

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | POSTER

Interpretations of Research on Sexual Offender Treatment

Anna Fedotova, BA (Hons)
Kevin L. Nunes, PhD
Carleton University

Debate persists about whether sexual offender treatments are effective at reducing re-offending, and whether the studies conducted to evaluate them are methodologically rigorous enough to test effectiveness. Harris and Rice (2011) argued that sexual offender treatment research has been generally plagued by “inappropriate biases” that are contrary to the principles of the scientific approach. More specifically, they argued that the default assumption often seems to be that sexual offender treatments are effective, despite the fact that study designs are often too weak to convincingly demonstrate effectiveness. In the current study we survey professionals who work with people who have sexually offended to explore their interpretations of sexual offender treatment research.

Via the ATSA listserv, we will invite professionals to complete an anonymous survey, in which participants will provide information about their involvement in delivering sexual offender treatment, read a brief description of a non-experimental uncontrolled intervention study about either a sexual offender treatment program or a cancer drug, and answer questions regarding their conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention and recommendations for implementing and funding the intervention. Participants are randomly assigned to read either the description of the sexual offender treatment program study or the cancer drug study. We will examine (1) the strength of the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the ambiguous evidence, (2) the extent to which stronger conclusions and recommendations are made by people who are more involved in sexual offender treatment (e.g., delivering or managing programs full-time) than those who are less involved (e.g., those who exclusively do risk assessments or research), and (3) the extent to which any such difference is specific to research on sexual offender treatment or is also observed for research in another area (i.e., cancer intervention). This study will raise awareness about research methodology, limitations, and potential biases, all of which will contribute to motivating stronger tests of the effectiveness of sexual offender treatment.

Anna Fedotova has recently graduated with a B.A. Honours in Psychology from Carleton University, having done her honours thesis with Dr. Kevin Nunes. Her primary research interests are clinical cognition and decision-making, and knowledge translation, dissemination, and implementation of research into clinical practice and guidelines.