although I can now see the Home Office circular does refer to it (para. 5.1.9)—the circular also has a list of things the applicant will be told (para. 5.1.7)—the list does not include telling them about the need for <u>them</u> to be checked against the Police National Computer, Visor and local force intelligence systems.</p> <p>Do applicants know that they will be checked? What happens if ‘something’ is thrown up by such a check? How would that affect their application? Not surprising applicants themselves have felt under suspicion as UWE says.</p> <p>Criminal record checks will be off-putting to many applicants—so will simple things like the idea of having to produce</p>



	<p>evidence of identity.(para.5.2.6); do health authorities and children’s services know they may be approached to ascertain an identity (as suggested in para.5.2.7)?</p> <p>Being warned they risk prosecution if they provide false details in an attempt to make a malicious application (para.5.2.4) will also be off-putting to some applicants; especially if that is done by insensitive inexperienced officers.</p> <p>Not the easiest of ‘marketing’ jobs when the process is potentially so ‘user unfriendly’. And the word will soon go round on some of our estates.</p> <p>Whilst we are working to a figure of one in nine children being the subject of child sexual abuse I can see where the ‘much needed publicity’ idea comes from. But to play devil’s advocate—what if we <i>are</i> searching for something that is not so widespread after all and offering a service that people do not want?</p> <p>I may be wandering off the point here but there is arguably a comparable experience when it comes to women trafficked for sexual purposes /exploitation and its extent. A lot of concern being expressed but massive national police raids like Operation Pentameter reportedly arrested 528 but only managed 15 trafficking convictions:</p> <p><a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/20/government-trafficking-eng...">http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/20/government-trafficking-eng...</a></p> <p>The suggestion is we have overly reacted to the ‘problem’.</p> <p>We also have new laws in place to prosecute men who buy sexual services from coerced (trafficked) women (Policing and Crime Act 2009 s14 which has amended the Sexual Offences Act 2003 by adding a new s53A) yet they are hardly used—stories emerge of sex workers being repeatedly questioned by the police about whether they are being trafficked (when they haven’t) as though the police are desperately looking for a problem that is not there (<a href="http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/aug/06/london-sex-workers-po...">http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/aug/06/london-sex-workers-po...</a>)—there is also evidence that these new laws are now being misused by the police for other purposes (i.e., on kerb crawlers when we already have laws for them(HMG (2011) Human Trafficking: the government’s strategy London, July para.94)—the Director of Public Prosecutions is said to not be happy.</p>
UWE	<p>One of the main issues emerging from this debate so far is the idea of whether the scheme fits what the public wants, and how we convey to the public what the scheme actually does; as ATSA points out we have a role to play in doing so and as Leeds Met points out the scheme has many hidden elements.</p> <p>However, marketing and education are difficult issues in regard to sexual violence, and we have tried public engagement in the past (referring back to the first two posts) and it has not worked with a range of sexual violence and related topics, with the public disengaging. Or is it a case that we have reached certain, more engaged publics who have now become oversaturated and disengaged, and the publics that we need to focus on are the difficult to obtain and/or hard to reach ones?? Therefore is this a case of carpet bombing the public via the media? Integrating more education and content related messages into TV/Movie storylines? Doing more public events? Developing apps and new technology approaches? Being more interactive than we have been in the past? Starting earlier and looking at what’s taught in schools?</p> <p>Also, it’s about examining and rationalizing what the scheme is meant to do—is it about public protection, government accountability, risk management or offender reintegration/rehabilitation? I think that if we are not clear on that (which we are not with different discourses arguing that the scheme does different things), how can we give a coherent message to the public on what it is and how to use it?</p>
DMU	<p>I wonder if Leeds Met’s post is right and that we are hooked on providing responses and solutions to an over-inflated problem? Also the barriers to usage in the current scheme do need some further investigation, as our study and subsequent papers posed that significant psychological and cultural barriers to use were embedded within the scheme itself. I also wonder whether policy makers actually do understand what the public wants- or whether politicians and policy makers have conflated media clamour with public appetite. They are, based on current evidence, not the same.</p>
