

Victim support for consequential victims of indecent images of children offences

Providing support to consequential victims of indecent images of children offences.

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Key details

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| Does it work? | Untested – new or innovative |
| Focus | Prevention |
| Topic | Child sexual exploitation and abuse Digital Diversity and inclusion Vulnerability and safeguarding |
| Organisation | Durham Constabulary |
| HMICFRS report | PEEL 2023–25: Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy |
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| Region | North East |
| Partners | Police Government department |
| Stage of practice | The practice is implemented. |

Key details

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| Start date | January 2022 |
| Scale of initiative | Local |
| Target group | Adults Children and young people Families Victims |

Aim

The practice aims to provide consequential victims of indecent images of children with appropriate victim support by recognising them as a victim with individual needs. This involves referring them into [victim care and advice service \(VCAS\)](#).

VCAS provide a range of services for victims of crime and their families on behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This referral would take place at the point of police attendance at an address or at a further point in the aftermath of the initial action when it is recognised that they may be struggling.

Intended outcome

The intended outcome is that consequential victims of indecent images of children (IIOC) within the Durham Constabulary area will be offered bespoke victim care through VCAS. There are various intended outcomes.

- Change of organisational mindset as to how consequential victims of IIOC are seen and treated.
- Procedural change as to how the consequential victims are dealt with by departments across the organisation.
- Improve confidence in police officers/staff who deal with consequential victims.
- Improve the victim experience for consequential victims at what is recognised as one of the most challenging times of their lives.

Description

The initiative established that previously, consequential victims of IIOC such as partners and children were not offered sufficient support at the point that police attended the address to arrest the IIOC offender. Due to the nature of the offending, which has a real stigma attached to it, it often comes completely unexpected and life is never the same for anybody in the household again.

Previously the bulk of the support was given to the perpetrator of the offence with little or no support given to those affected by the offending and no acknowledgement of the longer-term effects on their life.

Consultation

Following a consultation with VCAS, a commissioned service within Durham Constabulary, it was decided that consequential victims of this type of offending should have the same right as any other victims of crime. Therefore, victim services were made available to them. This was something that, at the time, was not being done elsewhere in the country. Consequential victims of IIOC have previously been seen as a victim of somebody else's offending rather than a direct victim of crime.

It was agreed that at the point the police attended an IIOC crime and identified an offender/potential offender within the house, that the partner/dependants of the offender would be offered the support of VCAS. If they declined the service at this time then a phone call would be made to the consequential victim, three weeks after this, to offer them the support again.

Three weeks was deliberately picked as it is acknowledged that by this point the consequential victims will have started to realise what the impact of the arrest etc of the offender has had on them. It is also recognised that the early stages of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may have started to manifest and is a good time to reach out and offer the support.

It is also acknowledged that due to the stigma of the offending that the victims are potentially unlikely to reach out for support of their own volition. The practice was initially trialled for a 6-month period by the online child abuse team who predominantly deal with IIOC investigations. Once it was shown to have worked and to have been of benefit to the consequential victims it was rolled out across the force to all those that deal with IIOC offenders and consequential victims.

This has now enabled a significant number of consequential victims to obtain victim services which were previously not available to them and to provide them with some enhanced support at a really challenging time in their lives.

Overall impact

Monitoring has measured the number of times that the Online Child Abuse Investigation Team have been notified that the consequential victim service has been offered. This monitoring included the number of times that it has been accepted on the first occasion and the number of times that it has been accepted on the follow up offer (three weeks). This is shown as the following figures:

- 2022 – 33 offers of VCAS support, 12 accepted at the time of arrest and a further three being accepted after three weeks call back. (15 in total) 45% uptake of service for 2022.
- 2023 – March 24 – 87 offers of VCAS support offered, 16 accepted at the time of arrest, nine accepted at the three weeks call back point. (25 in total) 29% uptake of service from 2023 – March 2024.

Overall, figures show that since the start of the scheme, 120 offers of VCAS support have been made and that 40 of these offers have been taken up either at the time of the original offer or subsequent later offer. These offers relate to number of households given the offer, as opposed to individuals.

Evidence

The anecdotal evidence from VCAS is that this is a really worthwhile area of work, and that consequential victims often need some significant work carrying out with them. This is an area which has previously been ignored. The police officers and staff who deal with consequential victims have bought into this practice and are very positive in their delivery. This has helped to change organisational attitudes to these types of victims.

The overall impact is that the way in which consequential victims of IIOC within Durham Constabulary are treated has changed for the better. There has been a procedural change built into how the victims are dealt with during the investigation which is now integral to how these victims are treated.

Feedback

Feedback has been received from officers and staff about the improvement in the way that consequential victims of IIOC are dealt with and the understanding that they now have about how a consequential victim may be feeling. VCAS have stated that they are very happy to have taken on this work and have seen huge benefits in offering the service to consequential victims. They have been keen to continue with the scheme as they see this as a really important area of work.

Learning

- Success has been possible due to buy in from the senior leadership team in relation to this area of business.
- Roadshows have been carried out to explain the process to police officers/staff who deal with consequential victims of IIOC.
- All new criminal investigation department (CID) officers are taught about the consequential victim scheme during their CID training.
- There are regular training and briefing sessions between the police and VCAS to enable both sides to understand each other's expectations.

At the time that this was implemented at a force level it was revolutionary. However, there are some forces that have taken this work further and have now implemented consequential victim care officers. This is something that Durham Police should be looking to emulate in the future.

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Tags

Victim care Child sexual exploitation