Improving Victim Response in Abusive Image Cases

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• The phases and some early findings of the project

• What we’re learning about the research process in this context
Victim services, law enforcement, and mental health have learned a lot about responding to child sexual abuse victims.

But what about victims whose abuse is photographed or videotaped?

- What if those images are circulated for many years and across many jurisdictions?
- What are the additional mental health needs of those victims?
- How do we ensure victims’ rights in cases against the producers, distributors, and possessors of these images?
- What are the other service needs of these victims?

The Problem
1. Created a national advisory committee of stakeholders.

Twenty-one people who have various perspectives on these issues, who can help BRING IN information and GET INFORMATION OUT.
This Advisory Committee is working well.

- Members have regular opportunities to provide input and help spread the word as the project continues.
2. Analyzing the rights of child pornography victims, including how those rights are implemented.

What We’re Doing

Informed
Compensation
Restitution
Civil justice
Heard
• No victims’ rights issues in cases involving the PRODUCTION of CSA images.

• Lack of attention to implementation (States) in DISTRIBUTION and POSSESSION cases.

• Great promise from the Federal victims’ rights implementation in these cases.

What We’re Finding
States Specifically Covering CP under Victim Rights Statutes

- Creation, Distribution, and Production Specified
- Creation and Distribution Specified
- Only Creation Specified
- No CP Crimes Specifically Included in Victim Rights Statutes
3. Conducted an online survey of practitioners
   - Law enforcement/prosecutors
   - Clinicians/mental health professionals
   - Social workers
   - Forensic interviewers
   - Advocates
   - Medical providers
   - Others

What kind of cases are you seeing?  What are the impacts?

What advice would you give your peers in serving these victims?

What needs are you seeing in this population of victims and families?

How are victims’ rights operating in those cases?
Not as many professional respondents as we anticipated, especially with experience with this population

- Clinicians (120/45) (Total/With Experience)
- Social workers/victim advocates/forensic interviewers (89/64)
- Prosecutors (73/58)
- Civil attorneys (22/5)
- Law enforcement (494/308)
Clinicians responding (45)

- 36% had worked with victims who denied CSA or CP despite the evidence
- Of those who had worked with a victim whose images were distributed online:
  - All said victims feel powerless and helpless.
  - All said victims feared others would see the images.
  - 82% said victims worried they’d be seen as voluntarily participating in the abuse.
  - 82% said victims cannot find closure due to the permanence of images
Clinicians who’d worked with parents of CP victims said, in cases with images,
- Parents were quicker to believe children were abused (68%)
- Parents pressed harder for prosecution (71%)
- Parents felt more emotional distress (81%)
- Did NOT believe parents of CP victims were less able to provide emotional support or less able to follow through on treatment.
Most clinicians have not found a specific intervention helpful with this population

HOWEVER, 61% believed they’d encountered child and family strengths that improved outcomes:

- Supportive, nonjudgmental family members
- Family members who believe the victim
- Family members who ensure the victim’s safety
- Family members who were actively involved in treatment
- **Law enforcement**
  - Most had received some training in investigating CP cases (88%)
  - Fewer than half had received training on working with *victims* in CP (46%)
  - Wanted more training on CP, including how to interview and how to support victims (63%)
Prosecutors:

- Only 15% of prosecutors had been involved in a case involving CP distribution or possession that included restitution to victims.
- Agreed victims are usually concerned and upset images will be shown to judges and juries (71%)
- Agreed victims were less likely to have to testify when images are present (74%)
4. Telephone interviews with caregivers of children served by child advocacy centers (in sexual abuse cases, both WITH and WITHOUT images).

- **How has the crime affected you? Your child?**
- **What has been your experience with being notified of prosecutions, applying for victim compensation, and other victim rights?**
- **What services have been helpful for you? What other support would have helped?**
- **Standard trauma indicator questions (about the parent AND the child from the parent’s perspective)**
- **Do we have permission to interview your son/daughter?**
5. Telephone interviews of victims (13 and older) in cases of sexual abuse, including those WITH and WITHOUT images).

- Did someone help you get through the time right after people found out about what happened?
- Were there any changes you made for yourself that helped you cope?
- Do you have advice for other people (police, doctors, parents) who talk to kids about their abuse?
- Standard questions about current well-being
• Families and kids appreciate being involved.
  ◦ Following parental interview, most parents agreed to let their child be invited to participate
  ◦ Almost all parents and children indicated that participating in this research to help other children and families was “very important”
• Incentives/thank you’s were appreciated.
• CACs were not as fruitful a source of victims as we expected.
• Sexual assault centers were not a good source of victims and families.

What We’re Finding
6. Online survey of adult survivors.

What services were helpful?

What other support would have helped?

What changes would you recommend?

Standard trauma indicator questions
187 respondents who indicated they had been a victim in a case that involved CSA images; analyzing 147 responses (those who answered more than half of the questions)

What they told us

They appreciate being asked
What We’re Doing

Identifying evidence-supported services and promising practices.

- Literature review
- Interviews with expert practitioners
Releasing complete findings and recommendations

- **ANTICIPATED:** next summer?
Telephone interviews with mental health clinicians are still in progress! Please let me know if you would like more information or email Kaitlin.Lounsbury@unh.edu to participate.

THANK YOU!