

EVALUATING REGISTRIES

A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF THE STRUGGLE
TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE & HARM



WHAT IS MEANT BY “SEX OFFENSE REGISTRY SYSTEM”

- First implemented in the U.S. in the 1990s, the **sex offense registry system** is a collection of criminal justice laws and policies that allow the government to monitor and track people convicted of certain crimes following their release into the community. The most common stated purposes are to “protect the public” from sexual violence or “protect children”.
- **Conviction registries** are databases that are accessible to law enforcement and frequently publicize a person's offense and personal information online. This most often includes their photograph, name, ethnicity, date of birth, current address, place of employment, and vehicle information, and may extend further.
- **Registry requirements and sanctions vary by jurisdiction (federal, state, and local)**. Because these laws are strict liability, any failure to comply may result in re-incarceration. Registration is not simply a compliance measure; it is a legal status that can trigger additional obligations as well as restrict full access to certain constitutional rights, public services, and protections.

TRUTH 1:

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE & HARM ARE
SERIOUS PROBLEMS**

TRUTH 2:

**CURRENT SEX OFFENSE POLICY
DOES NOT DECREASE SEXUAL
HARM, IN FACT IT CREATES THE
EXACT CONDITIONS THAT INCREASE
RISKS OF VIOLENCE**



THE PROBLEM:SEXUAL HARM AFFECTS ALL OF US

Over 2 in 5 women & 1 in 6 men experience sexual harm involving physical contact in their lifetime.



1 in 5 women & 1 in 31 men report rape or attempted rape.

At least **1 in 4 girls & 1 in 20 boys** report experiencing child sexual abuse, **& about 9 in 10** are harmed by someone they or their family know & trust.

1 in 2 LGBTQ people experience sexual harm.

Native American, Alaska Native & multiracial women **experience the highest rates of sexual violence.**

Sources: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention.

2016/2017 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/nisvsreportonipv_2022.pdf

2015 National Transgender Survey. <https://ustranssurvey.org/download-reports/>

Leemis RW, et al. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2023/2024 Sexual Violence Data Brief. CDC, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/media/pdfs/sexualviolence-brief.pdf>

Human Rights Campaign: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-intimate-partner-violence-in-the-lgbtq-community>



THE PROBLEM: CHILD SEX ABUSE MATERIALS & ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sexual abuse imagery of children aged 11-13 is most prevalent, accounting for almost **seven in 10** instances identified in 2020.

The impact on survivors of CSAM **is ongoing** because distribution is continual & images are perpetually accessible

The majority of CSAM **producers** are parents, guardians, neighbors, or friends - who are often socially isolated

In 2021, **girls were seen in 97%** of the CSAM reported and removed by the global Internet Watch Foundation



Sources: Gewirtz-Meydan, A., Walsh, W., Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2018). The complex experience of child pornography survivors. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 80, 238-248.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc. (2017). Survivors' survey. https://www.protectchildren.ca/pdfs/C3P_SurvivorsSurveyFullReport2017.pdf

