

## **SHAPING THE FUTURE**

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | POSTER

### **'Every Door Is Shut in My Face': The Role of Employment in Desistance for People with Sexual Convictions**

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The focus of this paper is what happens when people with sexual convictions are released from prison. Much of the work around people with sexual convictions focuses on what happens in the custodial environment but recently there is a focus on post release given its importance regarding recidivism. Being employed brings with it several benefits: structured time and purposeful activity, social contact with others, a sense of personal status and identity, and reduced financial strain (Creed & Macintyre, 2001). For people with convictions who seek employment, the benefits of working are increased, yet the difficulties of gaining a job are likewise substantially increased (Brown, Spencer & Deakin, 2007). Where an individual has been convicted of a sexual offence, the advantages of having a job are even greater since unemployment has been associated with sexual reoffending (Hanson & Harris, 1998). Not having a job is thus a risk factor for sexual reoffending (see e.g. Thornton, 2013; de Vries et al, 2015), and the benefits to society of reintegrating people with a sexual conviction into the workforce transcends any individual benefits, but instead present an important gain to society with a reduction in sexual harm. Currently, few people with a sexual conviction can find employment, in part due to public fear and hostility (Harper & Hogue, 2015), but also because of restrictions which necessitate additional processing time for job applications. There is also a reluctance for organisations (even those committed to finding ex-offenders employment) to assist those with sexual convictions in gaining employment (Levenson et al, 2007), yet such attitudes belie the actual risk of sexual recidivism (Hanson et al, 2009).

This study explored the experiences and challenges faced by men seeking employment who have served prison sentences for a sexual offence. The research comprised a qualitative analysis of a sample of men (n=15) convicted of a sexual offence. Emerging themes were Tangible barriers, Hope vs reality and Stigma. Practical suggestions (including information about the launch of the Corbett Centre for Prisoner Reintegration on 13 February 2019 in the UK) are made to help service users (and those helping service users) to shape better lives in the future.

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**Dr Belinda Winder** is a Professor in Forensic Psychology and Heads the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) in the Department of Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. She set SOCAMRU up in 2007 to build upon the collaborative relationship between ongoing research within the Department of Psychology at NTU and HMP Whatton (one of the largest prisons in Europe, holding approximately 830 convicted adult men who have been convicted of a sexual offence). The unit's primary aim is to conduct and facilitate applied research in the area of sexual offending and sexual crime. The unit works with the HMPPS, Ministry of Justice and the NHS and conducts research at a number of prisons (including HMP Whatton and HMP Stafford) and other secure forensic establishments. She has disseminated her work in a range of ways (presentations, professional reports, peer reviewed papers, articles for prisoners' newspapers, medical journals and so on) both internationally and nationally. Belinda specialises in mixed-method research with a strong service-user voice and an applied focus.

Belinda is a co-founder, trustee, Vice Chair and Head of Research and Evaluation for the Safer Living Foundation, a charity set up in 2014 to conduct (and evaluate) initiatives that help to prevent further victims of sexual crime.

**Dr Nicholas Blagden** is the Associate Head Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) and Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. He is a Chartered Psychologist and has worked and researched within the criminal justice system and HM Prison Service for many years. He has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in psychology, forensic psychology and criminology. He has also trained police officers. His work has been funded by the HMPPS and he is currently engaged in numerous collaborative forensic projects with NTU, HMPPS, Institute for Mental Health, Ontario, Canada and Correctional Services Australia. He has published widely in international journals and disseminated research at international conferences.

**Dr Christine Norman** is a Senior Lecturer in psychology at Nottingham Trent University and a member of the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU) at Nottingham Trent University. Christine's research and teaching interests are in the area of biological and cognitive psychology with application to psychiatric disorders, forensic psychology and behavioural addictions. She is part of the research team working closely with HMP Whatton one of Europe's largest sex offender prisons and is also involved in prevention research with non offending paedophiles.