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Could a Dunkelfeld-Style Program Work in New York State?

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Background:

New York State has many policies in place for when an offense has occurred. Research shows not only that 94% of sexual offenses are committed by first time offenders, but that the recidivism rate of sex offenders against children is lower than commonly believed (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Jill S. Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Sandler, Freeman, & Socia, 2008). Therefore, there is a gap in addressing child sexual abuse (CSA) at the origin, namely with those at risk to engage in CSA behaviors (J. S. Levenson & Grady, 2018; J. S. Levenson, Willis, & Vicencio, 2017). Many experts or professionals that work with sex offenders find the current policies lack effectiveness in reducing recidivism and also recognize that post-conviction policies lead to many collateral consequences such as isolation, stigmatization, trouble finding housing and gainful employment (J. Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2009). Currently, prevention programs in the United States appear to be limited to educational paradigms targeting parents about the signs of sexual abuse and skills trainings for children on understanding the differences between appropriate and inappropriate contact with adults and how to “say no” if it occurs (e.g. Stop it Now!, NYSPCC).

Aim:

The goal of this poster is to discuss the development of a secondary CSA prevention program targeting individuals with pedophilia/hebephilia in the community New York State. We will discuss the influence of mandated reporting on the development of the program using New York State as a case example and examine the views of both existing sex offender treatment providers and the community toward such a program. We assessed the level of potential support from treatment providers and the community for such a program and whether they believe this prevention program would be beneficial in helping to reduce the number of child sex abuse cases.

Methods:

We used two separate online surveys administered via Qualtrics to gather data from treatment providers and the community. The treatment provider survey consisted of 31 questions and was emailed directly to professionals in the state of New York and via the membership listserv for the New York State Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers/Alliance for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (NYSATSA/Alliance). Questions for treatment providers assessed key background variables and asked whether the participant would support the program and asked for feedback regarding development. The online survey for the community assessed key demographic variables, level of program

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support, and general knowledge about/attitudes toward sexual offenders, pedophilia, and prevention programs.

Results:

Mandated reporting presents a key issue in treatment and CSA prevention. Clinicians must know their jurisdiction's laws and be willing to use informed consent documents stipulating those laws when working with this population. Data collection is currently ongoing for the community survey. Results from the treatment provider survey suggest overall support for the program, with participants mentioning concerns for program structure, treatment goals, and issues with anonymity. This poster should be used as a framework and example of how to develop a secondary CSA prevention program in the U.S.

References

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Dr. Gilian Tenbergen is an Assistant Professor of Psychology with SUNY Oswego, specializing in research into the etiology of pedophilia and its translation into the prevention of child sexual abuse. She came to Oswego via Hannover, Germany, where she spent several years working with the German Prevention Project Dunkelfeld and the German national NeMUP Research Consortium (Neurobiological Mechanisms Underlying Pedophilia and Child Sexual Abuse), and hopes to bring her experience back to her native New York. Her research interests focus primarily on understanding the risk factors for the onset of sexual offending against children and the translation of this knowledge for use in prevention against child sexual abuse in New York State.