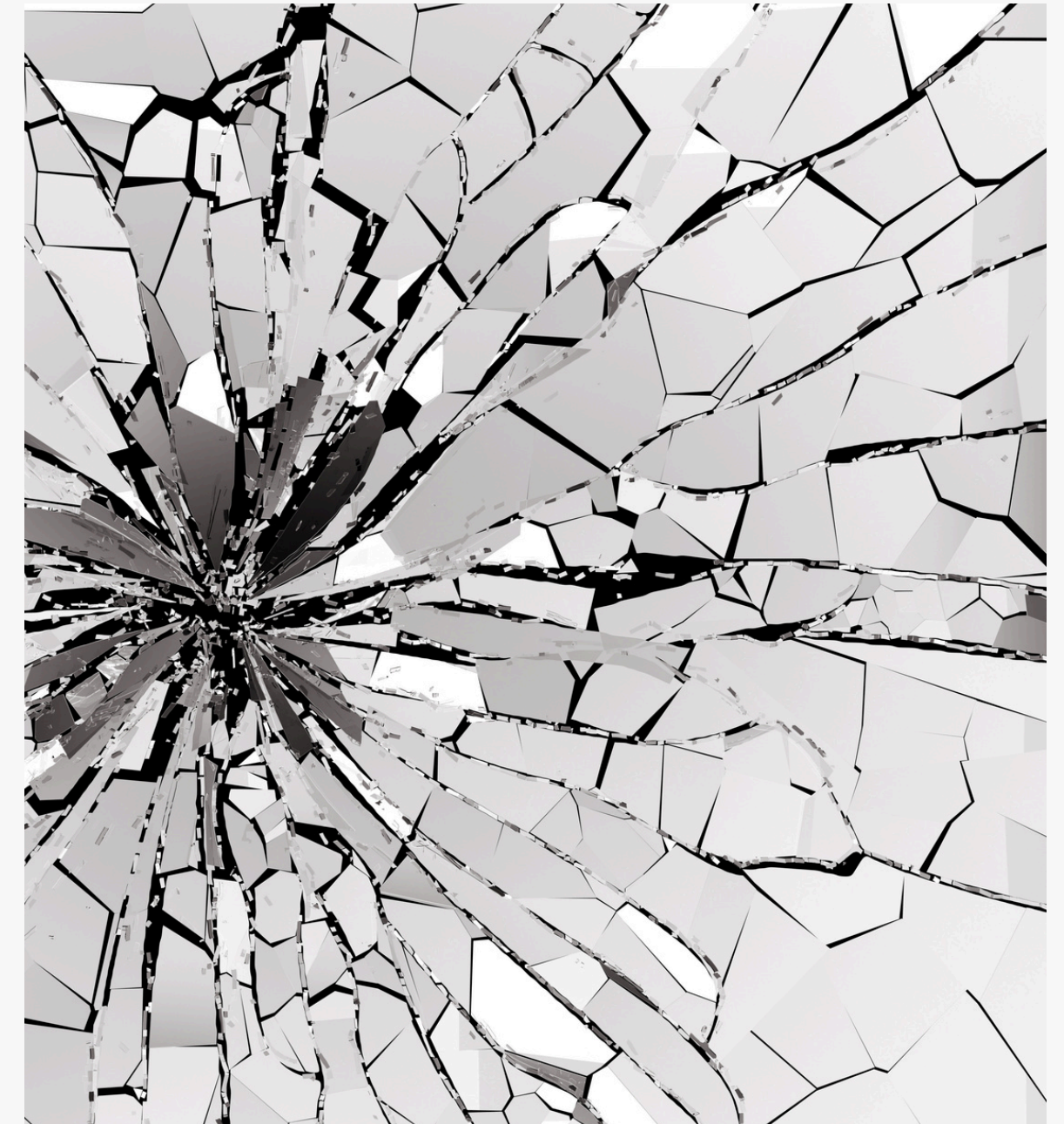
Cale, J., Holt, T., Leclerc, B., Singh, S., & Drew, J. (2021). Crime commission processes in child sexual abuse material production and distribution: A systematic review. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 617, 1-22.

Internet Watch Foundation <https://www.iwf.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/annual-report-2021/>

THE PROBLEM: PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARM

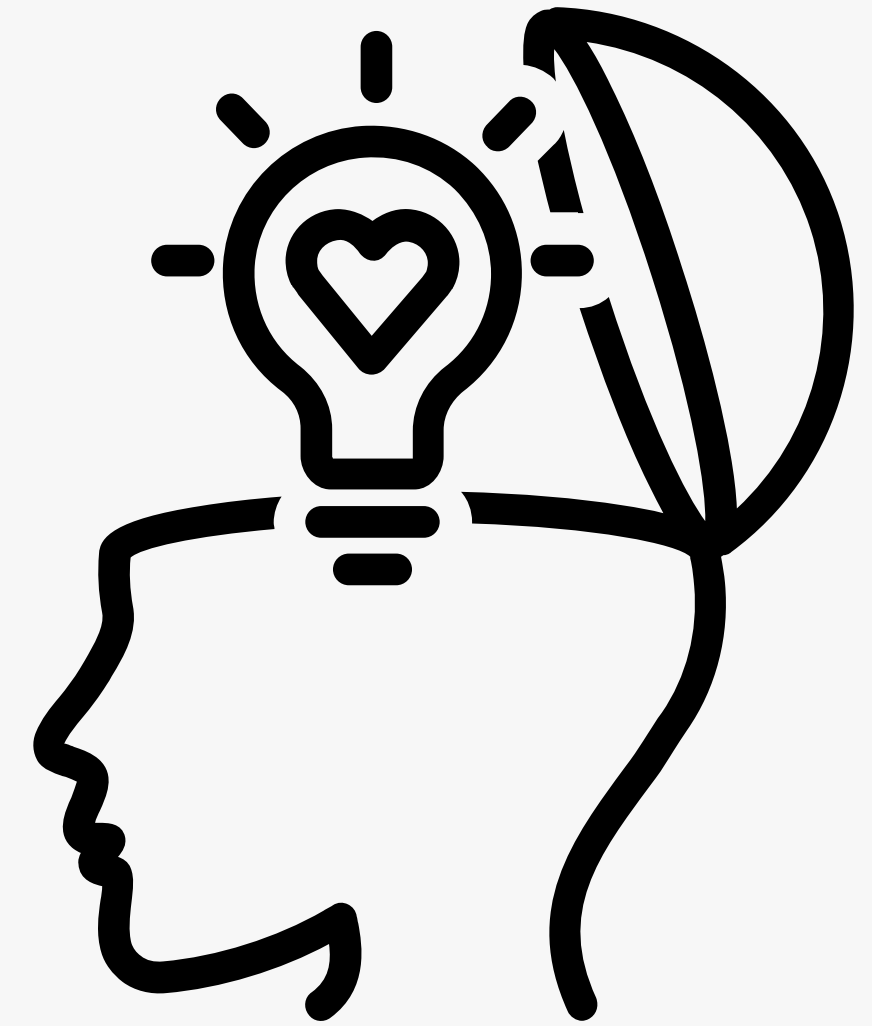
Most sex crimes are not rape - formal law enforcement data does not include the vast majority of sexual harm in this country.

