

Guest editorial

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This special issue of the *Journal of Criminal Psychology* aims to share with its readers the latest research and thinking in relation to strengths-based approaches when working with people convicted of sexual offending. It is our privilege to present a selection of novel and thought-provoking papers from significant scholars whose work is dedicated to preventing sexual abuse and working with those convicted of sexual offending in an ethical, humane, and positive way. Strengths-based approaches involve identifying and developing the positive aspects of an individual (Barton and Mackin, 2012). As noted by Kewley (Kewley and Blandford, 2017), they have been utilised in many contexts, such as education, health/well-being, and organisational behaviour. In recent years, there has been a move to incorporate and employ strengths-based approaches in forensic contexts, especially rehabilitation. Indeed, Barton and Mackin (2012) note that strengths-based approaches can help foster a treatment process that is more collaborative and involving of the client.

In this special issue, strength-based approaches are explored in relation to the assessment, treatment, and management of those convicted of sexual offending. It includes research from a range of forensic contexts, including the police, prison, and the community. In the first paper, Kewley and Blandford detail the development of a new strengths- and risk-based assessment tool, used by police practitioners to determine the degree and nature of actions required to help support the safe reintegration of sexual offenders into the community. A number of practitioner strengths, as well as empirical limitations of the tool, are discussed. In the second paper, also relating to risk assessment, Kewley reports on the experiences of practitioners using strengths- and risk-based tools in practice. She highlights a number of benefits police practitioners' report but also the challenges they face in terms of the political, economic, and social context in which they operate. The third paper by Merdian *et al.* details a qualitative study examining the desistance strategies used by a sample of 26 online "child sexual exploitation material" users. The authors link the findings to the Good Lives Model, demonstrating how the findings can be used to develop a strengths-based approach for working clinically with this population. The fourth paper by D'Orazio concentrates on the treatment regime within a custodial context. Here, she evaluates the degree to which the therapeutic climate, group environment, and therapist style are responsive to the needs of clients. She notes that the climate of risk and danger in which such therapy takes place can be problematic for clients and staff members. Our fifth paper by Youssef details the importance of engaging in a therapeutic alliance when working with those convicted of sexual offending. Here she explores the literature that details the value of therapeutic alliance for treatment outcomes but also highlights the obstacles and challenges therapists face when working with this client group. Finally, Marshall, Marshall, and Olver provide an evaluation of treatment approaches to working with those convicted of sexual offending. Their article draws on the Good Lives Model, however, they remind us of the limited empirical evidence to support such approaches, and when considering outcomes such as the reduction of recidivism, a clear, and agreed upon set of criteria for strengths-based approaches is needed.

Strengths-based approaches to working with this client group are still in their infancy, and as noted in this selection of papers, academics, policy makers, and practitioners are having to face a range of challenges. One significant area that requires immediate exploration is the empirical testing of such approaches. Far more research is needed to test: if strengths-based interventions address treatment targets and if strengths-based interventions can prevent/reduce recidivism. There is much work to be done here and we hope that this special edition plays a role in profiling the issues and inspiring future strengths-based research.

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