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2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

F-05

How Do We Characterize Risk?

A Qualitative Exploration of Public Attitudes Toward Sex Offender Reintegration in Canada

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Understanding public perceptions of those who sexually offend is critical to the development of successful and workable sex offender policies and to successful reintegration of these persons back into the community. Reintegration involves a re-entry back into the community and thus a re-engagement with community members. Therefore beyond the offender's commitment to desist, effective reintegration requires public acceptance and cooperation. Members of the public are often the final gatekeepers to many positive risk-relevant opportunities for those who have committed sexual offences. It is important to understand how the public feels about this topic and to identify what factors or characteristics allow members of the public to feel comfortable with the release of sexual offenders into their communities. The literature related to public attitudes about sex offender reintegration is small but growing. Thus far, a main focus of researchers has been on quantifying public attitudes and reactions. Given the complexities and emotional elements of responses to this issue, a more nuanced investigation of public perceptions towards sexual offender reintegration is welcome and necessary.

The current data was obtained as part of a large national study of English-speaking Canadians' attitudes towards individuals who have sexually offended and related policy. This study, which was predominantly quantitative in nature, examined public attitudes towards three types of sexual offenders (adult contact, child contact, and adult non-contact sex offenders) and the relationships between demographic variables (such as political orientation, education, and gender), attitudes, and support for particular sex offender policies. Policies were divided into two broad categories: rehabilitative and punitive. Participants were randomly assigned to complete one of the three versions of the survey, and a representative sample of over 1000 English-speaking Canadians (N=1008) was gathered. Beyond closed ended survey questions all participants were asked one open-ended question related to what assurances would be necessary for acceptable release of sex offenders into the community. Participants were asked: *What would you need to feel more comfortable for a sex offender to be released back into your neighborhood?* Thematic analysis was used to analyze answers to this question.

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Two main themes related to reintegration factors were identified across the three groups of respondents: a) treatment and b) supervision. Most often, participants responses included a combination of rehabilitation and surveillance measures that would be necessary for them to feel safe allowing a sex offender to be released in their neighborhood. Subthemes were also identified under each of these main themes. In addition, differences among responses between the three groups. For example, for the child contact offender, many participants wanted assurances that the released offender posed little or no risk before they could feel comfortable, whereas this subtheme did not emerge for the other offender types.

Results of thematic analysis overlapped onto the results from the quantitative study, which revealed differences in attitudes towards different types of offenders and endorsement of a combination of rehabilitative and punitive policies to manage sex offenders. This research suggests that in contrast to Canada's former conservative government's tough on crime agenda, public perceptions about sex offender and their reintegration are complex and multifaceted and not solely punitive. These findings have implications for future policies and reintegration strategies and may encourage collaboration between researchers, policy makers, and the public.

Learning Goals:

- Identify and discuss themes of treatment and supervision, as well as subthemes. Provide examples of these categories and discuss implications of these findings.
- Identify and discuss differences that emerged among respondents in the three groups. Did responses vary as a result of sex offender type?
- Identify and discuss similarities and differences among qualitative and quantitative findings of Canadian attitudes towards sex offenders and policies related to sex offender management.

This research study was funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Award, awarded to Gabriela Corabian in 2013.

Dr. Gabriela Corabian recently completed her PhD in Clinical Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada under the supervision of Dr. Mark Olver. She has a MEd in Counselling Psychology from the University of Alberta where her research investigated perceptions of the media's impact on sex offender reintegration. Her dissertation research focused on understanding Canadian attitudes towards sex offenders, sex offender treatment and policy. Dr. Corabian was an active ATSA student member and continues to be part of the Ethics and Public Policy Committees.

Dr. Mark Olver is a Registered Doctoral Psychologist and a Professor in the Clinical Psychology Program at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, where he is involved in program administration, graduate and undergraduate teaching, research, and

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clinical training. Prior to his academic appointment, Dr. Olver worked as a clinical psychologist in various capacities, including providing assessment, treatment, and consultation services to young offenders in the Saskatoon Health Region and with adult federal offenders in the Correctional Service of Canada. Dr. Olver's research interests include offender risk assessment and treatment, young offenders, psychopathy, and the evaluation of therapeutic change. He is the co-developer of the Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offender version (VRS-SO) and he provides training and consultation services internationally in the assessment and treatment of sexual, violent, and psychopathic offenders.

Who Is a Dangerous Sexual Offender? An Australian Perspective

Gaynor Hobbs, PhD
Deakin University
Prof. Andrew Day
James Cook University

Over the past decade, many Australian states have introduced specialised legislation for sexual offenders, including preventive detention. This legislation targets a small number of high risk sexual offenders who are identified as 'dangerous' and thereby posing an unacceptable risk of committing further sexual offences. There are some important differences between the legislation for preventive detention between the United States and Australia. The focus of this presentation is to provide an overview of preventive detention legislation in Australia, including data from the first Australian study to explore risk profiles with this population. The analysis focuses on one Australian jurisdiction exploring demographic, risk and offence-specific variables on the population of dangerous sexual offenders. The profile of dangerous sexual offenders is also compared with the much larger population of registered sexual offenders not deemed to be dangerous. The presentation also explores areas of professionals' perceptions of risk, supervision and management of high risk sexual offenders.

Learning Goals:

- Develop insight into Australian preventive detention legislation targeting sexual offenders.
- Understanding of a jurisdictional scan analysis of preventive detention outside of America.
- Explore the impact of perceptions of risk on supervision and management of sexual offenders.

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Gaynor Hobbs is a forensic psychologist who has worked with corrective services for the past 18 years. She has held many positions including assessment, treatment, clinical supervision and program development. Her current role is within the research and evaluation unit for rehabilitation and reintegration services. She has a special interest in preventive detention sexual offenders and high risk sexual offenders. She is near completion of her PhD through Deakin University.