Of every 100 sexual assaults:
27 are reported
5 lead to an arrest
fewer than 3 people are incarcerated.



THINGS TO ACKNOWLEDGE

- **Sexual re-offense rates are low (between 3-5%) and risk declines with time.** Each year offense-free lowers the odds of sexual reoffense by about 12%. After 10 to 15 years, most people are no more likely to commit a sexual offense than someone with a nonsexual criminal record.
- Like other parts of the criminal legal system, systemic bias and disparate treatment based on race, gender identity, disability, and class sweep people **onto conviction registries.**
- Approximately **900,000** people are on sex offense registries nationwide, including approximately **8,000 in Oklahoma**, where registration follows automatically from conviction for 15 years, 25 years, or life after the sentence is completed, with no individual assessment of risk.
- Research shows that the legal treatment of sex offenses as categorically different from other crimes is not natural or neutral, **but a product of historical ideas and moral panic.** This panic has produced sex offense laws that are disproportionate to actual risk and driven by fear rather than evidence.



Sources: Hanson, R. K., Harris, A. J. R., Letourneau, E., Helmus, L. M., & Thornton, D. (2018). Reductions in risk based on time offense-free in the community: Once a sexual offender, not always a sexual offender. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(1), 48-63.; Sandler, J. C., Freeman, N. J., & Socia, K. M. (2008). Does a watched pot boil? A time-series analysis of New York State's sex offender registration and notification law. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 14(4), 284-302.; Alper, M., & Durose, M. R. (2019). Recidivism of sex offenders released from state prison: A 9-year follow-up (2005-14) (NCJ 251773). Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsorsp9yfu0514.pdf>; Gruber, A. (2023). Sex exceptionalism in criminal law. *Stanford Law Review*, 75, 755.; Renfro, P. M. (2020). *Stranger danger: Family values, childhood, and the American carceral state*. Oxford University Press.; Horowitz, E. (2015). *Protecting our kids? How sex offender laws are failing us*. Praeger

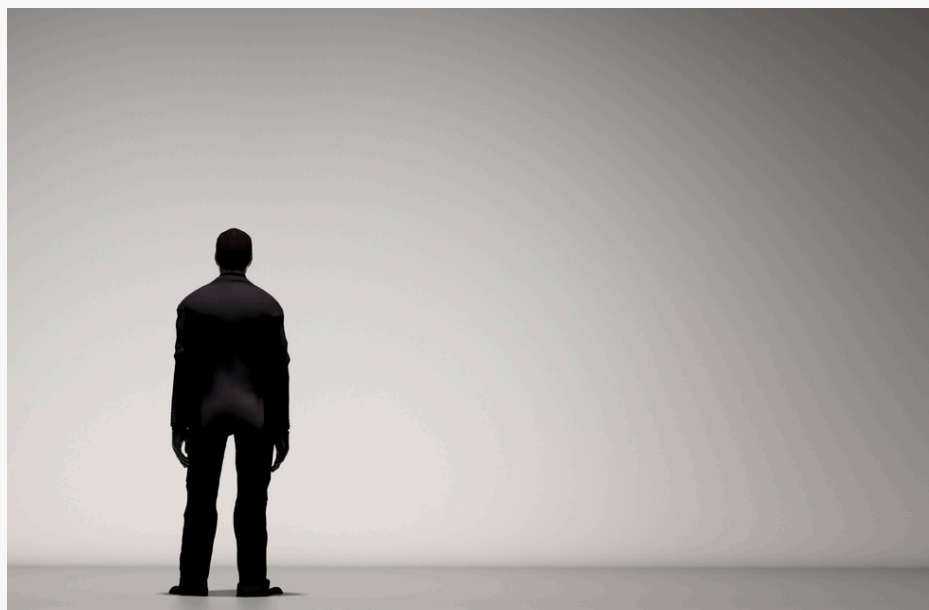
THE KEY DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE



