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Policing people with sexual convictions using strengths based approaches

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## Abstract

Effective risk management planning ought to include strategies that help control and mitigate risk, as well as develop and strengthen client's protective factors. The Active Risk Management System (ARMS) is a structured risk assessment and management planning tool designed to assess both dynamic factors known to be related to sexual recidivism, along with protective factors that might support the desistance process. The tool was recently implemented across all police forces in England and Wales. This study looks to examine police practitioner's experience of the tool, their attitudes towards risk assessment, risk management planning, interviewing clients for the assessment and their perspective on strengths based approaches in general.

A mixed method approach is adopted including one attitudinal measure: Community Attitudes Towards Sexual Offender-Revised (CATSO-R); and four focus groups, analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

CATSO-R results indicate that when compared to other populations, police officers appear to perceive sex offenders as dangerous, requiring severe punishment. These findings are supported in the IPA analysis where three themes highlight the following: a) Principles and practices of the ARMS tool are incongruent with traditional policing; b) The negative values officers hold conflicts with a role that supports a process of reintegration and c) Training and supervision is insufficient to equip MOSOVO's with the skills and knowledge needed.

Only one study exists in which ARMS training and its pilot test were examined, this is the first empirical examination of its application in practice. Findings are therefore, of relevance to practitioners and academics alike.

Key Words: ARMS, Strengths based approaches, Police, Risk management, Sex offenders

## **1 Introduction**

Formal risk management planning is an essential process in the risk management, reintegration and rehabilitation process of those convicted of sexual offending. Risk management planning helps criminal justice agencies assess a client's risk and need, which enables them to effectively deploy appropriate resources; provide targeted treatment interventions; and administer necessary controls (Bonta and Wormith, 2013). Successful risk management planning, thus, serves to protect the public from harm, support the client, while also managing public resources efficiently (Hilder and Kemshall, 2013).

Effective risk management planning ought to include strategies that both help control and mitigate risk, while also developing and strengthening client's protective factors (Laws and Ward, 2011). Yet, risk management planning processes exist in cultures of fear, risk aversion and blame (Nash, 2010) therefore, fostering the strengths of a client as part of their risk management plan can often be overlooked (Kewley et al., 2015). Instead, those deemed as 'dangerous' receive risk management strategies that seek to control and restrict (Harrison, 2011) and although these may alleviate public protection concerns, the legitimate needs of the client tend to be ignored (Ward and Connolly, 2008). As such, mechanisms to manage risk become characterised by strategies of control, restriction, mandatory treatment and surveillance (Kewley et al., 2015, Bosker et al., 2013) often resulting in unintended consequences such as; stigmatization, social isolation, unemployment and poor housing (Levenson and Hern, 2007, Levenson et al., 2015).

In an effort to redress this balance, and perhaps offer a more ethical approach to risk management planning; academics and practitioners have begun to develop and implement risk and strengths based tools (for a criminological review of strengths based approaches see Kewley, 2017). Strengths based approaches, in a criminal justice context at least, enable practitioners to support clients to build personal capacity and expose them to opportunities that help develop personal strengths and goals. For example, building community and social bonds, improving emotional and psychological resilience, securing meaningful employment or pursuing education etc. help clients contribute to society as they strive to live a meaningful and offence free life (Ward and Maruna, 2007). Strengths

based approaches therefore; serve the needs of the public and criminal justice agencies by helping to reduce risk, as well as working collaboratively and supportively to help the client build a *good life* (Ward and Stewart, 2003). Yet, application of such approaches is a challenge given the climate of punishment and risk reduction in which correctional practitioners operate.

This tension is perhaps most notable for a group of specialist police officers, who in England and Wales, under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 have a statutory duty to manage the risks posed by those convicted of sexual and violent offending (either as a single agency or jointly with Probation and Prisons). Under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) police forces are required to a) identify people who require MAPPA (these include sexual and violent offenders); b) share relevant information about such people with appropriate agencies; c) assess their risk of serious harm; and d) manage their risk. In order for police areas to carry out these duties, *Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offender* (MOSOVO) teams' operate within each of the 43 police areas.

To assist MOSOVO officers manage clients with sexual convictions, the Active Risk Management System (ARMS), was recently developed and implemented across England and Wales. The tool was developed by an academic team of senior representatives from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and an experienced police professional with extensive expertise in the assessment, treatment and management of people with sexual convictions. The tool was tested for inter-rater reliability, with positive reliability (Nicolls and Webster, 2014) however; the tool is yet to be tested in terms of its relationship with recidivism risk reduction. This work is currently in progress. For a detailed discussion of both the tools development and areas of further work, please see Blandford and Kewley (currently under review).

ARMS, is a structured risk assessment and management planning tool designed to assess dynamic factors known to be related to sexual recidivism (adult males only), along with protective factors that might support the desistance process. Each individual factor is identified in the literature as being related to recidivism. Assessors are required to examine a total of twelve factors, including seven risk factors and five protective factors. These include the risk factors: Opportunity, sexual pre-occupation,

offence related sexual interests, emotional congruence with children, poor self-management, hostile orientation and social influence. The five protective factors include: Social influences, commitment to desist, intimate relationships, employment and positive routine and social investment. Assessors are required to gather information from a number of sources which might inform their assessment and subsequent risk management plan. Sources include interview(s) with the client, previous offending history, case files, court documents, prison/probation records, offender behaviour reports etc.

