



PRESS RELEASE

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Families Speak Out Against Recovered ‘Memory’

NEW BOOK GIVES VOICE TO FALSELY ACCUSED

Picture this: It’s a normal day. You’re opening the post. Your 30 year-old daughter has sent you a letter saying she’s reporting you to the police for abusing her sexually when she was a child. She says she has recently recovered memories that you did this to her and that you told her to keep it quiet. In shock, you hand the letter to your wife and wait for her to react. In a moment, your life, as you know it, is shattered.

That is a real story and typical of thousands of others in the UK.

Parents falsely accused of sexual abuse by their now adult children are bravely speaking out about their heartbreak through a book which puts their accounts into the public domain for the first time.

The book, *Fractured Families*, is to be launched at the House of Lords, 11 am to 12.30 pm Tuesday May 15th. It charts the tragic stories of how adults have become estranged from loving parents.

It describes the damage done by well-meaning healthcare professionals, counsellors and therapists and by irresponsible self-help literature.

Some of the stories have a happier ending, with the accusers retracting their accusations and beginning a process of reconciliation.

Sixteen parents have decided to break the silence and stigma of allegations of historic child sexual abuse. They represent thousands of families known to the British False Memory Society, and perhaps many more that remain isolated in their pain.

Shattered by these horrifying accusations and understandably afraid of the stigma they bring, parents keep quiet and rarely speak out - until now.

Professor Larry Weiskrantz, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Oxford University has contributed an article to *Fractured Families* that explores the science behind false memories.

He says: ‘False memories can play a dangerous role in witness testimony and other claims for the recall of non-existent or seriously distorted events. The most serious examples, perhaps, are accusations of severe sexual abuse that never occurred, although fervently believed by the accuser.’

Madeline Greenhalgh, Director of BFMS, said: 'With the stigma attached to allegations of sexual assault, it's not surprising that families decide they cannot speak out in their own defence.

'This is why *Fractured Families* is so important. It gives a voice to the falsely accused and the opportunity for them to provide an insight into the heartbreak caused by such shocking allegations.

'We also hope that the book, launched today on the UN's Day of the Family, will raise the profile of the issue with academics and clinicians, child protection workers, social workers and everyone in the criminal justice world, especially lawyers and the police.'

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Notes to Editors

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Fractured Families will be launched at the Attlee Room, House of Lords on Tuesday May 15. The event will run from 11 am to 12.30 pm. You can confirm your attendance with the BFMS by emailing or calling Alison or Madeline using the numbers above. When you have confirmed, we will send you a printed invite.

Please note that for security reasons it is essential that you confirm your attendance with us in advance and by noon on Friday May 11th at the very latest. Security requirements at the House of Lords dictate that we must notify them in advance of guests expected as entrance will only be granted to people on the list who present their original invitation.

Since it was founded in 1993 the British False Memory Society has had contact with over 2000 people affected by false allegations by their now adult children who have 'discovered' memories of sexual abuse in childhood.

The society continues to get calls daily from parents who are devastated that they could be accused of such a heinous crime by a loved one.

The charity, which has a Scientific and Professional Advisory Board comprising respected psychiatrists and psychologists (see web-site), works to improve understanding of false memory by encouraging, sponsoring, conducting and publishing academic and professional research.

The psychological concept underlying the accusations is based on the claim that the brain 'blocks out' severe childhood trauma as a mechanism to enable the mind to cope. While such a mechanism for traumatic amnesia has been discredited by psychiatrists, the concept of buried trauma has gripped the public imagination and been the subject of many films and novels. Belief persists that it is possible to recover 'blocked out', buried memories, bringing into consciousness a history of trauma for which the individual was previously unaware.

'Recovered memory' can be brought about through the ministrations of authoritative figures such as therapists and psychiatrists, or through reading self-help literature or concentrated focus upon 'what might have been'. In an insidious process, which might take years, the patient comes to believe that all his or her troubles stem from this newly remembered abuse.

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