The Utility of Qualitative Methods in the Evaluation of Pharmacological Treatment for Convicted Male Sexual Offenders

Helen Elliott
Rebecca Lievesley
Belinda Winder
Christine Norman
Eloise Manby

Nottingham Trent University (SOCAMRU)
Nottinghamshire Offender Healthcare
HMP Whatton
Background

- Interventions with sex offenders in UK prisons are primarily psychological in nature, adopting a CBT approach.
- High levels of sexual preoccupation and hypersexuality in high risk offenders appears to interfere with engagement on psychological treatments, potentially resulting in poor outcome on programmes.
- Evidence suggests the potential for use of medical treatment in aiding the management and treatment of risk factors such as sexual preoccupation.
- This is important since sexual preoccupation (both in the offence chain and generally) is the most frequently occurring ‘strongly present’ risk factor in sex offenders (Hocken, Winder & Grayson, in prep).
Context

Her Majesty’s Prison Whatton

- 840 adult males convicted of a sexual offence
- Medication commenced in November 2009
- 99 referrals
  - Approximately 90% of these receive medication

- Medications used:
  - SSRI (Fluoxetine & Paroxetine)
  - Anti-androgen (Cyproterone acetate / Androcur)
  - GnRH agonist (Triptorelin)
The Evaluation

Mixed method evaluation

• Quantitative components to assess effects of medication on clinical measures of sexual preoccupation and hypersexuality and on psychometric measures of sexual deviance, sexual compulsivity, personality, anxiety & depression

• Qualitative component to explore in depth experiences of the medication
Service users

Qualitative research

Therapists

Offender Supervisors

SOCAMRU
Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit
Key Findings
### Key features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Medication</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service user studies</strong></td>
<td>To explore the use of anti-libidinals to reduce sexual preoccupation and/or hypersexuality in convicted sexual offenders</td>
<td>19 adult male sex offenders</td>
<td>Anti-androgens, SSRIs or combined</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Therapist study</strong></td>
<td>To explore the experiences of individuals involved in the referral of pharmacological treatment and those who work with sexual offenders receiving pharmacological treatment</td>
<td>8 intervention staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offender supervisor study</strong></td>
<td>To explore the perspectives and experiences of offender supervisors in relation to the pharmacological treatment</td>
<td>6 offender supervisors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key findings

- Reduced sexual preoccupation & arousal
- Improved impulse & emotional control
- Some noncompliance
- No prior knowledge of medication
- Concerns about effects & long term use
- Offenders’ concerns & insight
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of awareness about treatment & lack of support
- Concerns about throughcare
- Offenders’ reluctance to engage
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of awareness
- Excluded from treatment process
- Importance of throughcare
Implications
Service users had no prior knowledge of medication

Increase awareness for offenders

Lack of awareness among those outside psychology

Training for staff

Training / education

Improve information available on medication

Service users’ concerns about effects and long term use

Service users’ lack of insight

Perceived lack of support for those outside psychology
Concerns about throughcare

Collaboration for throughcare

Lack of feedback post referral

Collaboration

Training collaboratively

Improve feedback loop

Lack of communication between departments
Concerns about effects and long term use

Some non compliance

GP community study

Service user follow up study

Importance of throughcare

Reduced sexual preoccupation

Corroborated findings

x2 Offender manager community studies

Research

SOCAMRU
Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit
Conclusions

• Qualitative research helps us to understand the context of a treatment service and the experiences of the individuals who participate in the service

• Adds an additional dimension to quantitative elements of an evaluation through providing an understanding into the effectiveness of interventions more generally and at a deeper level

• This can reveal the need for change, in this instance:
  o The need for further education/awareness for prison staff and offenders regarding the medication
  o A change in the referrals process such that a feedback loop is set up for all referrals
  o A focus on collaboration between departments and the community
  o Further research exploring the transition and sustainability in the community