

Palgrave Macmillan – Survivor’s Chapter
Circles of Support and Accountability:
Restorative Outcomes for the Survivor Volunteer
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Abstract
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Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a community-based initiative that supports the safe reintegration into the community of a Person Convicted of a Sexual Offence (PCSO)¹ recently released from prison. Originating from Ontario, Canada in 1994², the CoSA model has become an international movement with projects implemented throughout Canada, in several jurisdictions in the United States, in Australia, New Zealand, in six European countries, and across the United Kingdom. Allowing for different legal contexts within these different jurisdictions, the CoSA model is based upon the values and principles of restorative justice, regarded by some commentators as a restorative justice mechanism (Daly, 2016). The values of truth and transparency, equality and accountability are integral to CoSA’s aim to repair and heal individuals and communities affected by sexual crime (see Newall, 2007 for an overview of CoSA’s restorative credentials). CoSA achieves this aim by using volunteer members of the public. Four or five trained volunteers work as a collective, meeting on a regular basis with a PCSO, referred to as the ‘Core Member’. Through a supportive relationship, CoSA volunteers provide the Core Member with practical assistance and ongoing support as they transition into the community. This includes ensuring that the Core Member’s risk factors are appropriately managed and that the Core Member is held accountable for their actions. The primary aim being to ensure that the Core Member creates ‘No More Victims’.

¹ ‘Person(s) Convicted of a Sexual Offence’ (PCSO) is a descriptive definition that avoids both labelling and defining someone based exclusively on their offence.

² Please see Wilson, McWhinnie and Wilson, 2008 and Wilson, Cortoni and McWhinnie, 2009 for a full account of the first Circle.

Whilst several studies related to CoSA have examined its effectiveness (see for example, Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Bates, Saunders & Wilson, 2007; Bates *et al.*, 2013; McCartan *et al.*, 2014; Thomas, Thompson & Karstedt, 2014), most of these consider the Core Member and how CoSA, as a community-based initiative, impacts upon them and their offending; often crediting this to CoSA's international success and growth. Surprisingly there are still few studies that focus solely on the CoSA volunteer, despite their crucial role in the success of the scheme (see for example, Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Almond, Bates & Wilson, 2015; Lowe, Willis & Gibson, 2019; Lowe & Willis, 2019). The research literature does still tell us a lot about volunteers associated with these projects, including data on their age, gender, occupation, and motivations for volunteering. It also now consistently reports that between 20 and 25 per cent of CoSA volunteers will themselves have experienced sexual violence (see Almond, Bates & Wilson, 2015; Kerr, Tully & Völlm, 2018; Lowe *et al.*, 2019; McCartan, 2016).

Despite reticence from some professionals regarding survivors of sexual violence working with a PCSO (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), CoSA do not exclude survivors becoming volunteers. Data on survivorship is captured during the initial training that all prospective volunteers are required to undertake³. There is of course no expectation (nor should there be) for prospective volunteers to disclose this information, and in fact research suggests that the subject of survivorship is not widely acknowledged or disclosed in practice. For example, the first book published in the UK on CoSA (Hanvey, Philpot & Wilson, 2011) includes an excerpt from a survivor volunteer, Elizabeth. Elizabeth had engaged with CoSA without disclosing her own experience of childhood sexual violence. However, her excerpt explains how volunteering for CoSA not only helped her to come to terms with the impact and psychological damage she had suffered because of the abuse, but also enabled her to discuss it (with her husband) for the very first time (see Hanvey, Philpot & Wilson, 2011 p.126). Similarly, more recent research (conducted by one of this chapter's authors, Wager & Wilson, 2017) also suggest that survivorship remains largely private and undiscussed in practice.

³CoSA training will vary across the different jurisdictions. However, this will usually include an initial interview and orientation session. Whilst the key aim of the orientation session is to disseminate information about CoSA and PCSOs, it also provides an opportunity to screen prospective volunteers. During this session for example, prospective volunteers will be asked to complete a short survey which includes a question on their motivations for volunteering. One possible response relates to any personal experience of sexual violence. For an overview of the training process specific to the UK, see <https://circles-uk.org.uk/>

Wager and Wilson's (2017) research is the only previous study to focus on the perspectives of survivors who volunteer for CoSA. Their research drew on interviews with 15 volunteers. While five volunteers had previously disclosed their survivor status to the organisation delivering CoSA, of the remaining 10 (who reported having no direct personal experience of sexual violence), only one was aware that they were working alongside a survivor volunteer.

