



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2015

I19 Critique of New Sex Offender Management in California: Assessment, Containment, and Treatment

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of the sociopolitical history predicated current sex offender evaluation, treatment, and supervision rationale in the state of California. Attendees will also gain a basic understanding of the “containment model,” the codified model for sex offender management in California since 2012, and the roles of therapists, law enforcement, and polygraph examiners within that model. Attendees will be able to: (1) assess the evidence for and against California’s model for sex offender management; (2) draw conclusions about the efficacy of the model; and, (3) consider what further information is needed to bolster the system’s ability to reduce sex offender recidivism, provide adequate supervision, facilitate safe community re-entry, and furnish ethical mental health care to the sex offender.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by: (1) generating ideas regarding areas where more research is needed with respect to sex offender risk assessment; and, (2) developing novel approaches to improve the current model in sex offender treatment, management, and community re-integration.

In 2008, a state-appointed task force evaluated California’s methods for management, treatment, and registration of sex offenders. This report, prepared jointly by the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the California Sex Offender Management Board, indicated areas for improvement in state management of sex offenders. Deficient areas cited were: (1) lack of specific accountability of government agencies with respect to assessing recidivism risk; (2) absence of data on recidivism of sex offenders within the state; (3) inadequate numbers of treatment providers for both incarcerated and non-incarcerated sex offenders; and, (4) no codified guidelines for either risk assessment or treatment of sex offenders. Following this report, Penal Code (Section 290-294) was amended, establishing the State-Authorized Risk Assessment Tool for Sex Offenders (SARATSO) Review and Training Committee.

The SARATSO committee’s function is to select risk assessment instruments to be employed by trained professionals to assess the individual risk of sex offenders with respect to re-offense. This information is meant to be provided to law enforcement and the judiciary in formulating appropriate sentencing, deciding upon post-incarceration supervision (parole or probation), recommending treatment programs, and evaluating the progress of the offender (via observation of assessment score patterns). The ideal assessment tool should reliably predict re-offense risk, accurately assess static and dynamic risk factors, and demonstrate good inter-rater reliability. Currently, the Static-99 and the Juvenile Sexual Offense Recidivism Risk Assessment Tool-II (JSORRAT-II) are the recommended assessment tools for adult male and juvenile male offenders, respectively.

A discussion of how the adult assessment tool scores impact treatment, placement, and community integration will be presented. A critical analysis of California’s sex offender management will be provided from the vantage point of the mental health care provider, and conclusions will be drawn regarding both the merits and potential deficiencies of the containment model within California. The goal will be to generate ideas regarding areas where more research is needed. In addition, with the goals of balancing community safety and providing the sex offender with effective mental health treatment, novel approaches to improve the current model will be posited.

Sex Offense, Recidivism, Risk Assessment