Assessors then draw on the information gathered and rate the presence of each factor (high, medium or low) detailing the required risk management action in response to the presence of each factor.

Findings from the assessment inform subsequent risk management plans which should incorporate strategies to control, rehabilitate and support the client while living in the community. ARMS assessments are reviewed regularly, depending on the risk level determined or when a significant change occurs in the clients life, such as a further offense, loss of a job, new relationship etc.

The ARMS tool is theoretically grounded in a number of perspectives. It draws for example on much of the literature relating to the etiology of sexual offending (Ward and Beech, 2006; Ward et al., 2006), particularly in the areas related to risk. But also draws heavily from the more general offending literature, such as Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model (Andrews and Bonta, 2010); desistance and protective factors literature (de Vries Robbe et al., 2015) Maruna, 2001) and the Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward and Stewart, 2003; Ward and Laws, 2010). The RNR literature advises that to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, correctional practitioners need to focus attention and direct resources to the areas of greatest risk. Furthermore, to reduce risk, only specific criminogenic needs such as anti-social associates, criminal attitudes etc. ought to be targeted in treatment; and that treatment should be individualised so that the unique learning needs of the client can be met and accommodated. The desistance and protective factors literature however, provides focus on the internal and external mechanisms required to support a person make positive changes in their life that help them desist and maintain desistance from crime. Practitioners are needed to foster and develop opportunities that might improve a client's social capital, or help motivate them to make internal cognitive transformations, that is, move away from an 'offending identity' to one that supports a non-offending

lifestyle. Likewise, the GLM is a strengths based model that looks to understand the needs of a client from a more holistic lens. Rather than focus on what ‘caused’ them to offend, the GLM requires practitioners to consider what support is needed to help build a person’s capacity to live and enjoy a good life. The model proposes that practitioners ought to help clients achieve goals that we all strive for, such as happiness, inner peace, satisfaction in relationships etc. In doing this, it is argued that ‘risk’ is by default, reduced.

It is the inclusion of the more strengths based and protective factors approach to working clients convicted of sexual offences that is of particular interest to this present study. Although little is known of this specialist group of police officers (Nash, 2016), even less is known of their experience of working with clients convicted of sexual offending from a strengths based perspective. The community protection culture in which MOSOVO officers operate, is one that is characterised by criminal justice policy and practice that includes activities such as surveillance, restrictions, regimes of control, in essence the needs of the perpetrator are secondary to the needs of the community (Wood and Kemshall, 2010). The application of the ARMS tool in this context is therefore, of interest. Of particular curiosity are officer’s attitudes towards the clients they manage, their experience of risk assessment, risk management planning, interviewing clients for ARMS assessment as well as their perspective on strengths based approaches in general. This is the first empirical examination of the ARMS tool in practice and therefore has relevance for policy makers, practitioners and academics alike.

## **2 Material and methods**

Due to this study being the first of its kind, in this context at least, an exploratory approach is adopted. The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, along with a measure used to examine the attitudes of MOSOVO officers working with the tool is used.

### ***2.1 Procedure***

Ethical approval was gained through Birmingham City University Ethics Committee and the National Police Chiefs Council supported the proposal, providing access to research participants. No

participants were deemed vulnerable. All participants gave written consent prior to the study and to further protect their identity no police area or police staff member is named in this paper. Instead the abbreviation FG1, FG2 etc. is used, to mean Focus Group 1, Focus Group 2 etc.

The Community Attitudes Towards Sexual Offender-Revised (CATSO-R) scale was administrated and completed anonymously by all participants and returned to the researcher prior to engaging in the focus group discussion.

The four focus groups ran for an average of 75 minutes, each was audio recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. The discussion centred around participants experiences of the following: interviewing clients using the tool as a guide; their experiences of gathering and analysing the data needed for the tool; a comparison of previous forms of assessment with this current process; their experience of making clinical judgments using the framework; their experience of developing risk management plans; their feelings in relation to the approach used in the tool (e.g. strengths and risk based); the purpose of the tool in relation to their role as a MOSOVO officer. All focus groups were undertaken on police premises and during participants working hours.

### *2.1.1 Measures*

The CATSO-R scale (Church et al., 2008) is a measure designed to examine people's attitudes towards 'sexual offenders'. Given that the role of the MOSOVO officer is to police, manage and support those with sexual convictions in the community, it is important to understand the attitudes and values officers hold about this group. Likewise, it is helpful to triangulate different sources of data when examining complex social phenomena (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The measure requires participants to read 18 statements about 'sexual offenders' and indicate on a Likert Scale (ranging between one and six) the degree to which they 'Strongly Disagree' or 'Strongly Agree'. Statements include for example: "People who commit sex offenses want to have sex more often than the average person"; or "Only a few sex offenders are dangerous"; or "Convicted sex offenders should never be released from prison". When scores are calculated the higher the score, the more negative the attitude held by the participant towards 'sexual offenders'. Scores are divided into the following four domains:

Social Isolation; Capacity to Change; Severity/Dangerousness and; Deviancy. The aim of using this measure is to examine MOSOVO officer attitudes towards people convicted of sexual offending and triangulate these with the findings of the qualitative analysis.

