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The Color of Money: How we fund sexual offense work

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One of the main challenges that professionals working in the broad field of sexual offending is funding; namely, how much there is and where you can get it! We have previously written about the challenges of identifying and truly knowing the extent of sexual offending that there is in society, and therefore the number of resources needed to respond to it both from a victim and perpetrator perspective. This complex mathematical, and very human, the problem has been made challenging of late as we have started to think about the prevention of first-time offending in the same breath as preventing re-offending. This means that we need to make a small pot of money go a lot further and do a lot more. But how can we achieve balance with this?

Quite often one hears from colleagues in the sexual abuse prevention, treatment, and activism fields that times are tough and that there is not enough money to go around to fund the services that they need to (not even close to what they want to) deliver. For all the political hyperbole around sexual offending and its impact on individuals as well as communities it is underfunded, and when push comes to shove it is always first in the queue when additional cuts need to be made. This is particularly relevant when you consider the scale of sexual abuse, between one in four and one in eight people being impacted by it at some point in their lives. Sexual abuse, therefore, is not a one-off offense that randomly strikes at small groups of society. With figures like this, sexual abuse is a pandemic with a potentially greater hit rate than COVID-19. This leaves us with a paradox: we know it's common and it traumatizes people with a long-lasting effect and yet we still do not fully fund efforts at preventing and treating it! It is important to state that we are not just talking about services for people convicted of sexual offending, although the punishment side of the equation is better funded than the rehabilitation side, but also victims of sexual offenses who have also had funding cuts, and services reduced. It is across the board!

So, what do we do about it? This is a challenge because we often hear that budgets are stagnant and that there can be no more investment. Often this is tied up with politics, governance, media discourses, and public mood, which means that asking for money at the right or wrong



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We are longtime members of ATSA 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.

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time can result in a feast or a famine. This is unsustainable and is often reversed later in the funding cycle or in the next funding cycle. We need a more sustained funding strategy rather than just a reactionary one. A more sustained funding strategy allows more innovation and positive adaptation, rather than cutting or squeezing existing budgets to do small, underfunded projects. So where does the “new” money come from to support ongoing work in, and develop innovative work in, sexual abuse?

One solution, as discussed by Wilson Wong in a piece about [defunding the police](#), is that we move and reallocate the existing pot of money to use it better. The argument here is that the best and most suitable organizations should be the ones that deliver the services and, in this instance, maybe the police are not the best ones to respond to, support, and manage those impacted by sexual offending. That work could instead be done by third party organizations and charities. In addition, it reinforces the broader move in the sexual abuse field at the minute to be more trauma-informed and service user lead. Following on from this, if we broaden our remit around sexual offending and continue to incorporate elements of health, public health, education, and local communities we can open more funding pots. With various organizations and statutory bodies funneling monies into a combined project then not only will we have more funding, but we will also have more buy-in and impact. Additionally, the way that broader society, both corporate and private, funds sexual abuse support/treatment organizations is important. If sexual offending is an epidemic, then where is the national fundraising drive or the equivalent corporate response? Sexual offending research and practice are not funded the same as cancer research, or HIV/AIDs research, but the impact that sexual offending has is the same.

We need to change the funding formula with respect to sexual offending, both in terms of victims and people who commit it, so that it's fit for purpose. So while the defund the police movement has thrown up a suggestion on how to tackle the funding challenge in sexual offense work maybe it's more “refund”, “change funding” than “defund”? Funding sexual offense work should not be a deficit, it should not be taking the funding away from other sources to support it, but rather should be a reallocation to make existing practices work better.