

## ***SHAPING THE FUTURE***

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

**T-28**

### **Stigma and Barriers to Community Support**

#### **The Help Wanted Prevention Intervention: Resources for Families and Professionals**

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University of Massachusetts – Lowell

Research has shown that there are few resources, and considerable barriers to help-seeking behavior, for adolescents and young adults who have a sexual interest in children (Cantor & McPhail, 2016; Goode, 2010). To address this need, the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse developed the *Help Wanted Prevention Intervention* (Help Wanted), an online intervention designed to support users' commitment to non-offending and to promote self-acceptance, self-esteem, and healthy peer relationships (Shields, 2018). As part of this intervention development, we recognized a need for additional resources for a) families of young people with a sexual interest in children, and b) professionals who want support or guidance when young clients disclose a sexual interest in children. As a result, the Help Wanted team is developing additional modules for these audiences.

This presentation will proceed in two parts. In Part I, I will review results from a qualitative study of 30 young adults (aged 18-30) who have a sexual interest in children, with a particular emphasis on participants' experiences with, and recommendations for, families and professionals. For example, participants discussed how families can respond to disclosure, the importance of communication, and how to handle difficult conversations. For professionals, participants described obstacles to therapy, including financial and social barriers, fears about confidentiality, and issues with aligning treatment goals with crime prevention goals. In Part II, I will discuss the development of Help Wanted modules for families and professionals, highlighting key messaging, content, and approaches used in the online sessions.

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### **References**

- Cantor, J. M., & McPhail, I. V. (2016). Non-offending pedophiles. *Current Sexual Health Reports, 8*(3), 121-128.
- Goode, S. D. (2009). *Understanding and addressing adult sexual attraction to children: A study of paedophiles in contemporary society*. London: Routledge.
- Shields, R. T. (2018, November). *Help Wanted: Intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children*. Paper presented at the annual Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers conference. Vancouver, BC.

### **Learning Goals:**

- To understand how families can best support adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in children
- To identify therapeutic needs of adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in children and support professionals who work with this population
- To explore a novel online prevention intervention for adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in children that features modules and resources for families and professionals

**Ryan T. Shields, Ph.D.** is an assistant professor in the School of Criminology and Justice Studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He is the former Associate Director of the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. His scholarship centers on the intersection of criminology, criminal justice, and public health. His recent work has examined policies aimed at youth who have sexually offended, such as juvenile transfer to adult court and sex offender registration and notification policies. He is also currently leading a project to develop an online prevention intervention for adolescents with a sexual interest in children.

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### **Stigma and Rural Sex Offender Reintegration: A Qualitative Exploration of Providers' Viewpoints**

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East Tennessee State University

Sex offenders are a uniquely marginalized population, morally devalued and closely monitored by the legal system and subject to targeted public policy. Despite overall lower rates of recidivism for sex offenders in comparison with other offender groups, sex offenders face increased stigma and legislated challenges associated with their status. Although Bontrager, Bales, and Chiricos (2005) describe ex-offenders as one of the most stigmatized statuses in Western society, the label of 'sex offender' is even more so, often paired with terms such as 'predator,' 'evil,' and 'monsters' (Petrunik, 2002; Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013; Waldram, 2007). Research has suggested that the collateral consequences of stigma - intersecting with legal restrictions - impact critical components of successful reintegration for sex offenders including housing, family reunification, employment, and mental health (Petersilia, 2003; Spencer, 2009). Offenders returning to rural communities may experience exacerbated barriers to successful treatment and reintegration for a multitude of reasons (Wodahl, 2006).

Zajac, Hutchinson, and Meyer (2014) highlighted the additional negative impact rurality has on successful reintegration for returning citizens, such that issues like lack of transportation, employment, and programming are exacerbated in such communities. In rural communities, there tends to be far less social privacy and greater acquaintance density (the extent to which people in the community know one another), increasing the likelihood of promoting and spreading stigma (Hoyt, Conger, Valde, & Weihs, 1997). Thus far, the examination of stigma of sex offenders has taken largely an urban focus, as does most reintegration-based research. Levenson, D'Amora, and Hern (2007), in examining the impact of community notification on re-entry, acknowledged that citizens of different community types may report varying experiences (e.g., higher rates of job loss and harassment) in rural settings.