It is the experiences of survivor volunteers working with CoSA which constitutes the main focus of this chapter. Whilst CoSA have always been considered restorative with regard to the Core Member, this chapter examines the restorative nature for survivor volunteers. It does so by drawing on an Educational and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded study conducted by one of the authors between 2017 and 2020 (Wilson, 2020). This research included a series of interactive focus groups with 29 volunteers from several UK based CoSA projects and follow up interviews with 14 of these volunteers. However, this chapter draws on interviews conducted with nine survivor volunteers. Of these, only three had disclosed their abuse to the CoSA coordinator or project officials. This chapter is therefore interested in both the restorative potential for survivors working face-to-face with someone who has perpetrated a sexual crime, and, whether disclosure of such an experience is important when undertaking this type of activity.

As noted, all research participants in this study volunteered for a CoSA project within the UK. We therefore begin with a brief account of the legislative and policy context of Circles UK⁴. We then consider how well this policy framework fits with the restorative principles applicable to the role and work of CoSA, and importantly the unique role of CoSA volunteers.

CoSA's relationship with its statutory partners

CoSA were first introduced to England in 2001 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and in 2002 were developed via two government-funded three-year pilot projects: Circles South East (formally Thames Valley/Hampshire), and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a UK-wide charity dedicated solely to preventing child sexual abuse (www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk).

⁴ Circles UK is the national body supporting the development, quality, coordination, and effectiveness of all providers of CoSA in England and Wales. See www.circles-uk.org.uk for more information.

Establishing the CoSA pilot projects coincided with the implementation of the UK Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). These arrangements formalised and regulated the multi-agency risk assessment and risk management for all PCSOs released from custody and subject to statutory supervision on licence⁵. Today all CoSA projects operating in the United Kingdom work within these arrangements and co-support the management and reintegration of PCSOs released from custody.

How this looks in practice is often depicted as two concentric circles (see for example, Bates *et al.*, 2013; Wilson, McWhinnie & Wilson, 2008). CoSA volunteers and the Core Member make up the inner circle, with the local MAPPA and other statutory agencies making up the outer circle. As we have already discussed, volunteers are required to undergo significant training before meeting the Core Member. Through training the volunteers will become familiar with the risk assessment and risk management framework in which CoSA operates, and their role within this. The existence of the outer circle in the CoSA model thus signifies the relationship between the statutory agencies and CoSA. Sitting between both circles is also the local CoSA co-ordinator. They act as a conduit, ensuring that all pertinent risk related information is communicated to the local MAPPA and other statutory agencies, while also providing regular supervision and support to all CoSA volunteers (see also www.circles-uk.org.uk).

CoSA projects in the United Kingdom therefore play a crucial role in the statutory post-release supervision and reintegration of a PCSO. However, the fact that CoSA involve volunteers distinguishes their work from the role of statutory professionals. Reporting on Circles operating in Canada, Wilson *et al.*, (2007) argue that what makes the volunteer's role unique is their ability to build a supportive relationship with the Core Member based on trust and friendship, where, ultimately, the Core Member would socialise with the volunteer's own family and friends. It needs to be noted that in the United Kingdom (and European) model, the development of friendships is not encouraged, nor is the sanctioning of volunteers to take Core Members into their homes. Nonetheless, it is arguably this cooperative and trusting relationship which differentiates it from statutory support and supervision. This supporting

⁵ MAPPA was formally created in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

role is of course balanced within the framework of MAPPA. Volunteers also require the Core Member to take responsibility (to be 'accountable') for their ongoing risk management. Höing, Bogaerts and Volelvang, (2016), suggest that it is the combination of these two roles which assist in positive behavioural changes, enabling the volunteers to effectively monitor the Core Member's risk of re-offending. The CoSA model clearly demonstrates how someone can be held to account within a supportive and meaningful relationship (McCartan *et al.*, 2014). The voluntary nature of CoSA arguably helps facilitate this. The fact that this work is carried out by volunteer members of the Core Members own community, further reinforces its restorative potential. We will now discuss the theory behind CoSA in more detail.

