

Treatment for sexual and domestic violence offenders does work

August 20 2019, by Gary Hughes



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A first-of-its-kind study has found that specialised psychological

programmes for sexual and domestic violence offenders have led to major reductions in reoffending but best results are achieved with consistent input from a qualified psychologist.

For the study, which was led by Professor Theresa Gannon at the University of Kent, a team of [psychologists](#) from the UK and Canada reviewed 70 previous studies and 55,000 individual offenders from five countries (UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand) to examine whether specialised psychological offence treatments were associated with reductions in recidivism.

Three specialised treatments were examined: sexual offence, domestic [violence](#) and general violence programmes, with the first two comprising the majority of specialised psychological programmes offered in correctional and community settings.

The study showed that, across all programmes, offence specific reoffending was 13.4% for treated individuals and 19.4% for untreated comparisons over an average follow up of 66 months. Relative reductions in offence specific reoffending were 32.6% for sexual offence programmes, 36% for [domestic violence](#) programmes, and 24.3% for general violence programmes. All programmes were also associated with significant reductions in non-offence specific reoffending.

However, overall, treatment effectiveness appeared improved when programmes received consistent hands-on input from a qualified registered psychologist and facilitating staff were provided with clinical supervision. For sexual offenders, specific group-based treatment, rather than mixed group and individual treatment, produced the greatest reductions in sexual reoffending as did treatment that focussed specifically on reducing inappropriate sexual arousal. All sexual [offence](#) treatment in these studies was Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Amongst its recommendations, the study suggests that policy makers and [offender](#) programme providers might optimise programmes outcomes by providing qualified psychologists who are consistently present in hands-on treatment. It also suggests that programme providers might also want to consider methods for tightly controlling programme implementation given that the researchers found single site treatments seemed to fare better than multisite treatments.

Professor Gannon, a chartered [forensic psychologist](#) and Director of Kent's Centre of Research and Education in Forensic Psychology, said: 'The results of this study are good news. They suggest that treatment can be effective; particularly if care and attention is paid to who delivers the treatment as well as how treatment is implemented.'

More information: Theresa A. Gannon et al, Does specialized psychological treatment for offending reduce recidivism? A meta-analysis examining staff and program variables as predictors of treatment effectiveness, *Clinical Psychology Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cpr.2019.101752](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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