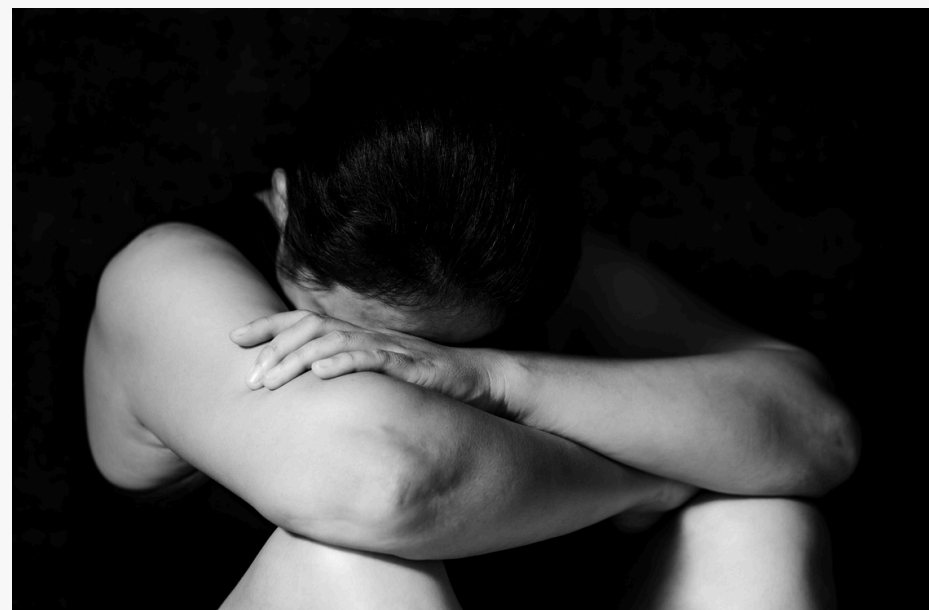
EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE



ISOLATION



SHAME



AN INABILITY TO MEET ECONOMIC NEEDS



Sources: James Gilligan, *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes* (New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 1996).

Fox, B. H., Perez, N., Cass, E., Baglivio, M. T., & Epps, N. (2015). Trauma changes everything: Examining the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and serious, violent and chronic juvenile offenders. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 46, 163-173.

Levenson, J. S., & Grady, M. D. (2016). The influence of childhood trauma on sexual violence and sexual deviance in adulthood. *Traumatology*, 22, 94-103.

REGISTRIES & RELATED SANCTIONS



- Misunderstand the realities of most sexual violence
- Fail to prevent sexual harm & may deter disclosure
- Focus scarce resources predominantly on the author of harm – not the survivor
- Create **isolation and shame** for those subject to them
- Expose people to the threat or reality of physical **violence**
- Create instability in housing and employment – creating significant barriers to **economic stability**

Sources: Socia, K. M. (2014). Residence restrictions are ineffective, inefficient, and inadequate: So now what? *Criminology & Public Policy*, 13, 179-188.

Zgoba, K. M., & Mitchell, M. M. (2023). The effectiveness of sex offender registration and notification: A meta-analysis of 25 years of findings. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 19, 71-96.

Cubellis, Michelle & Evans, Douglas & Fera, Adam. (2018). Sex Offender Stigma: An Exploration of Vigilantism against Sex Offenders. *Deviant Behavior*. 40. 1-15. 10.1080/01639625.2017.1420459.