CoSA's restorative credentials

As we have outlined above, what sets CoSA apart is the role of the volunteers. Through the voluntary giving of time, care, and support, CoSA volunteers clearly contribute a restorative element to the management and support of a PCSO. Restorative justice has been described as "a process to involve, to the extent possible those who have a stake in specific offence and to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (Zehr, 2015: 47). Whilst not specifically a restorative intervention, the advantages of the CoSA model are firmly based on the restorative principles of repair, stakeholder participation and transformation (see Newell, 2007, and also Wager & Wilson, 2017 for a fuller account). The principle of stakeholder participation argues that victims, persons convicted of a crime, and communities, should have the opportunity to be fully involved in the justice process. The principle of repair requires all persons involved to be cognisant of the damage caused by crime and to bear responsibility for healing. Finally, the principle of transformation aims to transform the justice system delivered by the state, to a system based on an egalitarian perspective, informing the way in which we live and relate to one another. As is exemplified by CoSA, both the state and community can and should work together. Specifically, within the UK CoSA model, the community has been trusted by the state to take on some of the responsibility to hold a PCSO accountable (Wager & Wilson, 2017). This chapter is primarily concerned with the first two principles, namely the principles of repair and stakeholder participation.

Within the CoSA model, communities are of course represented by volunteers. They, alongside the Core Member, work to repair and heal the damage caused by the perpetration of sexual violence. The relationship between the volunteers and the community thus arguably signify how well CoSA conform to these principles of restorative justice. In reality, CoSA volunteers are traditionally drawn from religious groups, students in higher education and retired professionals. The majority also tend to be white, middle class and female (80 percent of CoSA volunteers in the United Kingdom are female). Despite this, it is to CoSA's credit that each individual project strives to be diverse in membership as physically possible, in age, experience and the skills volunteers bring to the role. CoSA volunteers therefore represent, as best as they can, the communities which the Core Member has harmed. Although CoSA's mantra is 'No More Victims', the reality is that the volunteers work with the Core Member and not their victims. Whilst CoSA do not actively seek to repair harm to victims or survivors, the fact that volunteers may also include individuals who themselves have experienced sexual violence, means it has the potential to do so.

As we have already noted, Wager and Wilson's (2017) research starts to identify the restorative potential of this type of volunteerism for survivors of sexual violence. However, their research also documents the historical reticence within the statutory, criminal justice sector, of survivors of sexual violence working with those who perpetrate such crimes. Drawing on evidence both in academic thinking (Bampton, 2010) and in organisational policy and practice (Hanvey, Philpot & Wilson, 2011) they credit this resistance to a belief that anyone who has experienced sexual violence and is motivated to do such work, does so to understand their own experience and to resolve any residual trauma or at worse, to seek revenge (Kassam-Adams, 1995). Such motivation is considered counterproductive to the therapeutic alliance between practitioner and perpetrator. Their research also considers arguments that point to the detrimental impacts that survivors might experience when working with a PCSO. Further support for this comes from the literature on practice with PCSOs. This often documents the ethical and emotional challenges faced by different professionals working with this client group resulting from the very nature of their offence as well as negative societal views (see for example, Grady & Strom-Gottfried, 2011; Höing, Bogaerts & Vogelvang, 2016). Academics too have reported on the challenges and emotional aspects of conducting research with PCSOs (see for example, Hudson, 2005; Coburn, 2007;

Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). From these results it is then perhaps not that surprising there is reluctance to allow those with direct experience of sexual violence to work with a PCSO. For example, Brampton's (2010) findings from their doctoral thesis (discussed in more detail in Wager & Wilson, 2017), argues in the context of treatment programmes, that survivors of sexual violence should be excluded from working with a PCSO on the basis on their potential vulnerability and impact on their mental health. Wager and Wilson (2017) themselves too report on the attitudes towards survivor volunteers held by those volunteers who had not personally experience sexual violence. Their study points to a subtle but pervasive negative attitude among this group that reflects the same concerns relating to the perceived dangers for a survivor volunteering for CoSA. An important aspect here is that the volunteers who expressed these attitudes, often did so by framing their negativity as concern for the person's well-being, while continuing to believe that the survivor volunteer will be less resilient than themselves and prone to emotional outbursts, triggered by the Core Member.