### *2.1.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is theoretically grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009). It is a method used to understand how, from first-person experience, a person makes sense of a particular phenomenon, but presented from a third-person perspective. In contrast to a more nomothetic approach to studying human phenomenon, IPA enables the exploration of unique and idiosyncratic experiences of smaller populations, such as the four focus groups. The IPA researcher asked open questions and followed up answers by asking participants to reflect on their experience in terms of how they felt or thought about an experience. They were asked to say more and expand their answers, particularly in terms of what certain experiences meant to them. The nature of IPA data collection means that discussion is free flowing and conversation like. It is not intended to be a series of closed or limiting questions and answers, therefore although there was an interview schedule; this was used only as a guide and prompt to the researcher.

## *2.2 Data analysis*

To analyse the CATSO-R measure, data was entered into an Excel spread sheet and analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS v21. To provide some context to the findings, results from other studies using the CATSO-R was also included in the analysis.

The focus group data was analysed using IPA. To ensure consistency Osborn and Smith (1998) four steps to data analysis was used. This included a) an initial familiarisation of transcripts, with initial thoughts being noted; b) line by line analysis, with more detailed notes being made including conceptual, linguistic and insightful observations of participants. This step is repeated to ensure no data is missed; c) a shift from analysis to interpretation occurs here as codes are developed into clusters, ensuring the participant's narrative remains central and finally; d) clusters are then developed

into larger and more concrete themes. This process is iterative and so periods of returning back to the data for re-analysis and further interpretation occurs until themes are fully developed and labelled.

### **2.3 Sample**

Four police areas were selected to participate in four focus groups. In an effort to generate as much geographical representation as possible; groups included two geographically semi-rural, one rural and one city type. Participants were recruited through an internal invitation email sent by a single point of contact within each police force, to all staff members in each of the MOSOVO teams only. The email included information about the research; the focus group; requirement of participants; as well as the researchers contact details should further clarification be needed. Participants were required to volunteer by indicating their interest by return email to the single point of contact. When a minimum of six people were recruited the logistics for the focus group were set up by the single point of contact and consent forms signed before the focus group.

A total of N=28 participants took part in the study. The sample consisted of 57% male ( $n=16$ ) and 43% female ( $n=12$ ). One participant was a senior officer with strategic responsibility for ARMS and although did not have operational experience of the tool, he played a key role in its implementation and resourcing; his data was therefore, included in this analysis. All remaining participants were either serving police officers or police staff; all were employed as MOSOVO officers. Their time in service and as a MOSOVO officer varied with a mean of 17.2 years in service ( $SD=9.34$ ), and a mean of 3.74 years as a MOSOVO officer ( $SD=3.39$ ). It is noted that time in service data is incomplete as five participants did not provide their full length in service and as previously noted, one senior officer had not served as a MOSOVO.

## **3 Results**

### **3.1 CATSO**

Results detailed in Table 1, demonstrate participants' attitudes towards 'sex offenders'. It shows that for the three of the four items: *social isolation*, *capacity to change*, and *deviancy* participants did not hold particularly problematic or negative views towards this group of people. Indeed, when compared

to other studies (included in this table), participants recorded very similar levels of attitude when compared to other populations. These findings indicate that in keeping with other studies, participants when thinking of ‘sex offenders’ found them to be able to make new friends, have close friends, have adult relationships and thus not all be particularly socially isolated. Their attitudes expressed by these findings show they believe this group of ‘offenders’ have a capacity to change their offending behaviour and therefore rehabilitation is not a waste of time. Likewise, they did not appear to hold particularly negative attitudes in relation to the sexual preoccupation or deviancy of ‘sexual offenders’. However, they do hold attitudes that support the idea that ‘sexual offenders’ are dangerous and should be severely punished. When compared to the other studies included in the table, this present group appear to hold the harshest views with regards to severity and dangerousness. This is interesting as even when compared to a general police sample (Day, 2014) this score is double that found in Day’s study. Höing et al. (2016) also found negative attitudes in their sample for this factor too. It is thought that this similarity might suggest cultural attitudes towards people with sexual convictions as both the present study and the Höing et al. (2016) study include European participants. These results will be reflected upon further in the analysis of the focus group and later discussion.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

A reliability analysis was carried out on the scale comprising 18 items. In keeping with George and Mallery’s (2003) guidance, Cronbach alpha showed the questionnaire to reach only questionable reliability,  $\alpha = 0.68$ . ( $>.70$  is deemed acceptable). Most items appeared to be worthy of retention, resulting in a decrease in the alpha if deleted. The two exceptions to this were items 9 (Severity and Dangerousness subscale) and 14 (Social Isolation subscale), which would increase the alpha to an acceptable level of reliability  $\alpha = 0.74$ . Cronbach alpha values for each subscale were obtained for each scale (Social isolation,  $\alpha = .85$ ; Capacity to Change,  $\alpha = .76$ ; Severity/Dangerousness,  $\alpha = .67$ ; and Deviancy,  $\alpha = .69$ ).