Stigma has also been assessed from the offenders' points of view, yet little research has discussed examined the perspectives of sex offender treatment and supervision service providers. Lea and colleagues (1999) found that professionals who work with sex offenders reported conflict between professional responsibilities and personal values; however, because those who work with sex offenders are familiar with many of the challenges faced by their clients, their perspectives can also offer insight into how to improve reintegration (see Zajac, Hutchinson, & Meyer, 2014; Ward & Merlo, 2016). The current study explores the perceptions of mental health providers (MHPs) and community supervision professionals (CSPs) in rural Southern Appalachia who work with both sexual and non-sexual offenders.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 38 individual mental health providers (MHPs) representing social work, counseling, clinical psychology, and marriage and family

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therapy and four community supervision professionals (CSPs) associated with mental health and case management agencies who perform court-ordered services. Qualitative data were subjected to a two-stage thematic analysis. Initial themes were identified and then examined for overlap and commonality. Similar themes were then condensed into more distinct themes and subthemes, which were then coded from transcripts (Braun & Clark, 2006). In this presentation, we will examine and describe general themes emergent regarding MHPs' and CSPs' perspective on the impact of stigma on clients' reintegration efforts and success, explore components of stigma that MHPs' and CSPs' describe as uniquely attributable to rurality, examine stigmatizing language used by MHPs and CSPs during the qualitative interviews, and discuss the impact of rurality on providers' perspectives of the effect of stigma on sex offender reintegration success. Implications for practice and policy will be discussed.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Participants will gain an understanding of Southern Appalachian mental health providers (MHPs) and community supervision professionals (CSPs) perspectives on stigma and how stigma impacts reintegration for returning citizens who have committed sex offenses.
- Participants will learn about unique features of the continuum of rurality that exacerbate components of stigma, thereby creating additional barriers to successful reintegrating for returning citizens who have committed sex offences.
- Participants will learn about stigmatizing language used by MHPs and CSPs who work with returning citizens and the impact of such language use from providers will be considered.

**Alyssa P. Gretak, MA**, is a graduate student in East Tennessee State University's Clinical Psychology doctoral program. She has particular research and clinical interests in ex-offender reintegration. Prior to enrolling at ETSU, Mrs. Gretak spent a year working in collaboration with the St. Vincent DePaul Homeless Shelters and the Montgomery County office of Ex-Offender Reentry through the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio. She holds a master's degree in clinical psychology from the University of Dayton (2015) and a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville (2013).

**Lydia L. Eisenbrandt, MA**, is a graduate student at East Tennessee State University's Clinical Psychology doctoral training program. She is most interested in research pertaining to serious mental illness and rural primary care. Ms. Eisenbrandt holds a master's degree in psychological science from the University of North Carolina, Wilmington (2015) and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the State University of New York at Potsdam (2013).

**Jill D. Stinson, PhD**, is a licensed psychologist and an Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Training at East Tennessee State University. She received her dual doctorate in Clinical Psychology and Psychology, Policy, and Law from the University of Arizona prior to

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serving as the Director of Sex Offender Treatment at Fulton State Hospital with the Missouri Department of Mental Health. Her research focuses on sex offenders with serious mental illness, personality disorders, self-regulatory problems, and histories of early childhood maltreatment, as well as issues related to sex offender community re-entry, stigma, and suicidality. Dr. Stinson has authored three books related to sex offender etiology, treatment, and motivation to engage in therapy. She serves as an Associate Editor for ATSA's official journal, *Sexual Abuse*, and has been on the Professional Issues Committee, Public Policy Committee, Membership Committee, and several Conference Planning Committees for ATSA, with an appointment of Co-Chair for the 2020 ATSA Conference in San Antonio, Texas.