The negative attitudes towards survivors working with a PCSO is also challenged by Wager and Wilson (2017). For example, in contrast, to the belief that survivors enter their volunteering role seeking self-healing, the five survivor volunteers included in their research instead volunteered after they had transitioned from victim to survivor (we will return to this finding later in the chapter). Their research thus concludes that such attitudes only serve to 'proliferate demeaning notions of victimhood,' ultimately treating all survivors as a homogenous group. Conversely, they highlight the importance of affording survivor volunteers working with CoSA the same objective knowledge base and understanding as is given to the Core Member; claiming that 'it cannot be acceptable to state that a Core Member is more than the sum of his or her offending behaviour and yet to continue to pathologise those who have been victimised' (Wager & Wilson, 2017 p.275). Instead, their study argues that survivor volunteers occupy a unique space in the CoSA and start to evidence how the inclusion of volunteers who themselves have experienced sexual violence allows for a range of benefits to be accrued to all parties involved.

The restorative potential for survivors: New findings

In light of the above discussion, we now present new data that examines further the potential in CoSA to address the harm and help to repair and heal those directly affected by sexual

crimes. This data is from a larger ESRC study that explored the experiences of CoSA volunteers (Wilson, 2020). Here we present findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with nine survivor volunteers relating to whether CoSA can provide an opportunity for such volunteers to address their own justice needs and to be part of a restorative process that could beneficially impact upon their own wellbeing.

To begin we first present an overview of the survivor volunteers. In doing so we are able to highlight the contrasting ways in which survivorship was conceptualised and start to consider whether this was thought to have influenced their decision to volunteer with CoSA.

Table 1: The Survivor Volunteers

| Pseudonym | Response to question: Have you ever been a victim of Sexual abuse/ violence? | Self-perception of survivorship | Survivorship disclosed to CoSA | Motivation to volunteer linked to survivor status |
|------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Siobhan | Yes | Survivor of sexual abuse | No | Yes |
| Sarah* | Yes | Survivor of sexual abuse | Yes | Yes |
| Lydon | Yes | Survivor of sexual abuse | No | Yes |
| Jill | Yes | Survivor of sexual abuse no longer resonates with how they see themselves | No | No |
| Claire | Yes | Survivor of sexual abuse no longer resonates with how they see themselves | No | No |
| Margaret | No | Recognised their survivor status through engagement with CoSA | Yes | Yes (with hindsight) |
| Linda | No | Recognised their survivor status through engagement with CoSA | Yes | Yes (with hindsight) |
| Jane | No | Disclosed childhood sexual abuse during interviews | No | Yes (with hindsight) |
| Ivan | No | Disclosed childhood sexual abuse during interviews | No | Yes (with hindsight) |

*Sarah was interviewed as a survivor volunteer but was at the time of the research employed as a CoSA co-ordinator.

The difference in self definition

The data presented in Table 1 reinforces the reality that survivors of sexual violence are not a homogenous group, but rather, individuals who subsequently define themselves in different ways. All interviewees had first-hand experience of sexual violence, but when, where and how this was discussed was different for them all.

We turn first to Jane and Ivan. As shown in Table 1 neither recognised that they were survivors of sexual violence, both answering ‘No’ to the question, ‘have you ever been a victim of sexual abuse/violence?’ They did so on the basis that they genuinely believed that they were not victims of sexual violence. Yet both discussed incidents during the interviews that they had experienced that would be defined by law as sexual crimes, and for this reason included as survivor volunteers in this chapter. Ivan for example, was 11 years old when he witnessed a brutal gang rape. Although his victimisation could be defined as ‘secondary’, the impact of this event resulted in a trauma and fear that has remained with him as an adult and led, in part, to him volunteering for CoSA. Jane suffered sexual harassment in the workplace and described being subjected to behaviours that would undoubtedly result in criminal justice involvement. However, she did not define herself as being a victim or survivor of sexual violence but instead contextualised it as ‘something that happened in those days’. In fact, there were several occasions during the wider research when a number of female volunteers contextualised unwanted sexualised male behaviour towards them as ‘the everyday experience of women’. Evidently while the #MeToo movement has raised awareness of this issue both in the public and individual’s consciousness, there may still be many CoSA volunteers and members of the wider public, who share the same experience as Jane, but who equally do not perceive themselves as victims of sexual crime.

