

Nature of the Offence

Let me begin by telling you a bit about myself. I am a convicted sex offender. A "wrong'un" if you will. Technically there's more to it than that. Involving concepts like mental health, addiction, depression and crippling social anxiety. The sort of concepts repeatedly used by attractive celebrities in brave social media posts for likes, hearts and crying emojis. The sort of concepts everyone loves to be seen to care about and raise awareness of. Not if applied to sex offenders mind you. Then, nobody cares. Not society, not the criminal justice system and certainly not social services.

I wasn't always just a wrong'un. I was married, had two cheeky young sons, and a job that I enjoyed despite doing it for over 20 years. Things fell apart when I was arrested and a year later convicted of voyeurism and downloading indecent images. I am in no way a victim in all of this. I knew how the world would see me when I started down this path. But like anyone at the height of their addiction, the consequences didn't matter.

There was never any accusation, investigation, or even rumour that my sons had suffered abuse by myself or anybody else. The investigating officer and the police had no qualms with me remaining with them. None of this mattered. Due to the "nature of the offence", the immediate and unanimous decision of all the experts and agencies involved was that the only way to safeguard my children was to surgically and completely remove me from their lives. To quote my family's first social worker "although there's no evidence that you have abused your children there's also no evidence that you haven't".

My wife, under severe pressure from child services and her own family, ended things with me a few months into our ordeal. Social services took the opportunity to cease all contact and communication with me. I haven't heard a word from them since. I'm sure they all slept soundly, safe in the knowledge that they had successfully saved my family from a monster.

I was recently released from prison after sixteen and a half months. The time I served was spent surrounded by scores of others caught in the same situation. Living so closely and talking with those going through the same thing went a long way towards helping me with my social anxieties, mental health problems and issues in general. Strangely though, once released, SO's are not allowed to have any contact with anyone else convicted of a sexual offence for the remainder of their lives. Under threat of being returned to prison. Where we are then once again forced to live together in close confines.

Surely, if the best help and advice for an alcoholic or drug addict comes from former alcoholics and drug addicts, the same is true for those of use addicted to sex and pornography.

To quote Law & Order: SVU "sexually-based offences are considered especially heinous". We are all treated with the same loathing and suspicion regardless of the severity of the crime itself. Many people will proudly announce their belief in the death penalty for sex offenders and equate us to murderers. We are all opportunistic predators that must be watched and monitored at all times. I was asked so often if I was having suicidal thoughts that I even began to think there was something wrong with me for not considering it.

My new partner has been brilliant, understanding and helped me through the worse times imaginable at the cost of many friends along the way. Her sanity was repeatedly called into question by those in authority.

Anyone that tries to help is treated with suspicion. Government and private agencies are staffed with people "safeguarding" their own reputations from hypotheticals born of the brutal and horrific but statistically few cases heavily reported in the media. Protecting families from the negative effects of these very same safeguarding measures is barely an afterthought.

Since my release I've tried contacting various places to re-establish contact with my kids, only to be told to try elsewhere. I reached out to my local access centre only to be told, very bluntly, that they do not work with those convicted of sexual offences. I am still left with no idea how to even begin the process. It's now two and half years since I last saw my sons. My eldest is now 11, and the youngest is 7. I have missed the last three of their birthdays, two Christmas' and so very much more. They are growing up fast. I can't be there for any of it.

How can we rehabilitate and make amends when every pathway is closed and those in authority refuse to risk their own reputations to improve our chances? There is no chance of redemption, no atonement through rap, boxing, religion or the arts as is possible for those convicted of drugs, violent or gang-related crimes, no life-affirming video reports about the former convict changing his life, movingly set to a soundtrack by Elbow.