### **3.2 IPA**

Due to the nature of qualitative approaches and in particular IPA, a wealth of rich and thick data emerged. Indeed, a total of eleven superordinate themes emerged, all of which cannot be discussed within the limitations of this paper. Therefore, only three themes are profiled (see Table 2) and discussed in detail. Each theme featured strongly across all four focus groups and are discussed in turn here.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### *3.2.1 Principles and practices of the ARMS tool are incongruent with traditional policing*

This first theme is an important finding in relation to the principles of risk management planning and the perceived or traditional role of MOSOVO officers. The theme highlights a real disconnect between how participants view their role and the skills, knowledge and experience needed to use the new tool. Participants reported that although their role had changed over recent years, the implementation of ARMS meant their role had changed significantly. As a result of this change, there appears clear skills, experience and knowledge gaps. Likewise, because of these gaps, MOSOVO officers were yet to fully embrace the strengths based element of the tool, at least in practice. Each subordinate theme is discussed here in turn.

It is without doubt that over the years the role and demand of the MOSOVO officer has changed. It is worth noting the positive change participants felt ARMS brought to their practice. They felt the tool helped bring focus and structure to risk management planning; they felt a greater sense of autonomy when determining risk. For example prior to ARMS, participants did not feel confident to reduce a client's risk:

“You couldn't have reduced him before though...too risk averse before, we would be nervous about reducing somebody who's a very high down to a medium, despite the fact they make loads of really good stuff going on in their lives... just in case...”(FG4.p.51-52).

Even though they continue to operate in a risk averse culture the sense of anxiety to reduce a person's risk has somewhat dissipated; it “gives us the, the authority, if you like...and the confidence to reduce

them. Whereas before, we would just go with matrix [*Risk Matrix 2000*], and whatever matrix said... the good thing about ARMS is we have got the flexibility” (FG1.p.3).

While this was a positive change participants felt conflicted by the tool as it took them away from core tasks central to their role: “It actually decreases the amount of actual hands-on management that you do with people” (FG4.p.14). Participants felt they are not “out there” working with people but instead “we’re now doing nothing, nothing” (FG4.p.15), at least in terms of traditional policing. Instead of being “hands on” participants experienced a real a shift in the core duties of their role. This resulted in participants experiencing a new type of working practice, which conflicts with their view of a MOSOVO officer. Their new role requires them to support the reintegration process rather than one that only detects and prevents crime: “Cause it’s not just about the risk assessment, we’re also looking for, are these people offending... I’ve never looked upon myself as a rehabilitator, to be honest. I’d definitely put myself as a safe guarder” (FG4.p.55) but “now you’re asking us now to become offender managers on the rehabilitation side of things really. It’s a massive change” (FG3.p.77). These competing elements of the role are in conflict with how participants view their core duties and instead are “trying to wear a lot of hats” (FG4.p.56).

With this role change brings the demand for new practice and new skills. In particular, participants experienced difficulties when questioning client’s in relation to their sexual interest and or sexual pre-occupation. The structured tool to some degree dictated how home visits/ARMS interviews were run and thus “changed the dimension for some” (FG1.p.44). Indeed, the newer and more intimate line of questioning was quite problematic for several participants who felt genuinely uncomfortable by the type and style of questioning needed:

“It’s much more focused towards the, the sexual needs and desires and wants and, you know... We didn’t often ask them how many times they masturbated...a month, or whatever. Now it seems to be the first question, isn’t it? How many times you’ve had a wank this week, you know, it’s all the time, isn’t it? So that’s changed, the intimacy of the visit has, has changed, as a result of the ARMS form” (FG1.p.43).

While their clients do not appear to find this new line of inquiry problematic, because “a lot of them are used to that sort of thing...we're playing catch up” (FG1.p. 43). This last comment highlights how the ARMS tool demands particular skills and knowledge which participants feel deficient in.

Participants also appeared disengaged with the new type of interview style or approach needed because they felt it to be “more a touchy, feely kind of thing really isn't it” (FG2.p.30). They feel a drift towards probation practice, but “we're not probation officers and we're not trained to that level...I hate using the word touchy feely, that's what, you know, we're asking to be trained people and we're not” (FG3.p.91). The skills needed to prepare for the interview are not so problematic, in that participants interrogate the evidence and data by reviewing client's case files, they “do a bit of research on them, see what's been happening with them the last two or three months, and then do a research on sleuth, basically seeing if there's any activity” (FG2.p.19). However, when it comes to processing this data during the interview and in particular issues around sexual fantasy, participants feel lost and unable to respond to these types of disclosures: “We don't have the background or the training. A Probation Officer, that's what they're trained in...if someone tells me about certain sexual fantasies, what can I do about it...I can't do much about the sexual preoccupations, sexual fantasies, other than defer it to a Probation Officer to deal with” (FG2.p.29). Participants continually compared their own training and skill base to that of other criminal justice colleagues: “You have social workers who are social worked trained. Probation officers who are probation officer trained...we're not trained to that level. We're not on that same wavelength...we are not social workers and we're not probation officers and we're not trained to that level” (FG3.p.91).