The issue of patriarchy, its oppressive nature and the sexual objectifying of women and children, was also a factor in the way in which both Margaret and Linda had previously defined experiences of sexual violence (prior to volunteering with CoSA). Their initial perceptions of what is and isn’t sexually violent behaviour was clearly enmeshed within the complexities of patriarchy and male entitlement. Subsequently, neither defined themselves as victims or survivors until after they had completed their initial CoSA volunteer training and post training interview. As we have already discussed the training of volunteers is an integral part of the CoSA model. Through training all (prospective) volunteers will gain an increased awareness of the different offences, offending patterns, and behaviours of PCSOs. It was because of this training and post training interview with the CoSA co-ordinator that Margaret and Linda realised that what they had experienced as children constituted an act of sexual violence. For Margaret it was the acknowledgement that although the reality is that sexually aggressive

behaviour perpetrated by men and boys is an everyday experience for many women, this does not mean it is not abuse:

“Well, I had my interview and she (the CoSA co-ordinator) had asked about if we had had any experiences relating to this work and I said about this incident when I was 8, I think he was about 14 or 15 and there were a couple of other incidents as a child by older boys. So, she said, ‘oh, well you’re a survivor too’, but I kind of didn’t put myself in that bracket, I don’t consider myself so, I grew up on a rough council estate so getting beat up or getting things like that was quite normal. Yeah, I had never even acknowledged it, I suppose”. (Margaret)

Linda through her involvement with CoSA also came to understand and subsequently acknowledge that as a small child being shown a pornographic video was more than just inappropriate behaviour:

“It was after the training, I remember, when we were having the interviews, I hadn’t thought of it in that way before. I was little, my mum had a partner and I do remember him being very inappropriate with me in terms of he would ask me questions like if I wanted a film and it would be like a pornographic film”. (Linda)

While the remaining five survivor volunteers all recognised that they had been victims of sexual violence, only three defined themselves as victims or survivors. Two volunteers, Jill and Claire, refused to be labelled as a victim or survivor. Like the survivor volunteers in Wager and Wilson’s (2017) study they articulated how the impact of their experience did not define who they were, or their perception of the world and, if this had previously been the case, it no longer had the same impact. As the following quotation from Jill demonstrates, such terminology no longer had any relevance to the way she currently perceives herself:

“It depends on what you mean by sexual violence. So, in terms of being touched up by a photographer as a schoolgirl, things like that I have certainly experienced. I don’t think of myself as a survivor. I have moved way beyond that.” (Jill)

The above excerpts recounting the volunteers’ own histories of victimisation clearly show how perceptions of sexual violence and how to make sense of it is highly dependent on the individual. Within this discussion we have also started to address if and how volunteers

conceptualise their own experiences of sexual violence served as a motivation for volunteering with CoSA. We address this in more detail next, and importantly start to respond to concerns raised in the literature surrounding survivors working with a PCSO.

Survivor motivations for volunteering

As Table 1 shows seven of the nine survivors interviewed were able to acknowledge and verbalise a correlation between their experience of sexual violence and volunteering for CoSA. Our findings thus corroborate with Sarah's belief, speaking in her role as CoSA Volunteer, and having supported other survivor volunteers, that *all* volunteers who are survivors of sexual violence, to different extents, engage with CoSA because of their own experiences:

"Their arrival and journey with Circles are undoubtedly related to personal experience. Perhaps some less direct than others." (Sarah)

However, as already demonstrated, when and how they came to this conclusion varied considerably. So did the significance they attributed to it. For example, Jill and Clare, the two volunteers who refused to be labelled as survivors in our research, and subsequently did not attribute their victimisation to their decision to volunteer with CoSA, have both sought professions in careers in forensic medicine and child protection, respectively. The significance of their choice of profession in relation to their experience of sexual violence may be conjecture, but like their volunteering role, both professions require positive contact with PCSOs and the application of strength-based interventions⁶. It is also worth noting that none of the survivor volunteers included in this research had officially reported their abuse or gone through the Criminal Justice System, but instead had chosen to volunteer with CoSA and work in a positive way with a PCSO.

As this chapter has reported, the concern raised in the literature surrounding survivors working with a PCSO is that survivors enter into this type of role to undergo a process of self-healing or meaning-making. Whilst this was not evidenced in the research conducted by Wager and Wilson (2017), there is some suggestion that this might be true, in part, for Jane,

⁶ For information on strength-based models and how they are used with PCSOs, see Ward & Steward, 2003 and Carich *et al.* 2010.

