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Considering the alternatives to traditional Child Sexual Abuser risk management: Prevention?

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Risk management often involves a difficult balancing act between public protection, victim empathy, victim support as well as offender punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation; quite often one is achieved at the cost of others. This balancing act becomes compounded if you are dealing with a high profile offender population, like child sexual abusers and/or paedophiles, because you are dealing with many interested parties outside of the state-run criminal justice system who understandably want their voice heard and their opinions counted; which is appropriate and correct, however you factor into financial austerity, cuts in frontline services, an increase in reporting /recording crime, more people being sent to prison, more people being managed in the community and an increase in penal populism you can end up with the “perfect storm” of a crisis in risk management. Currently, in the UK, and in other western countries including Australia and USA, we are seeing this in regard to child sexual abuse with increasing offenders numbers of victims and offenders being identified and entering the system. The increase in reporting rates and therefore the identification of perpetrators, victims and the resulting financial impact of child sexual abuse is as a result of a number of distinct, but integrated factors, including;

- The impact of high profile celebrity, institutional and historical scandals, and cases of child sexual exploitation ([Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#); [Football Association scandal](#); [Jimmy Savile scandal](#))
- Increased reporting of sexual abuse by victims ([Crown Prosecution Service report](#); [NSPCC](#); [Office for National Statistics](#));
- Increased reporting, and awareness, of the diverse nature of contemporary sexual offending;
- Increased processing, prosecutions of sentencing of sexual offenses by the Crown Prosecution Service ([Crown Prosecution](#)



SAJRT Bloggers' Profile

Chief Blogger Kieran McCartan, Ph.D. and Associate Bloggers David S. Prescott, LICSW and Jon Brandt, MSW, LICSW are longtime members of ATSA. We are dedicated to furthering the causes of evidenced-based practice, understanding, and prevention in the field of sexual abuse.

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers is an international, multi-disciplinary organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse. Through research, education, and shared learning ATSA promotes evidence based practice, public policy and community strategies that lead to the effective assessment, treatment and management of individuals who have sexually abused or are risk to abuse.

The views expressed on this blog are of the bloggers and are not necessarily those of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment, or Sage Journals.

[Service report](#));

- Increased exposure to the topic though prolonged multi-media engagement and discussion;
- Increased risk adverse and restrictive criminal justice policies which require increased involvement from criminal justice agencies, as well as the associated costs (including, the sex offenders register; ViSOR; Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme).

(Please see these articles for a further discussion - [O'Sullivan, Hoggett, McCartan & Kemshall, 2016](#); [McCartan, 2014](#); [NSPCC, 2016](#); [Journal of Sexual Aggression Special edition 1](#))

Consequentially, how do we weather this storm? It is becoming more and more obvious that a change in tactics is needed; a balancing act of more effective/increased prosecutions, with more victim support, better risk management approaches and preventive strategies. Yesterday Chief Constable Simon Bailey, of the National Police Chiefs' Council, stated that the police cannot cope with the current influx of child sexual abuse investigations and that we have to look differently at how low-risk offenders are managed ([BBC NEWS](#)). While this may seem like a controversial statement on the outside it is not the first time that the police have said this regarding online sexual abuse and child sexual abuse imagery ([Jon Carr](#); [NSPCC](#); [National Crime Agency](#); [Journal of Sexual Aggression Special edition 2](#)). It is important to state that not all types of Child sexual Abusers are the same, not all pedophiles abuse and not all abusers are pedophiles; they are a diverse and individualistic group. We know that not all individuals who sexually abuse children, either through viewing imagery or a contact offence, are share same level of risk and that not all levels of risk get the same punitive and/or rehabilitative response from the state. In terms of low-risk offenders, who Simon Bailey was discussing, they will not receive a sex offender treatment programme or receive a full risk management plan or MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement) in the community. We are dealing with them differently in all other aspects so his argument is an extension of this. Additionally, in rethinking how we tackle low risk, and possibly medium risk, offenders it means that we can look to prevention as a viable means of intervention; can we identify these individuals earlier, through other means (i.e., through redirection from online sites [[Stop it now](#)], predictive analytics [current piece of research being carried out with Avon and Somerset police, Bristol City Council and the University of Western England] or encouraging people who are concerned about their behavior to come forward and seek support [[Safer Living Foundation](#); [Circles South West](#)]). Interestingly today the English government has decided to re-examine sex education and healthy relationships in primary and secondary schools ([BBC 01/03/2017](#)), which is a departure from their previous position ([BBC 11/02/2016](#))

It seems obvious that an alternative to our past practice is needed (and even police officers are now saying this publicly), we need to recognizing that rethinking sex offender risk management is an not an act of acceptance of offending, offenders or their lifestyles as appropriate, but rather its recognition of practicality, resource management and effective engagement. The ultimate question is whether we want them to do it again or not? And assuming the answer is no, what effective action can we take?

Effective risk management must comprise deterrence, sufficient and effective treatment for victims/survivors and offenders and crucially primary prevention activity including sex and relationships education in all schools, advice and information for parents, professionals and communities as a whole to ensure full engagement and a promotion of the understanding that we all have a role to play in child and public protection