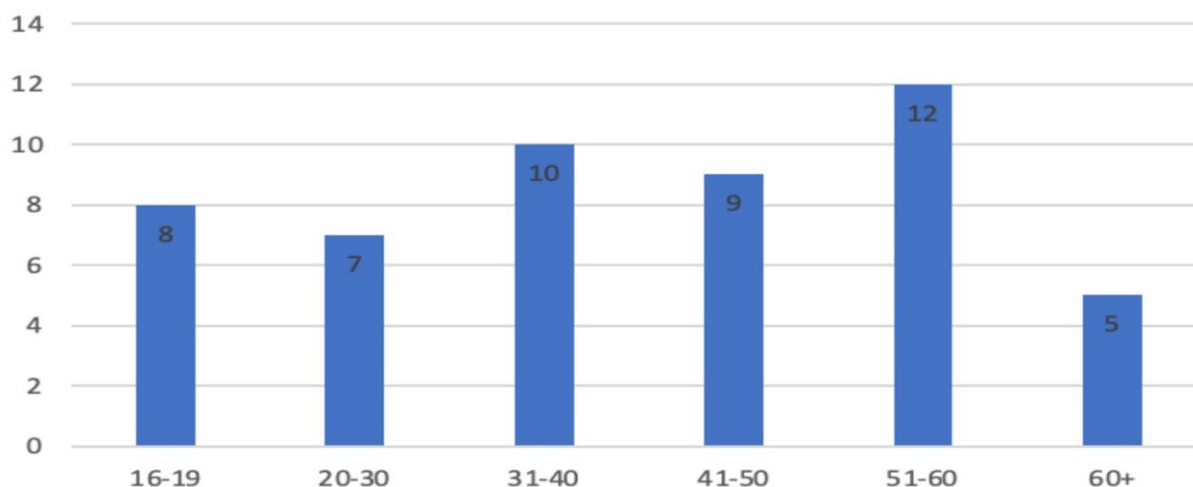


Research shows benefits of new policing role that offers support to families

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Age range of suspects. Credit: *The impact of the Lincolnshire Police Force's Indirect Victims Support Officer role on the families of individuals being investigated for online child sexual abuse offences, and on the investigating officers involved.* (2024)

Anglia Ruskin University's International Policing and Public Protection Research Institute (IPPPRI) has [published](#) findings linked to an innovative project designed to support the families of people being investigated for online child sexual abuse offenses.

The team at IPPPRI have been influential partners in a major project to

explore ways in which family members, including children, can be better supported following "the Knock"—the term given to describe the moment police officers execute a search warrant at the home of a suspected offender.

Their latest research, led by Dr. Theresa Redmond, in consultation with people with lived experience of this, has shown the clear, positive impact of a new role introduced at Lincolnshire Police. The role is specifically designed to provide this [support](#), and evidence has shown the significant well-being impact on both family members and police officers.

Lincolnshire's Indirect Victim Support Officer (IVSO) role was embedded in the Lincolnshire Paedophile OnLine Investigation Unit (POLIT) in 2022. It is the first role of its kind in the UK, and was created in response to the profound distress and harm being experienced by families in the aftermath of 'the Knock'—and the clear need for a service to support them.

It follows work pioneered by Thames Valley Police, also evaluated by IPPPRI, in which an automatic referral system was established, directing all families impacted to the Family Matters charity that provides help and support.

Between September 2022 and September 2023, the IVSO at Lincolnshire Police was able to directly support 51 families who otherwise would not have received any tailored support following "the Knock."

The support offered by the IVSO can include face-to face meetings, texts, [phone calls](#) or emails, all depending on the family members' preferences, while also signposting to other agencies, and often acting as an advocate in very challenging situations. All families are referred to the IVSO unless they opt out, relieving the burden of having to find

support during a time of intense shock.

IPPPRI's research involved speaking with members of the POLIT team and the impact was clear. Prior to the introduction of this role, investigators would carry the burden of the trauma being experienced by [family members](#), while also managing the investigation into the crime. One team member said, "I can't imagine now walking away, not having that [the IVSO] to offer. It just makes it less impactful for us emotionally as well. Feeling that we're not just walking out that door and leaving them with nothing. We are leaving them with something."

Family members who had been supported by the IVSO unanimously spoke highly of their experience with the IVSO and that the sensitivity afforded to them was crucial to their mental health.

One family member described the impact of the IVSO as "transformative," saying, "Where do I even begin? There truly are not words to even begin to express the gratitude that our whole family feels for you and your support over this last 11 months. What a journey it has been. From your support and care and gentleness on that first day, to your continued fight and defense of my family, we truly could not have come through the wilderness without your care ... We are forever grateful and indebted to you."

As part of the project, IPPPRI Postgraduate Researcher Mille Fjelldal is embedded with the POLIT, gaining 'first of its kind' access to the team to gain a deep understanding of these investigations from both the police and family member's perspective.

Dr. Theresa Redmond, Associate Professor at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said, "This is the second phase of our work with a growing team representing policing, charity, lived experience and academia, that is wholeheartedly committed to helping people that have been irrevocably

harmed and impacted by the arrest of a family member.

"We know that instances of online child sexual abuse are rising exponentially, and while we rightly focus on safeguarding the children who have been harmed and pursuing those responsible, to date, there have been countless families who have become 'hidden victims,' and have been left to deal with the trauma of what has happened to them, completely alone.

"Our findings into the IVSO role come as no surprise—the impact has been transformative, not only on the lives of the families being supported, but also on the police officers and staff who have to deal with the aftermath of their critical work, day in, day out.

"I'm very proud that the work of our combined team is being shared across the policing sector and I hope our evidence will encourage and inspire more forces to invest in this critical role."

More information: Report: The impact of the Lincolnshire Police Force's Indirect Victims Support Officer role on the families of individuals being investigated for online child sexual abuse offences, and on the investigating officers involved, www.aru.ac.uk/-/media/Files/ip...nshire-IVSO-Role.pdf

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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