Ivan, Margaret and Linda, interviewed in this study. To reiterate, neither Jane nor Ivan perceived themselves as victims of sexual violence, yet both discussed incidents during the interviews that evidenced that they were. Similarly, Margaret and Linda self-identified as survivors after having undertaken the initial CoSA training. Consequently, all four volunteers acknowledged, albeit with hindsight, that their decision to volunteer with CoSA might have been to help them make sense of their own personal experiences. According to some, the fear is that such a motivation might be detrimental to all involved, but particularly to the survivor themselves (Brampton, 2010). Conversely, we would argue that through volunteering Jane, Ivan, Margaret and Linda were afforded the opportunity to challenge broader social discourses about sexual violence. We would also argue that this was not deemed to have had a detrimental effect on their well-being. Instead, as a result of their involvement with CoSA they were able challenge their thinking and use this in a positive way in their relationship with their Core Member (we will return to this later in the chapter). Importantly, too, whilst Jane, Ivan, Margaret and Linda may have intrinsically entered into this role to help make sense of their own experience, this was certainly not the main reason given. These volunteers all articulated that their primary motivation for volunteering was to help ensure that there were 'no more victims'. Any potential benefit that they had gained was considered secondary to this desire.

In fact, all the survivor volunteers interviewed in this study articulated that their primary motivation for undertaking this role was to prevent future victims. For those able to draw on their own victimisation, they expressed a desire to ensure that others would not be subject to the same sexually abusive and violent ordeal that they had experienced. Their reasons for volunteering were first and foremost out of concern for others. However, whilst Sarah, speaking again from the perspective of a CoSA coordinator reinforces this point, she also acknowledges how they too can benefit from working with CoSA:

"[They- survivor] got involved as an attempt to really understand and to stop it happening again to anyone else. I think that has been really helpful for [them]. I think it's the recognition, the realisation once you know you can survive it, you can help people whose lives have been affected by it. You can really take a lot from it". (Sarah)

These findings thus demonstrate how CoSA volunteers, who themselves have experienced sexual violence, are still able to place the victim at the centre of the whole process, a factor which Gailly (2003) defines as being essential for redressing the balance of crime within the context of restorative justice. What is more, the findings presented here (and supported by Wager & Wilson, 2017) demonstrate how survivor volunteers can bring with them an empathy, born of experience, which they believe makes them better volunteers. We turn to this now.

Survivors as volunteers

The following accounts draw on the volunteer's perception of sexual victimisation as well as the 'journeys' they have undertaken prior to volunteering. As already noted, there is a perception of victimisation where the victim is forever a victim who suffers permanent psychological damage. This bizarre reality fails to acknowledge the spirit and strength of an individual who, having experienced sexual violence, has processed it and reached an inner strength, and a desire to help prevent anyone else experiencing what they had gone through. This was certainly true of the survivor volunteers in this study who started CoSA having already processed their own abuse. More importantly, for these volunteers, it was because of this that they were able to offer support and guidance to someone who has inflicted similar pain and suffering on someone else. For example, for both Jill and Claire, it was this transitioning away from the label of victim or survivor that they accredited to being able to function effectively in the role of a CoSA volunteer. Both Jill and Claire spoke of having resolved issues regarding a sex offense committed against themselves and now had the strength and resilience to function in a positive way.

Siobhan also speaks of a journey, but unlike Jill and Claire, she draws on her transition from victim to survivor. According to Siobhan, it is this journey and her sense of survivorship which facilitates her ability to function effectively in the role of a CoSA volunteer. The strength required to do this is verbalised by Siobhan in her description as to how she manages her feelings, related to her own experience, when working in the CoSA with her Core Member.

"It was about 7 years ago now so it is long enough ago that I felt comfortable with it not impacting on me or how I treat the Core Member or deal with them, whereas I think if it was very recent it might have been harder. It is mainly about managing;

it is up to the volunteer to manage their personal feelings about their own offence (i.e., their experience of sexual violence) and keep it separate from the Core Member's offence and why you are there. It can be difficult because obviously I've been affected. His offence is quite similar to mine (her experience) and so it is making sure that when I am bringing it up, I am consciously saying in my head, 'is this benefiting him? Why do I want to know? Is unpicking it going to help him'? So, that particularly around consent and everything, it is massively helpful, he needs to know what is okay, and what isn't okay because he doesn't have the interpersonal skills and that sort of social environment to know what is and isn't okay, and obviously if he ends up doing something wrong, he will go back inside. So, it is making sure that I am constantly checking myself rather than anything to do with the Core Member." (Siobhan)