Participants therefore did not fully embrace the tool; in particular the strengths based elements of it. While participants recognise the value of protective factors, they do not perceive themselves to have the skills or access to resources, unlike other criminal justice agencies, and therefore, feel limited as to what support they can give to clients. Participants rejected the shift in role feeling the perspective of rehabilitator incongruent with one of enforcer. Although, participants understand the theory and benefits of developing the strengths of their clients, they hold some cynical attitudes that perhaps interfere with opportunities to develop strengths.

Indeed, the degree to which participants helped develop client's strengths and protective factors was limited to them viewing it as the clients own responsibility and not theirs: "At what point do I go, right, you now have to manage that yourself a little bit? Because it's just unrealistic for us in that with the numbers we've got" (FG3.p.79). In addition to feeling frustrated by the few resources available in the community and clients' restrictions, participants also feel torn by the worry of increasing risk by exposing clients to opportunities in the community:

"You can say about voluntary work, so I'll say 'what about getting involved with some voluntary work' and then you've got to look at what they can do, what they can't do, because of certain, some are work inappropriate...on one hand there's a protective factor, it's keeping them engaged, and on the other hand, what's the risk to other people? And then what do you do with them?" (FG2.p.43) because "you're kind of groping in the dark as to who was available and where to put them" (FG3.p.79)

Participants just did not feel it was their role to develop the strengths of clients, they do not have the authority to enforce participation even though "a lot of stuff we do is certainly the support, so you introduce them to a support and then they take it...but there's nothing compulsory" (FG2.p.40-41) because "it has to be voluntary for them, they have to want to do it ...I mean, you try and persuade somebody who's socially isolated to go to service support, it's quite hard to do...you can make all these suggestions and referrals but it's down to them to access it" (FG2.p.41-42). This does create a tension in practice as participants feel that ARMS is watering down the enforcement element of their role: "we're there to enforce, prohibitions, and enforce the law, and it's started to detract a bit from being more forceful as a police officer" (FG2.p.30). Participants therefore, present with some cynicism about the role of protective factors:

"It's good to know if they've got structure in their life... You know, we've all done the course, we all understand the thought process behind it. But a lot of them would have had that structure when they were offending anyway. So it's just whether there's any weight behind someone having a job, well great, well they were working before they went to jail" (FG1.p.44).

This theme highlights the changing nature of the role of the MOSOVO and the meaning this has for those in practice. In particular participants note a change in their core practice and feel a drift towards one that is more of a rehabilitation function than one of enforcement. This shift means that participants feel unable and unprepared to carry out these new tasks, they do not feel that they are fully trained or educated to the standards required to do the job and therefore participants feel anxious, frustrated and limited in carrying out this work. Finally while participants accept the principles and even logic of adopting strengths based approaches to supporting their clients back into the community, they do not yet fully embrace this new ideal and instead revert to more control and monitoring mechanisms to manage their clients, thus undermining the value of the ARMS tool.

### *3.2.2 The negative values officers hold conflicts with a role that supports a process of reintegration*

Across all four focus groups this second theme emerged indicating participant's belief that all clients are liars, cannot be trusted and will manipulate a situation to their own end. While holding this belief might not be an issue for a police officer responsible for investigation and detection of sexual crime; for officers holding an offender manager role, it is perhaps an incongruent value base and one that might prevent the development of effective collaboration.

Participants appeared to operate with a constant sense of doubt when working with clients. They reported finding it difficult to accept the value of what clients told them during interviews, particularly:

“The deceitful ones, which are the worrying ones, are the ones that won't tell you what you want to know, you know, and then, yeah, we are spending a hell of a lot of a time then typing it up and, sort of, covering your own back for when they do something, when actually, we'd all rather be out, seeing what they're actually doing” (FG4.p.18).

Even if this information might help inform a robust risk assessment because they believe their clients lie, they do not place real value on the information disclosed:

“You've gotta accept what he's saying... Yeah and there's not really much else I can do about that... I can't really go and ask every prostitute in X town has he ever hired you?

‘Cause you know I can’t ever do that so there I shall go with them because you’re relying totally on what they tell you and obviously we know that they don’t always tell the truth, sex offenders so that’s a fact” (FG3.p360).

Such beliefs drive detection type behaviours. While MOSOVO officers have no powers to search a client’s house, their fundamental belief that it is a fact ‘sex offenders’ lie, leads them to ask the client to show them around the house, in an effort to find evidence of offending:

“Especially things like sexual preoccupation...need to have a look at the DVD collection under the telly he’s got. Ask him to have a walk through the bedroom, what’s on the walls, maybe have a look in the drawers, obviously no power of search but provided we ask and they let us do it. It doesn’t really matter then if the assessment is a little bit afterwards, if the main assessment at the police station, say, is running short of time, so you’ve seen the home environment, it’s important to do that” (FG2.p.13).

Participants appeared to believe the ARMS tool requires them to believe everything that is disclosed and that they are “gear[ing] up to believing everything they say” (FG1.p.48), having to rely “solely on what they’re gonna tell you and I do struggle sometimes as to whether they’re being completely honest” (FG3.p.59). This is interesting because instead of using the tool to engage with the client and develop a meaningful risk management plan, participants use the tool to extract information; “it is a good tool to get information out of them” (FG2.p.15). Yet, they do this almost disingenuously trying to catch clients off guard, quickly firing confusing questions at them because “it’s brand new to them, quick fire questions, maybe jump between subjects, catches them out a bit” (FG2.p.13).