ATSA	<p>In answer to the last post’s comment on “whether policymakers actually do understand what the public wants” ... I suggest that the policy makers are at times more concerned with their continued existence in the role than they are about finding out what average citizens really want. My take on it is that citizens want to feel safe. They also want to believe that their policy makers are working on their behalf, which may not always be the case.</p> <p>In the USA, the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA, essentially the Adam Walsh Act) was unveiled with much fanfare by the Bush administration in 2006 (see <a href="http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/smart/sorna.htm">http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/smart/sorna.htm</a>). However, this sweeping piece of legislation included a number of terms that the public ultimately did not like—for instance, lifetime registration of juveniles. Some 6 years after its passing, most US states have not ratified SORNA, which comes with some financial penalties. Ultimately, those states decided that the penalties were worth it. I hear that the feds did not reauthorize SORNA for 2012, which does not mean that it goes away. Rather, it’s more of an official back-burnering of the law. I believe this likely has a lot to do with the negative reaction by many jurisdictions.</p> <p>All in all, the implication is that the federal government passed a huge piece of legislation that many of the people did not want or believe in at least part of. American television is replete with shows about crime and punishment (e.g., police dramas, special victims units, forensic medicine, etc.); however, it seems that at least some of the viewing public</p>

	can recognize that these are dramatizations of events that are likely relatively rare and certainly unlikely to touch their lives.
<b>SWM Probation</b>	Yes, I think we have much to learn from the US experience of public disclosure—as a cautionary tale. Yet what we have in this country seems to be a much more circumspect and well protected system. I realize that the protections might be such that some people avoid using it but there are other mechanisms by which information could be disclosed to the public—forexample the MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) guidance that sets out requirements on agencies that are required to work together to protect the public from sexual offending, requires a consideration as to whether disclosure should take place, in every case considered by MAPPA.
<b>DMU</b>	<p>I think the last post is correct on the USA cautionary tale, and I look forward to Roxanne Lieb updating us on that at the November 23<sup>rd</sup> English seminar, and to a more global overview then as well. I think also SMW Probation hints at the controlled disclosure options available under MAPPA and so forth, and I think we should focus more on improving that—Jenny Cann's 2007 research showed it being well used, and to good effect. I think this should be used to its fullest extent. I am also not convinced that public disclosure has necessarily found a lot of sex offenders or sexual offending that we did not already know about, and that could not have been managed and disclosed about through the controlled disclosure that MAPPA and key agencies already have.</p> <p>I think this has been an informed and positive discussion, my thanks to all participants, and I think a number of key points can be placed on the website for wider access and consumptions.</p>
<b>NIACRO</b>	<p>Reflecting on the blogs I want to pick up on issues relating to public understanding and the role of the media. In Northern Ireland (NI) we don't have a formal disclosure scheme (yet) and our branded Criminal Record checking process, "Access NI", has been developed more recently than other UK jurisdictions.</p> <p>Just before Easter a local paper reviewed the operation of Access NI in terms of the numbers it has processed and led with the headline "40,000 who apply to work with children 'red flagged'".</p> <p>Here is what I think really matters—we contacted the journalist and ascertained that she had obtained the information as a result of a freedom-of-information inquiry. We then worked with the material to unscramble the story.</p> <p>What we discovered is an issue that is much wider than just those who have committed sexual offences. In this context the journalist had interpreted "red flagged" to indicate a danger to children where as what it actually meant was that in 40,000 cases there had been some observations of an offence—anything at all ranging from motoring to the most serious of offences. So to cut to the chase, this is exactly how the media contributes to misinformation to the public and how we as professionals have a role and a duty to interrogate the data to ensure accurate reporting... We don't say it's easy but it must be done!</p> <p>I also feel this blogging experience has really made me think about how we offer help to families. Over my professional life I have found resourcing for, and had input into the creation of, many information packs—and I do fear many have hit the bin. We know from experience that any issue we face as parents is helped by someone with real knowledge of the issue engaging with us, and I know it's labour intensive, but I'm attached to DMU's notion of spreading the awareness-raising through already existing community networks. Therefore, to the list DMU developed I would add a range of NGOs—Barbados, Action for Children and groups working with Black and Minority Ethnic and other marginalized groups. The "ask" would be to have them embrace awareness-raising as an integrated part of their work with parents—not a pact, rather a proper conversation. It will be more of a challenge to design that type of engagement and it will need to be dynamically supported but if we honestly want to contribute to tackling the lot of children now, whose life's conditioning may lead to abusive behaviour in the future, we need to resource parenting directly and not through (proxy) packs!</p>
<b>ATSA</b>	Indeed, the MAPPA framework—when implemented responsibly and with equal participation of all partners (within reason)—is an excellent answer to the problems experienced in the US regarding the Containment Model. I am particularly impressed by the inclusion of community-based groups, over and above the membership from statutory bodies. This is exactly the sensible kind of community risk management scheme that is sorely needed in many jurisdictions.
