

A Risk Assessment and Risk Management Approach to Sexual Offending for the Probation Service

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Summary: This article reports on a study conducted by the author in 2007, which reviewed the research evidence on effective practice in relation to risk assessment and risk management of sex offenders primarily in the UK. It sought to appraise and draw conclusions in the absence of a specific risk assessment strategy for sex offenders to support evidence-based practice in the Probation Service. It focused on cognitive-behavioural therapy and the assessment and management of risk with sexual offenders and explored the development and use of risk assessment tools. Finally, the author used a small, controlled exploratory study of sexual offenders in the Irish context, involving probation officers who acted as respondents and formed a focus discussion group. The probation officers first assessed a number of sex offenders using clinical practice. Following attendance at a training course on the Hanson and Harris assessment tool, Stable and Acute (2007), they reassessed the clients using the new tool. They then compared, contrasted and evaluated the assessments. The study found that the use of a structured assessment tool provided guidelines as to what is effective in reducing recidivism with sexual offenders. It concluded that the research knowledge provided an evidence-based framework for the assessment and management of risk. It also looked at the implications for practice within the Probation Service, and highlighted the need for research into risk assessment and risk management of recidivism in Ireland.

Keywords: Acute, dynamic, static, risk, Ireland, probation officer, service.