In addition to the perception that clients will always lie, participants claimed clients manipulate assessments or home visits in an effort to trick the assessor and keep their risk level low. As a result of this, participants were highly resistant to the notion of a planned home visit, even one in which they might work through the ARMS assessment: “I will not do announced visits. I refuse to do them. We are told to do announced visits to get the numbers down and I will not do them” (FG3.p.22) because “what’s the point in doing an appointment to a sex offender?” (FG3.p.23). This underlying belief that

clients lie and manipulate, means that by turning up unannounced there is an increased likelihood of catching the client offending.

This lack of transparency is further demonstrated in participants being adamant that they will not share the clients own risk management plan with clients:

Interviewer: Is it a document that's then shared with the client?

Participant: No.

Participant: No.

Interviewer: No, so a copy isn't given?

Participant: Definitely not.

Participant: No, no. (FG4.p.46)

While there are valid reasons for regularly attending a client's home unannounced, for the purpose of completing an ARMS assessment, these reasons appear unclear. Likewise, completing a risk management plan may well contain information that ought to be kept confidential however, in the spirit of collaboration, sharing other aspects of the plan appears appropriate in this context. But it is this continual sense that clients are manipulating participants "they're not going to sit there with their laptop in front of you when they're not supposed to have a laptop" (FG2.p.23) so that risk can be reduced because "we're taking in everything that they're saying, and they're pressing all the buttons" (FG1.p.49).

This fear is extended to other criminal justice agencies, for example, participants worry that when on the sex offender programme with probation, clients are given the answers to the ARMS questions:

"Something that's concerned me quite a lot is Probation do various courses, like the SOTP course...it's becoming more and more obvious that they've mentioned ARMS to the offenders...within the course, which I don't think it's any secret anyway, is it?... I bet every one of us...are commonly coming up against standard answers to questions.....they're telling us what they now know...there's parts of what Probation do with offenders gives them the answers for things that we're going to try and do with them and I think it totally undermines everything we do, including ARMS" (FG4.p.53).

This type of thinking is problematic as it demonstrates a belief that no matter what a client might say it is unlikely to be a genuine disclosure; instead something that has been learned from another source in an effort to trick the assessor.

There is clearly an issue with officers responsible for the safe reintegration and risk management of clients back into the community to hold such hostile views about clients. Participants appear to operate on high alert, ready to catch ‘them’ out. Participants personally struggle to accept the information clients give them and so when it comes to making an assessment based only on what the client has told them, they air on the side of disbelief. By holding these beliefs participants see it as their job to catch them out. This type of approach not only goes against the principles of the ARMS tool, but it also prevents the development and exposure to factors needed to foster a process of desistance and aid reintegration.

### *3.2.3 Training and supervision is insufficient to equip MOSOVO’s with the skills and knowledge needed*

This final theme details a significant problem experienced across all focus groups; a lack of training, support and supervision. Working with people who have committed sexual offences is a specialist role requiring specialised training, support and supervision. Recognised across all four focus groups, of concern was the lack of follow on training, support and supervision MOSOVO’s received.

While there has been a national response to the issue of specialist MOSOVO training, there were mixed feelings about the training received to date. On the one hand participants felt that the “MOSOVO course...gave us a lot more info” (FG2.p.50). For staff who had been on the training twice, they “found it far better the second time round...there was a notable difference in the training... and it encompassed more information than the original just standalone ARMS course...which was quite intense...was a really good refresher” (FG4.p.5-6). On the other hand other participants felt “the training was difficult because you’re just doing it off the DVD and it’s not realistic” (FG3.p.9). The assessment was a challenge as they “really struggled to do it [*the written assessment*] in two and a half hours writing it with a pen off a DVD... you’re doing it in a sort of

sterile environment... that's like doing a university exam" (FG3.p.48). While participants recognised this was important they did not feel the training gave them the confidence to apply this knowledge to a live interview.

Participants report developing skills through "on the job training" (FG2.p.49) they also learn through observing how other agencies at work, "I just do the job and you see how probation interview them, then how we would go about the same thing, and it's... Yeah, you can see how they negotiate through the problem" (FG2.p.52) or writing up reports: "The written work as well, yeah, and look at how they write things, and naturally copy things" (FG2.p.53). While this shows great initiative and independent learning, which ought to be encouraged, learning also needs to be formalised and supported to ensure staff feel confident in their own practice and can keep up to date with best practice.

Levels of formal support were reported to be extremely poor across all areas. Support was mainly received informally by peers, for example while out on a home visit "you've got to where you're going, and the other person will chip in with bits that they feel that you've missed... And you will pick up on: oh yeah, I should have asked that question" (FG1.p.71). Participants also sound off ideas with each other, which serves as an informal supervision process and of course has its place but it also has its limitations: "You two might be sat there thinking no, no, that's alright, I agree with you. Let's bang that on...until somebody says to you don't do that, do this, you're gonna carry....doing what works for you" (FG3.p.67). But in "over 12 months, why hasn't somebody sat us all down on that screen there and said this is what we want. You're all doing it differently but actually that's what we want" (FG3.p.66). By not engaging in formal supervision or the sharing of any best practice, staff work in isolation, uncertainty and risk the possibility of drift away from the principles and requirements of the framework.