<b>UWE</b>	<p>Let me start by saying thank you for an engaging and (I think) productive exchange of ideas. I have drawn some of the main themes/issues out of the debate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How interested are the public in the disclosure scheme? Are some, more engaged publics, more interested than others?</li> <li>2. Does there need to be better engagement between practitioners, policy makers and academics in the fields of sexual violence and the public? Is this poor integration partly to blame for poor public engagement in the area? Therefore is more engagement and education around sexual violence what is needed? If so, how could this be done?</li> <li>3. Educational schemes that have worked well in the past have been focused and tailored to relevant groups or smaller broader groups; therefore improving their perceptions and understandings. However, it's difficult to educate all of society in this manner, therefore better public engagement through the media needs to happen and the media needs to be more invested in telling all sides of the sexual violence story.</li> <li>4. There is an issue about how we get the broad/general public to engage with discussion, attend workshops around and read informed material on sexual violence—so that we can reduce risk and manage offending appropriately.</li> <li>5. There seems to be a gap between what the public disclosure scheme does and what it is claimed that it does. Therefore the public are being told about offenders known to the police, not unknown / unregistered</li> </ol>



	<p>offenders.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Media representations of public concerns do not seem to match the reality of public concerns, especially regard to the disclosure scheme.</li> <li>7. There seems to be a gap between what the government and policy makers want to do, or what the public want them to do, and the reality of public concerns/actions. Therefore raising the question whether the government is over reacting to the current sex offender issue so that they can be seen effective and whether a more measured, effective approach is needed? [the example of SORNA I in America was used as an example here]</li> <li>8. The USA experience of full disclosure was discussed as a cautionary tale in the context that the national government seemed to go too far too soon and lost state government/local support for the adoption of the Adam Walsh act. With many of the participants arguing that the UK's approach was a lot more measured although there were issues with the UK approach, which was preferable to the USA version of the scheme.</li> <li>9. There is a need to use, and improve, schemes that already work with offenders in the community (rather than develop new ones from scratch).</li> <li>10. Is the public disclosure scheme and, therefore, public understandings of sex offenders as well as their management, about public protection/risk prevention, punishment, treatment and/or reintegration, appropriate?</li> <li>11. We need to seriously consider how sex offender disclosure impacts upon all affected individuals (the offenders and their families; the victims and their families; the professionals who work directly with offenders and victims).</li> </ol>
ATSA	An excellent reframe, but what do we do now? Who holds the power to make the kinds of changes you/we have highlighted and suggested? This is exactly the sort of task that organizations like ATSA and NOTA seem well suited to approach, but have traditionally shied away from, or have only recently embraced. ATSA's new prevention approach is probably a good example of new work but, frankly, it took an awful long time to start reaching out to our part of the sector for effective risk management and sensible public policy development.

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