

Assessment and Treatment of Sex Offenders: A Handbook

Edited by

**Anthony R. Beech, Leam A. Craig and
Kevin D. Browne**

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

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Dedication

Anthony Beech: *For Dawn and Jake, with all my love, who have to endure many hours without me to enable projects like this to see the light of day.*

Leam Craig: *For my parents and Nola, for their never-ending love and support, and for Rohan's future.*

Kevin Browne: *For my children; I hope the time I have invested in this project at their expense will be compensated by their better protection as a result of this book.*

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Anthony Beech, Leam Craig and Kevin Browne

Spring 2008

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Jason Wood is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at De Montfort University. He has research interests and expertise in the community management of high-risk offenders, including the effectiveness of strategies used to

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Foreword

This is an important and timely book. It captures part of what is needed in attempting to understand sexual offending. First, however, one needs to recognise two different discourses which currently operate in relation to sex crime. At the public level there is an explicit focus on regulation and control. Sex offenders have become the beasts in our midst. In control terms beasts need to be separated from the herd and hence, there is an exclusionary tendency – something akin to criminal apartheid for those who have committed sexual offences. The apotheosis of the regulatory focus was heralded, in the United Kingdom at least, by the passing of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 whereby sex offenders had to register after being convicted or cautioned. In short, while there are variations, many countries have tried to confront the considerable societal concern about the phenomenon of sexual offending by regulation and control.

Meanwhile, there has been a less public but equally fervent discourse, which centres on the importance of the assessment and treatment of sexual offenders. Of course, in the final analysis, this parallel discourse cannot or should not be totally separate from the discourse of regulation and control, but currently the discourse of assessment and control operates at a more subterranean level, for it is seen – perhaps largely by politicians – as something which is less enthusiastically embraced by members of the public. This may or may not be true for sometimes the public is less punitive than politicians believe. Indeed, the public may appreciate the futility and impossibility of addressing the issue of sex offending simply by regulation and control.

Anyway, the discourse of assessment and treatment is pivotal to this book. There has been a burgeoning interest in the assessment and treatment of sexual offenders over the past two decades and this development has coincided with a challenge to the previous, almost monopolistic stance of forensic psychiatrists in this area. Now there are a variety of professional voices espousing an interest in forensic mental health (Rogers & Soothill, 2008) in general and sexual offending in particular. Psychologists, especially since the early 1990s, have been crucial in pioneering new ways of assessing and treating sex offenders. But how new and how different? Here the work also needs to be seen within an historical context.

This book provides an opportunity to showcase some of the remarkable developments over the past two decades, which have provided new insights into ways of

conceptualising sexual offenders. Appropriate assessment and treatment follow from this. But how does all this link with past endeavours in this field?

Following the numerous chapters in this book there are approaching two thousand references cited of which over one-half refer to articles, books and reports published in this still incomplete first decade of the 21st century. Its 'up-to-dateness' certainly cannot be challenged. A further 30 percent of the references cite work from the 1990s, yet a further 15 percent of the references refer to work published in the 1970s and 1980s. However, there are just 32 pieces of work which relate to work published before 1970. This was a surprise.

Only two of these publications overlap, that is, are cited in at least two of the chapters. In fact, these two pieces were probably cited twice because the two chapters had a co-author in common. Of the 30 distinct pieces of work cited, the chronological first is Bayes' famous essay published in 1764 relating to 'solving a problem in the doctrine of chance', while the second is G.S. Hall's pioneering text on *Adolescence* published in 1904. In fact, of the 30 pieces cited, only 10 could be considered to have a direct focus on sexual offending of which the first is Kurt Freund's paper, 'Diagnostika homosexuality u muszu' published in *Ceskoslovak Medicine* in 1957.

What all this seems to mean is that the assessment and treatment of sexual offending does not have a 'classic' history which is routinely cited. However, this is in some ways curious, for the 1950s, for instance, was an era when the two discourses mentioned earlier were for a while less separate.

Sexual offenders have always had the possibility of provoking outrage and condemnation rather than attracting sympathy and assistance. Moral panics are sometimes fuelled by a supposed sexual component – in fact, the infamous Jack the Ripper offences committed in the late 1880s continue to titillate. However, in the specific area of *non-consensual* sex crime there have been some massive shifts – from the Victorian era when the alleged sex offender was more likely to be acquitted than not, to the 1950s when sex offenders were more likely to be awarded a non-custodial sentence rather than a custodial sentence or to be acquitted. Certainly for a while in the 1950s and early 1960s, in the criminal justice field, the public world of control and regulation began to coalesce with the subterranean efforts of practitioners in trying to offer something more positive to sexual offenders. Reports in local newspapers heralded this implicit optimism by indicating that treatment – such as probation with a condition of treatment – was being awarded to convicted sex offenders. The emphasis was on trying to do something which might alleviate suffering while, at the same time, recognising that a crime had been committed. Curiously, of course, in terms of *consensual* sex crime, the attempt to shift the label of homosexuality from being a crime to a sickness may have contributed to another kind of suffering.

Less than a decade later, the enthusiasm to treat began to wane and definitions began to shift. In truth, the results, while limited in scientific terms, were not impressive and the death knell was marked by the dire philosophy that 'nothing works'.

However, a new enthusiasm emerged in the 1990s which was underpinned by a more optimistic 'philosophy' seeking to understand 'what works?'. The present book is partly a crucial stock-taking exercise, identifying what has been achieved, while not

being hesitant to recognise that much more needs to be done in trying to identify ‘what works’. So will the present endeavours have the same sad outcome of the 1950s?

I think not. The current efforts, so well represented in this book, are not simply the output of some dedicated but often isolated individuals. The base is now much wider than that, calling upon theoretical perspectives which resonate and have a pedigree in parent disciplines. Perhaps more importantly, it is much more of a scientific enterprise whereby both successes and failures in theory and in practice can be more readily identified and documented.

All science eventually has human implications. However, a scientific focus on sexual offending is more direct than most. The suffering caused by sexual offending is very real with its impact much more long-lasting than previously appreciated. It is thus important that an appropriate ‘body of knowledge’ in relation to sexual offending continues to develop and this present volume provides a very useful foundation stone towards this end.

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