Formal supervision provides an opportunity to maintain integrity, keep officer's knowledge and understanding up to date, share ideas and of course learn from each other. It is perhaps surprising that staff have not been provided with a formal supervision process. Instead they want help and guidance but this just appears unavailable: "I can't remember much of the last five years or whatever it is, that

somebody's come to me and said 'oh right introduce them to this piece of, or this support group, or that support group'... We don't get to hear that" (FG3.p.42). Without the opportunity to engage in a process of peer reflection or supervision participants feel that they have to "grope about in the dark" (FG3.p.76).

#### **4 Discussion**

This study examined the attitudes and experiences of 28 MOSOVO officers responsible for the risk management and community reintegration of people convicted of sexual offending, across four police areas in England and Wales and their use of the ARMS tool. Findings from the CATSO-R scale were interesting. While, it is commonly reported that the general public tend to hold more negative views of people with sexual convictions than professionals working with this group (Levenson et al., 2007, Levenson and Cotter, 2005, Tewksbury and Lees, 2006, Ferguson and Ireland, 2006), this study found MOSOVO officers to hold very negative views in terms of the dangerousness and need for 'sexual offenders' to be dealt with severely. Corroborating this finding three themes emerged from the IPA analysis, including: a) Principles and practices of the ARMS tool are incongruent with traditional policing; b) The negative values officers hold conflicts with a role that supports a process of reintegration; and c) Training and supervision is insufficient to equip MOSOVO's with the skills and knowledge needed. The potential for the ARMS tool to transform how MOSOVO officers engage with and support the management and reintegration process of those convicted of sexual offending is great. However, this study exposes a number of challenges faced by MOSOVO officers, including how their own personal values impact on practice, and how current policy in relation to training, support and supervision, is inadequate.

It is perhaps worth clarifying, that this study examined only a small element of the MOSOVO role. The skills, knowledge and experiences of MOSOVO officers in relation to their ability to respond to child safeguarding issues, working with other agencies, detection and prevention of crime etc. are not under examination here. Indeed, much of the extremely challenging and highly sensitive work in which officers engage with on a daily basis, was observed to be carried out with the upmost

professionalism and commitment. MOSOVO officers are to be commended for their enduring dedication, under challenging times, to the protection of the public and to bringing justice to those who need it. What is brought to light however is the change in practice for MOSOVO officers as a result of the implementation of the ARMS tool. This change requires officers to engage in a practice that is perhaps more akin to the work of probation officers, and in order for the police to ensure the implementation of the tool is a success; a number of areas of consideration are discussed here.

The purpose and aim of the ARMS tool is to assist MOSOVO officers to protect the public, reduce the likelihood of recidivism and foster the desistance process. One of the key sources of information MOSOVO officers have at their disposal are the client themselves; in particular during the ARMS interview and home visit. Indeed, much of the evidence needed to generate a robust, quality risk management plan can be gathered at this point. However, this interview unlike other police interviews requires particular personal and interpersonal characteristics that engender change.

Much work undertaken in the field of psychological offender treatment (Marshall et al., 2011), offender management (Burnett and McNeill, 2005) and ethical practice (Ward et al., 2007) provides us with a wealth of knowledge in relation to which practitioner approaches and styles are most effective when working with clients in the criminal justice system. While MOSOVO officers are of course not providing 'treatment' in a psychological or rehabilitation sense, they are working with clients in an effort to help stop offending, motivate change and help people to live more pro-social and productive lives. Therefore this literature provides some useful insight that might help MOSOVO officers develop more productive relationships with their clients.

Much of this seminal work developed by academics such as Bill Marshall, Tony Ward, Ruth Mann, Shadd Maruna, and Fergus McNeill all point to the notion of working collaboratively and respectfully with clients. Indeed, by adopting a style that is warm, empathetic, direct and rewarding (Marshall et al., 2011), is not only ethical in that it promotes a sense of dignity in the client (Ward and Connolly, 2008) but it provides a collaborative context that can be adopted as early as initial risk assessment phases of the relationship (Shingler and Mann, 2006). Such relationships therefore foster trust,

provide hope and model mutual respect for each other and fellow citizens; all of which are targets needed to help promote the desistance process and ultimately stop further offences; a key goal of the ARMS tool.

In one study by Marshall et al. (2002) which examined the characteristics needed to support the treatment goals of people with sexual convictions, they observed 'warmth' and 'empathy' to have a significant effect on treatment. In particular, aspects such as client's use of minimisation of their offending and denying responsibility were found to reduce when characteristics of warmth and empathy were displayed by the practitioner. Likewise when practitioners were 'rewarding' and 'directive' this notably reduced the client's use of victim blaming. These interpersonal skills when used by criminal justice practitioners are likely to be as effective within alternative correctional settings.