Berg M. T., Huebner B. M. (2011). Reentry and the ties that bind: An examination of social ties, employment, and recidivism. *Justice Quarterly*, 28(2), 382-410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2010.498383>

EXAMPLE: RESIDENCY RESTRICTIONS

- **Federal research finds residency restrictions ineffective and potentially harmful.** A 2015 research review by the Department of Justice's SMART Office concluded that residence restrictions do not reduce recidivism and may increase risk.
- **Places that adopted restrictions saw no reduction in sex crime.** Jacksonville, Florida saw no significant change in citywide or repeat sex crimes after expanding its restriction. A federally funded study of Michigan and Missouri found negligible effects on recidivism.
- **They target the wrong threat.** According to the state of Minnesota's own analysis, not one of 224 repeat sex offenses would likely have been prevented by a residency restriction. Nationally, 93% of children who experienced sexual assault knew the person that harmed them directly.



Sources: Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART), U.S. Department of Justice. (2015). SOMAPI Research Brief: Adult Sex Offender Management; Nobles, M. R., Levenson, J. S., & Youstin, T. J. (2012). Effectiveness of residence restrictions in preventing sex offense recidivism. *Crime & Delinquency*, 58(4), 491-513; Huebner, B. M., Kras, K. R., Rydberg, J., Bynum, T. S., Grommon, E., & Pleggenkuhle, B. (2014). The effect and implications of sex offender residence restrictions: Evidence from a two-state evaluation. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 13(1), 139-168.; Minnesota Department of Corrections. (2007). Residential Proximity & Sex Offense Recidivism in Minnesota; Snyder, H. N. (2000). Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics (NCJ 182990). Bureau of Justice Statistics.

WHAT SURVIVORS REPORT THEY NEED



- To Be Believed
- Acknowledgment of Harm
- Empowerment & Self-Determination
- Answers & Truth-Telling
- Accountability
- Effective Public Policy
- Physical Safety
- Assurance It Won't Happen To Anyone Else
- Resources – Safe Housing, Job Retraining, Culturally Sensitive Therapeutic Support, Economic Support for Lost Wages



Sources: Herman, Judith. Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice. Basic Books, 2023.

Richards, Kelly. What Do Victim/Survivors Think About 'Sex Offender Registration and Notification' Policies? A Qualitative Examination, International Review of Victimology, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.1177/02697580261469211>

Koss, Mary P. The RESTORE Program of Restorative Justice for Sex Crimes: Vision, Process, and Outcomes, 29 J. Interpersonal Violence 1623, 2014 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513511537>.

WHAT THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM & REGISTRIES DELIVER TO SURVIVORS



- Cross-examination, questioning
- Immediate Denial & Minimization
- Powerlessness to Control the Process
- Poor Communication - Lack of Voice
- No space for Meaningful Accountability
- Knowledge without Context (Fear)
- Siphoning of Resources from Services & Support in favor of Punishment & Control (Centers Author of Harm)



Source: Lorenz K, Kirkner A, Ullman SE. A Qualitative Study Of Sexual Assault Survivors' Post-Assault Legal System Experiences. J Trauma Dissociation. 2019 May-Jun;20(3):263-287. doi: 10.1080/15299732.2019.1592643. PMID: 31072270; PMCID: PMC6994185.

Koss, Mary P. & Lopez, Elise C. Restorative Justice for Sexual Misconduct: Not if but When, Gender Policy Report, University of Minnesota, July 26, 2018. <https://genderpolicyreport.umn.edu/restorative-justice-for-sexual-misconduct-not-if-but-when/>