These accounts are similar to those presented in Wager and Wilson's (2017) research. The survivor volunteers in their research were able to challenge themselves in relation to their own expectations of their role in CoSA and would use this process to attain an objectivity in their expression of empathic concern and support. Being able to respond in this way refutes claims and assumptions that survivors will be too weak and vulnerable to work with a PCSO, or at least have a weaker resilience than any other volunteer. The survivors included in this chapter (as in Wager & Wilson, 2017) did not see themselves as permanently damaged or defined by their victimisation. Far from elevating their risk, Jill and Claire's perception of self demonstrates resilience, healing, post traumatic growth and their readiness to engage with CoSA. Similarly, Siobhan's account demonstrates how survivors can offer support and guidance to someone who has inflicted similar pain and suffering on someone else.

What is also important here, is that the survivor volunteers in this study (and in Wager & Wilson's 2017 research) did not express a desire for revenge (see Herman's 2005 account of the 'myth of the vengeful victim'). Again, this will be addressed in the initial training that all (potential) volunteers undertake. Part of this exercise will be to identify their attitudes and beliefs in relation to sex, sexual violence, and the work of CoSA. It is for example fundamental that *all* CoSA volunteers represent the community's condemnation of the Core Members *offence*, but not condemnation of the Core Members themselves. In line with this, there was

no evidence that survivor volunteers, because of a so called 'unrequited desire for justice' directed their condemnation at the Core Member, or desired more retributive punishment (Herman, 2005:6). Instead, far from seeking revenge, survivor volunteers through a supportive relationship sought to hold the Core Member accountable. This is aptly illustrated by Siobhan talking about the work with her own Core Member:

"He can get overwhelmed with self-pity saying, 'I shouldn't have been in prison; I don't deserve to have this record'. It's important to challenge, so I say, 'you do, you absolutely do! you did the offence, you owned up to it and you have served your time and I know you've got a record now, but you do deserve that record because you did the offence'. But it is about managing that and making him see why he should have the record, because he did something wrong". (Siobhan)

As we have already discussed, in the context of a restorative framework accountability is an important means to meet the justice needs of those who have been victimised. In terms of CoSA, the volunteer is the representative of the community and CoSA the vehicle in which to facilitate it. Arguably this is given further weight and meaning through the very presence of the survivor volunteer. Their presence can act as a measure of solidarity with, and on behalf of, the Core Member's own victims. Siobhan's account however also raises the issue of disclosure. Siobhan had not disclosed her survivor status to the CoSA Coordinator. This restorative benefit might therefore never be overly stated (or indeed intentionally practiced) but it can still be perceived when viewed through the lens of restorative practice as a way of placing the victim at the heart of the CoSA.

Siobhan's account however also raises further issues associated with disclosure. Having made the decision not to disclose her experience, she found herself working with a Core Member whose *modus operandi* is similar to that perpetrated against her. As her description shows she is having to process her work with the Core Member on two levels, for him and for herself, in a way that her volunteers with no personal experience of sexual violence, probably do not. It could therefore be argued that disclosure is necessary, particularly in a situation that Siobhan now finds herself in. We turn to this now.

Disclosure

In this final section we address the issue of disclosure. To reiterate only three survivor volunteers interviewed in this study had disclosed their survivor status to the CoSA Coordinator. They are Margaret and Linda who self-identified as survivors after having undertaken the initial CoSA training, and Sarah, who at the time of the interview was working as a CoSA co-ordinator. In our introduction to this chapter, we discussed how a type of screening process occurs during the initial training that all prospective volunteers will undertake. This includes being asked to comment on their victim status. As we then argued, there is no expectation that survivors need to disclose. The sample of survivor volunteers included in this chapter (and previous research) suggests that most will not.

One explanation arguably reflects the inaccurate and negative attitudes and assumptions about victims or survivors, discussed earlier in this chapter. We have also reported on the self-perception of volunteers who have not experienced sexual violence about the inclusion of survivor volunteers in CoSA. To reiterate some believed that they are more resilient and more able to cope emotionally with the work of CoSA than their survivor colleagues. Yet ironically most of these volunteers were unaware of their colleague's survivor status. This may give an insight into the question of whether disclosure of the personal is important, but whatever the perspective, their practice would indicate that the survivor volunteer engages in the work of CoSA with the resilience of any other volunteer. Indeed, using Siobhan again as an example, her account demonstrates that despite having to constantly process her interaction with the Core Member, she is still able to hold him accountable within the context of a supportive relationship, which demonstrates a remarkable strength and resilience. Both her colleagues and her CoSA coordinator commented on the excellent work she does as a CoSA volunteer, without any knowledge of her survivor status, suggesting that for Siobhan (and other survivor volunteers), disclosure of their own experiences of sexual violence is theirs and theirs alone to tell.