The literature around offender supervision also highlights some essential practice requirements and characteristics needed for a productive and effective relationship. In particular the need to instil hope is essential (Marshall et al., 2005). It is possible that by just engendering hope, all treatment gains can be positively affected. Therefore in a working relationship that aims to achieve goals that reduce the likelihood of recidivism, engendering hope must be an essential element to any interaction with clients convicted of sexual offending. This collaboration can start at the initial risk assessment phase (Mann and Shingler, 2001). Here it is most effective when the client has the process explained to them in plain neutral language (for example 'deviancy' or 'sexual fantasy' is replaced with 'sexual thoughts'), helped to understand the benefits of engagement and the need for commitment. The literature developed by McNeill (2009) details how offender recidivism can be reduced through enhancing the way how offender managers work with clients. For example being able to relate and engage in a process that espouses respect and genuine working alliance with the client are essential.

The literature also provides insight into the impact practitioner values can play on the professional relationship. In particular, the idea of human rights and punishment is an interesting perspective. For many, when a person commits an offence, particularly one as abhorrent as a sexual crime, they

believe the rights of the individual have been forfeited. Indeed, they believe their human worth, personal value, and agency, is so greatly reduced that existence within the community is a problem. When practitioners delivering rehabilitation interventions in a criminal justice context hold these beliefs, the boundaries between punishment and rehabilitation can become problematic (Ward and Salmon, 2009). People are viewed as dangerous, risky, and needing to be controlled and managed. Strategies in response are therefore ones that control, restrict and incapacitate people. Yet, human rights are intrinsically universal to us all (Laws and Ward, 2011), they offer a unique lens in which to view fellow human beings, even those who have committed offences against us, as equal and worthy of having access to opportunity and personal growth (Ward et al., 2007). By practitioners viewing clients as those we ought to *work with* rather than *work on*, can provide a more ethical approach to working with people with sexual convictions (Ward et al., 2007).

The findings in this present study, demonstrates that MOSOVO officers do not operate with the appropriate strengths based interpersonal skills, or values needed to foster a productive working relationship. Instead, officer's report trying to catch out their clients, not trusting or believing them, being unable to perceive them as equal citizens and ultimately presenting with emotional distance and even hostility. Attitudes that support the idea that all 'sex offenders' should be punished severely, as found in this sample, is an attitude this is likely to lead to risk management strategies that are wholly punitive which will result in clients disengaging (Ward and Laws, 2010). Indeed, the literature tells us that confrontational and hostile approaches usually prevent positive change (Marshall et al., 2003) and cause the client not only to disengage but learn to say what they think the professional wants them to say (Hudson, 2005), a response this cohort experienced.

Thus, when the purpose of the ARMS interview and tool is to develop a plan that mutually brings about the desistance of sexually abusive behaviours, the most effective type of approach ought to be adopted. In order for MOSOVO officers to do this however, a number of actions are needed. First, the attitudes and values officers hold about the clients they work with, need to align with strengths based risk management principles. This is not to say that they should disregard the notion of risk; this would clearly jeopardise the safety of others. However, by adopting a more ethical approach to their work

and viewing their clients as fellow humans just like them (Laws and Ward, 2011) they are more likely to work collaboratively to develop personal and approach goals, while considering clients wellbeing and opportunities in life. One of the ways officers might achieve this is through greater access to specialist training. Officers (as we all are) are vulnerable to some of the myths and stereotypes that are perpetuated in the media about sexual offending. Therefore, their knowledge must be constantly updated and should be routinely reminded of the evidence around recidivism rates and factors related to offending and desistance. To quality assure and support this process MOSOVO officers should also have access to regular formal supervision.

#### ***4.1 Limitations***

While this study is the first of its kind in relation to the examination of the ARMS tool in practice; there are of course a number of limitations. First to note are the methodological limitations. There are criticisms of the reliability of the CATSO-R measure (Tewksbury and Mustaine, 2013) and development of the tool remains ongoing (Harper and Hogue, 2015, Church et al., 2011). In addition, the qualitative element of the study uses focus groups which can be deemed as problematic, especially when gathering opinion on sensitive matters. While the researcher worked hard to ensure people felt comfortable and safe to discuss matters, it is possible that not everyone felt comfortable to do so. It is for this reason that follow on work is required to examine officer's experiences on a one to one.

#### ***4.2 Conclusion and implications for practice***

This study has highlighted a number of key areas that have serious implications for practitioners and clients using the ARMS tool. In short, without balanced application of assessment and management of strengths and risks, a holistic approach to risk management cannot be achieved. Without MOSOVO officer's adopting values and characteristics conducive to the principles of the ARMS tool, a climate of punishment and exclusion from the community will continue to be experienced by clients. The degree to which this has an impact on recidivism rates needs further examination. Likewise without the provision of formal support, supervision or meaningful training for MOSOVO officers, there is a risk that assessments and risk management plans might be inadequate, and do not meet the needs of clients and drift away from the underpinning principles of the ARMS tool.

Debate over whether MOSOVO officer should even engage in offender management is one that needs greater discussion and cannot be covered within the limitations of this paper. However, the police across England and Wales have implemented this risk and strengths based tool indicating organisational and strategic commitment for MOSOVO officers to engage in a practice of both offender management and rehabilitation. This practice however requires considerable management and supervisory resourcing. Officers must receive high quality, meaningful and ongoing training; they must be challenged when their values and attitudes contradict and compromise the principles of the AMRS tool; and it is essential that they receive formal supervision which will provide welfare, support their work, foster best practice, and enable a process of quality assurance to help develop professional and personal goals.

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