

# Sexual offending treatment programs in prisons and hospitals are ineffective

January 27 2015

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Sexual offending treatment programmes do not rehabilitate criminals before they are released from prison, warns an expert in *The BMJ*.

In prisons and secure psychiatric hospitals, sexual offenders are offered the Sexual Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP), a psychological talking therapy rolled out across England and Wales since 1991.

Group discussions focus on triggers, thinking styles, impact on victims, emotional management and intimacy skills. Completion of eighty six sessions can contribute to early release from prison.

But the treatment programme has not been shown to work effectively, says David Ho, a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist and Clinical Research Lead at the SEPT Secure Mental Health Services, South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust.

"No evidence from academic or policy research has shown that the treatment programme significantly reduces sexual reoffending," writes Ho. "Victims and the public deserve to know this."

The majority of offenders released back into society still pose the same level of risk as they did before the treatment programme, and this fails victims and the public, he argues.

"Professional pride or political embarrassment cannot justify persisting with a programme that leaves the public at risk of further sex

offending," he adds.

He calls on doctors to take responsibility for the treatment of [sexual offenders](#).

Rehabilitation could involve mandatory detention in [mental health](#) hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 and only proven treatments should be used to rehabilitate offenders effectively, he argues.

Treatments must be supported through robust research to demonstrate efficacy, which the current [treatment](#) programme clearly lacks, he adds.

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Sexual offending treatment programs in prisons and hospitals are ineffective (2015, January 27) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-01-sexual-treatment-prisons-hospitals-ineffective.html>

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