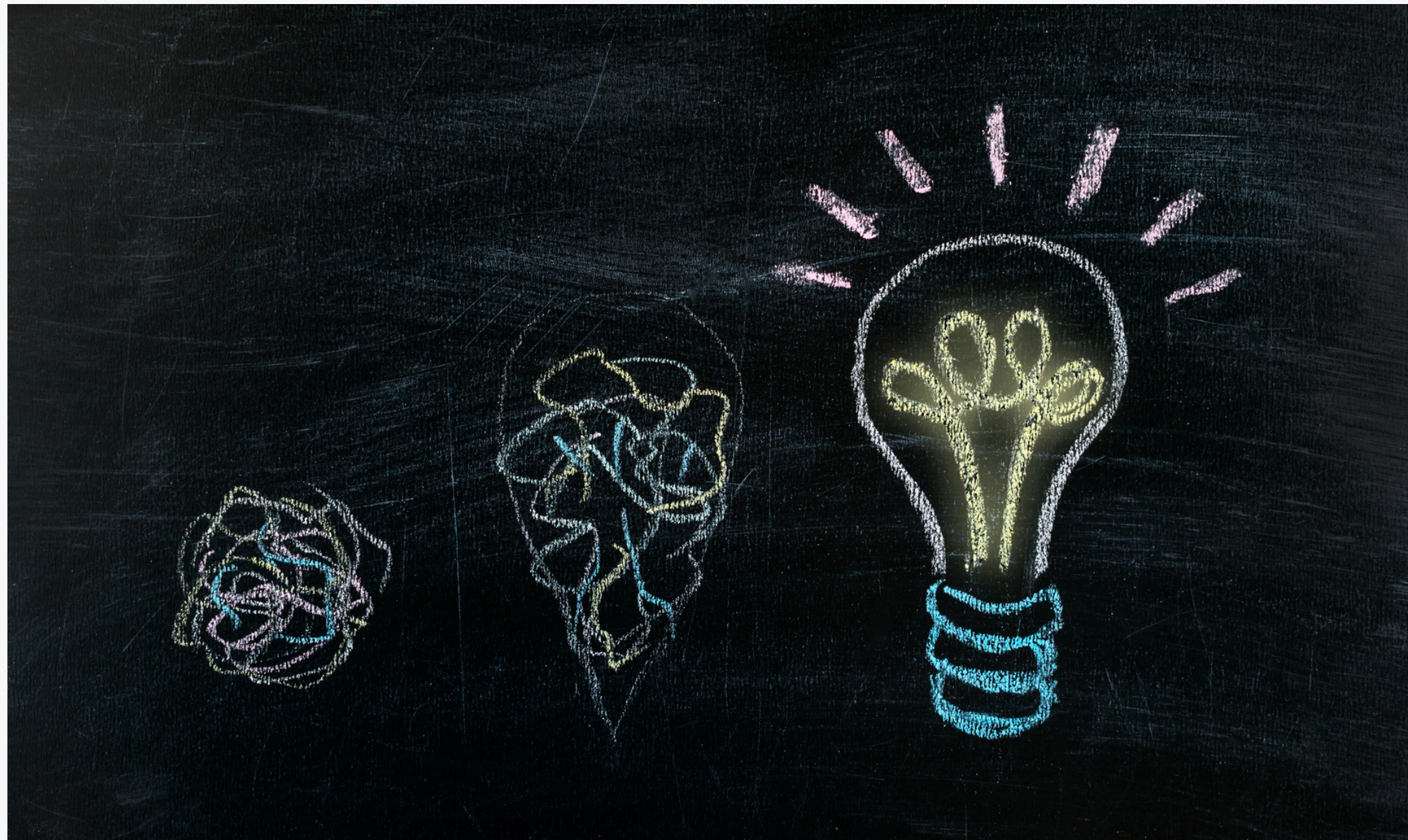
WHAT & REGISTRIES DELIVER TO SOCIETY

- Drain on Economic & Community Resources
- Sense of Fear & Panic
- Instability for People in Reentry
- Collateral Consequences to Families
- Generational Trauma
- Homelessness
- False Sense of Security
- Vigilante Justice
- Expansion of Over-Policing, Over-Incarceration & Community Supervision



Sources: Horowitz, Emily. From Rage to Reason. 1st ed. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023;
Lancaster, Roger N. Sex Panic and the Punitive State. 1st ed., University of California Press, 2011;
Levine, Judith & Meiners, Erica. The Feminist & the Sex Offender. Verso Publishing, 2020.
Zgoba, Kristen M. & Mitchell, Meghan M. The Effectiveness of Sex Offender Registration and Notification: A Meta-Analysis of 25 Years of Findings, 19 Journal of Experimental Criminology 71, 2023