Our findings do however recognise that survivors of sexual violence are not a homogenous group. Whilst this means that some will have the strength and resilience to be able to work with a PCSO, others might not. The survivor volunteers included in this chapter are evidently all at different stages in relation to how they understand their own victimisation. Whilst

reinforcing their heterogeneity, these differences also signify that understanding and healing following sexual victimisation does not have a set timeline (Pollino, 2021). As we have shown, some of the survivors included in this chapter were further along in their journey than others. For some, they recognised that by the time they were ready to engage with CoSA, their resilience was strong, enabling them to apply personal coping strategies to their role as a CoSA volunteer. Others were arguably at the start of their journey having only just come to acknowledge their victim status. Whilst we would argue that this should not preclude them from working with CoSA, we do also recognise how crucial it is that all volunteers receive appropriate support.

Throughout this chapter we have referred to the training received by all (prospective) volunteers. It is worth restating here that the UK CoSA model requires that all volunteers' work is supervised by a person who understands their needs, the complexities of risk assessment and the management of PCSOs. Through the training and ongoing support, the volunteer's wellbeing and care is of paramount importance. It is our belief that it is because of this training, the role of the CoSA co-ordinator, and the wider context that a CoSA operates, that survivor volunteers can and should continue to work in this role. It is also our belief that this framework further negates any requirement for survivor volunteers to disclose.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that this chapter draws on a small sample of nine interviews with survivor volunteers, and that a lot more research is needed in this area. However, from their accounts we can start to see the restorative potential for survivors working face-to-face with someone who has perpetrated a sexual crime.

Importantly, all the survivor volunteers interviewed in this study, through their work with CoSA, were afforded the opportunity to heal and repair. It needs to be reiterated that perceptions of survivorship varied greatly amongst those interviewed. Consequently, for some this meant challenging preconceived beliefs of sexual violence, harm, and blame; while for others, it meant they were able to actualise aspects of post traumatic growth. Our findings therefore support research that seeks to challenge and expand understandings of sexual victimisation by identifying the more positive aspects of coping and resilience experienced by

survivors (see for example, Domhart *et al.*, 2015, Newsom & Myers-Bowman, 2017, and Pollinio, 2021).

Whilst not all the volunteers interviewed here believed that their personal experience of sexual violence had led them to CoSA, our findings suggest that for most, personal experience was a factor. We would argue that this is perhaps not that surprising as individuals are more likely to be drawn to charitable endeavours that relate to personal experiences. However, all the survivor volunteers interviewed in this study articulated that their primary motivation for undertaking this role was to prevent future victims. CoSA was seen as a pragmatic way in which they were able to achieve this. As demonstrated in this chapter, these volunteers were able to positively work with their Core Members, to hold them accountable for past and future behaviours, alongside showing empathy and care. Consequently, these volunteers were still able to place the victim at the heart of the process.

Whilst arguably it is the presence of the survivor volunteer that makes this truly restorative, as we have noted, the subject of survivorship is not widely acknowledged or disclosed in practice. To reiterate only three of the nine survivors interviewed in this study had disclosed their personal experiences to their CoSA coordinator. Consequently, its full restorative potential might not be recognised. However, we have argued that the standard of integrity and ability consistently displayed by CoSA volunteers, evidenced through their personal qualities but also the effective and rigorous process of CoSA training and volunteer selection, negates any concerns surrounding survivors working with a PCSO and whether disclosure is important.

Despite the historical precedent of negativity towards survivors working in this area of practice, this chapter has demonstrated that survivors of sexual violence can not only willingly engage, but positively contribute to a PCSO's reintegration back into the community, holding them to account in a constructive, supportive, and affirming context. Our findings demonstrate how survivors of sexual violence are as capable as anyone in coping with the challenges of working with a PCSO. Far from being a homogenous group, this study reinforces the fact that each survivor's experience, and their decision to disclose this to others, or not,

is their own and does not inevitably result in them being permanently and irreparably damaged or having a weaker resilience than any other volunteer.

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