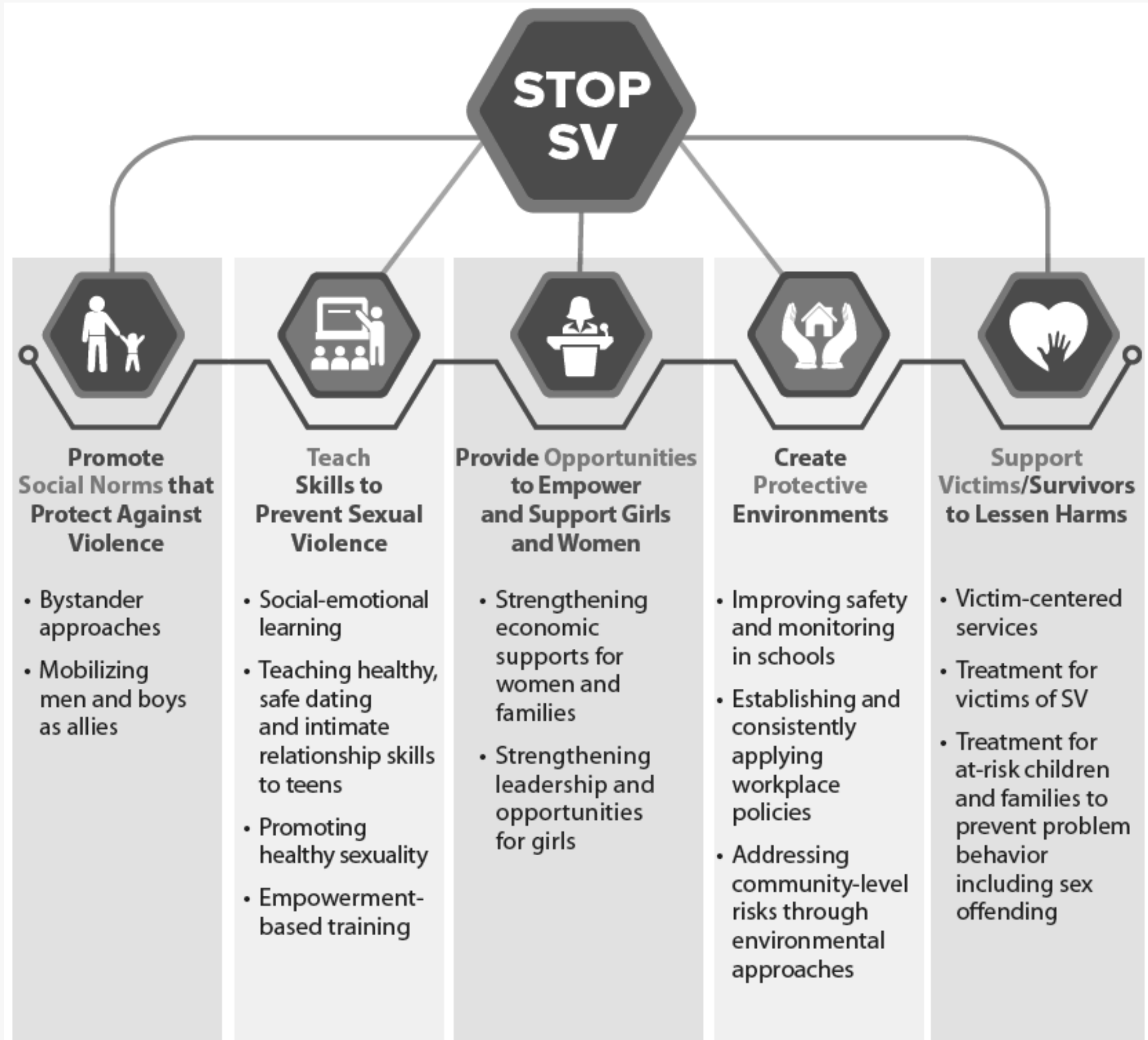
COLLECTIVELY, WE KNOW OF BETTER SOLUTIONS
AND THEY ARE WITHIN REACH



A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

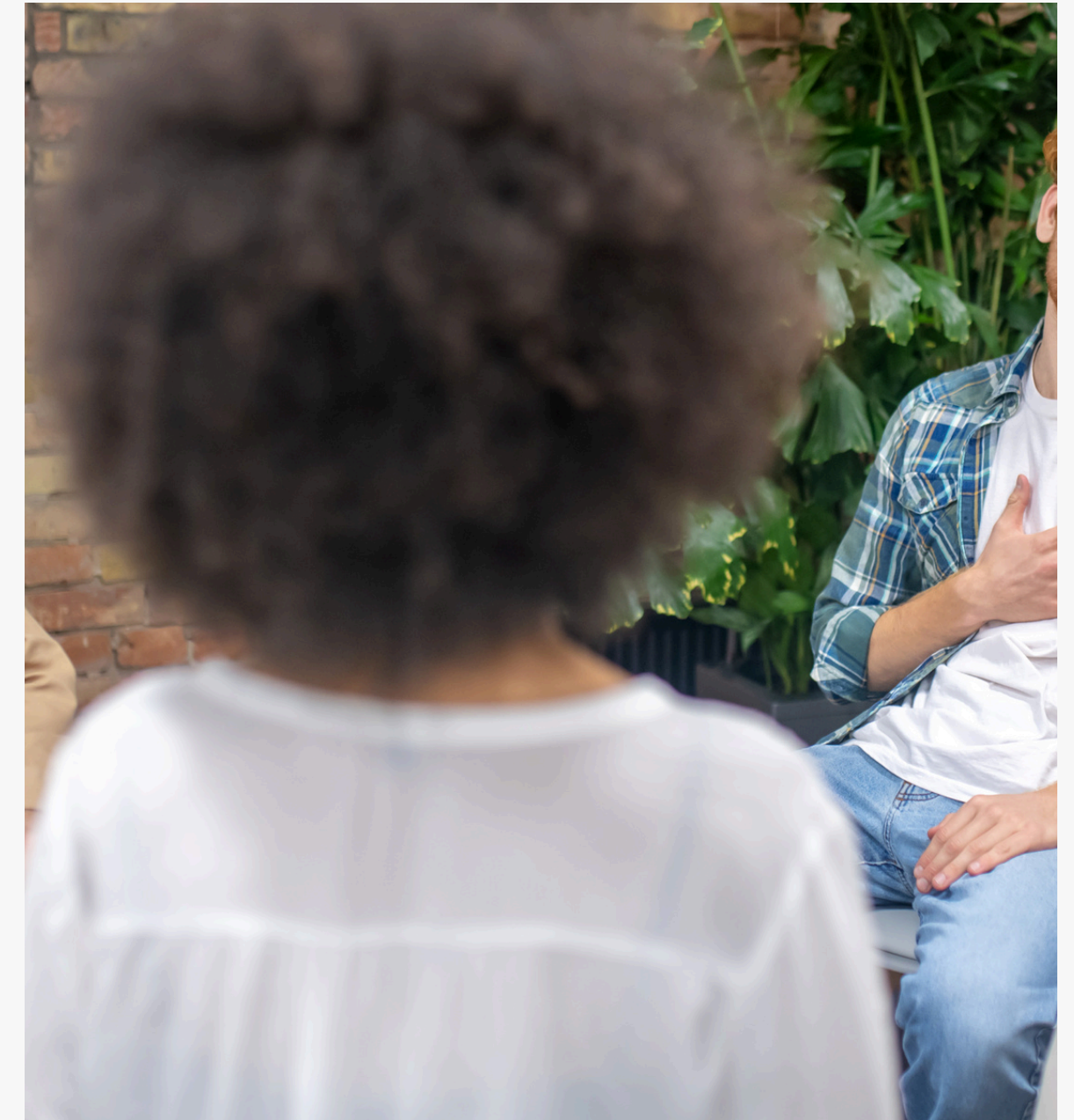
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Source: Basile, Kathleen C., DeGue, Sarah, Jones, Kathryn, et al. Sexual Violence Prevention Resource for Action: A Compilation of the Best Available Evidence (formerly STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016.
https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/media/pdf/resources-for-action/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

- Focuses on Harm Caused
- Identifies Obligations
- Centers the Recipient of Harm (ROH)
- May Engage Support People - Stakeholders
- Demands Truth-Telling
- Centers Accountability
- Treats Everyone Like a Human Being
- Encourages (re)integration into the community
- Works towards Reparative Agreements to Make things as right as possible



Sources: Zehr, Howard. The Little Book of Restorative Justice. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002.

Sardina, Alexa & Ackerman, Alissa R. Restorative Justice in Cases of Sexual Harm, 25 CUNY L. Rev. 1, 2022

Koss, Mary P. The RESTORE Program of Restorative Justice for Sex Crimes: Vision, Process, and Outcomes, 29 J. Interpersonal Violence 1623, 2014 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513511537>

FOR POLICYMAKERS TO CONSIDER

- **Listening to survivors** was the right starting point and should remain central
- **Survivors asked for solutions;** registries and other criminal legal responses were largely what they were given. Research and practice have shown us better.
- **Asking survivors to carry the full weight of policy analysis is unfair** and is not theirs to bear; they are experts in their own experiences
- **Survivors are not a monolith: When the loudest voices become the sole basis for policy decisions:**
 - Those with resources and platform are heard most
 - Survivors harmed within families (the largest group), especially those historically pushed to the margins, are harmed most
 - Outcomes and evidence of unintended societal consequences are disregarded or minimized
- **Honoring survivors means** examining the evidence, weighing the outcomes, and building interventions that are documented to effectively prevent harm, support survivors and keep us all safer.



**REGISTRIES AND RELATED
POLICIES ARE
PART OF THE PROBLEM**

NOT THE SOLUTION



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION?