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Chapter Title	Do CoSA Work? A Review of the Literature	
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Abstract	Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) are growing in popularity on an international scale. To ensure that CoSA projects continue to grow in both success and public confidence, a solid research base is essential. The body of literature on the effectiveness of CoSA, particularly from Canada, US, UK and the Netherlands, is in fact growing. However, it has been argued that there is still not yet enough evidence to determine whether CoSA significantly reduces sexual recidivism by the Core Member (Elliott, Zajac, & Meyer, *Evaluability assessments of the circles of support and accountability (COSA) model: Cross site report*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Office Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, 2013). The following chapter includes an overview of this debate along with the key CoSA efficacy studies carried out to date. In addition, more qualitative explorations of the psychosocial implications of being involved are considered.	
Keywords (separated by " - ")	CoSA - Recidivism - Reoffending - Sex offenders	

3

Do CoSA Work? A Review of the Literature

Rosie Kitson-Boyce

To ensure that CoSA projects continue to grow in both success and public confidence on an international scale, a solid research base is essential. In addition, to inform best practice the factors involved in the success of CoSA need to be identified (Wilson, Bates, & Völlm, 2010). The following chapter focuses upon the growing body of efficacy research surrounding CoSA projects. This will include the key statistical evaluations of the effect of CoSA on recidivism, along with more qualitative explorations of the psychosocial implications of being involved.

Do CoSA Reduce Recidivism?

In 2005, Wilson, Picheca and Prinzo carried out the first evaluation of the CoSA pilot project in South-Central Ontario, Canada. The evaluation was split into two parts, with the second part (Wilson et al., 2005; Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007b) assessing specifically the rates of

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H. Elliott et al. (eds.), *Sexual Crime and Circles of Support and Accountability*, Sexual Crime, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74823-8_3

reoffending of those involved in CoSA compared to a matched sample of those who were not.

The reoffending comparison study consisted of two groups of offenders and an average follow up time of 4.5 years. The CoSA group consisted of 60 individuals previously convicted of a sexual crime, who had become involved in the CoSA project at the end of their sentence. The comparison sample involved 60 individuals also convicted of a sexual crime, who were released following completion of their prison sentence, but who did not participate in CoSA. In order to eliminate potential confounding variables influencing the findings, Wilson et al. (2005, 2007b) endeavoured to match the groups on release date, risk category (e.g. low, moderate, moderate-high, high) and prior involvement in sex offender treatment programmes. However, the CoSA group had a significantly higher risk of sexual recidivism than the comparison group (assessed using the RRASOR; Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offence Recidivism, Hanson, 1997), and a significantly higher average of number of victims. This resulted in a comparison group who would presumably therefore reoffend at a lower rate than the CoSA group. As the authors acknowledged, in order for the matching process to be exact, the two groups should not have differed in this way, with regard to risk. The deficiencies in the matching protocol of the two groups were argued to be a consequence of the resource difficulties the CoSA project faced. The limited services resulted in a selection bias whereby CoSA were allocated to those individuals most need, that is at the highest risk of reoffending.

Despite the higher risk profile of the CoSA group, however, the comparison group reoffended at a faster and higher rate than the CoSA group. It was reported that being a Core Member of CoSA resulted in a reduction in sexual recidivism when compared to individuals who were not in CoSA (5% sexual recidivism in the CoSA group vs. 16.7% sexual recidivism in comparison group), demonstrating that the comparison group reoffended at three times the rate of the CoSA group. There was also a 57% reduction in all types of violent recidivism; 15% violent (and sexual) recidivism in the CoSA group vs. 35% violent (and sexual) recidivism in the comparison group. Overall there was a reduction of 35% in all types of recidivism; 28.3% in the CoSA group vs. 43.4% in the comparison group. Alongside this, the three instances of sexual reoffending in

the CoSA group were described by Wilson et al. (2007b, p. 332) to be 'qualitatively less severe or invasive than the offence for which they had most recently served sentence'. Details were only given however, for one out of the three instances, whereby a Core Member, whose previous conviction was for rape, reoffended by making an obscene phone call. This shift from perpetration of a contact offence, to a non-contact offence is described within the literature as a harm reduction function of CoSA and therefore still viewed as a positive and encouraging finding (Wilson et al., 2005, 2007b, 2010). However, it is unknown as to whether this reduction in harm occurred for all three reoffences.

As CoSA projects spread throughout Canada, Wilson, Cortoni, and McWhinnie (2009) sought to replicate the findings of the pilot study evaluation (Wilson et al., 2005, 2007b), by examining whether CoSA continued to demonstrate efficacy in reducing recidivism. Using a similar methodology, 44 offenders, previously convicted for a sexual crime and who were involved in CoSA were matched, on general risk, time of and geographical location of release and prior participation in sex offender treatment programmes, to a comparison sample of 44 offenders who were not involved in CoSA. It is important to note here that in all cases of CoSA research, the voluntary nature of participating in CoSA may result in a self-selection bias. For example, CoSA may be found to be successful in reducing recidivism due to the Core Members already having made the decision to leave their life of crime behind. This cannot be proven however, due to authors such as Farrall (2002) arguing that early aspirations and motivations to change do not guarantee that desistance from crime will take place.

The risk between the CoSA and comparison group was determined, using the risk assessment tool STATIC-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 2000) and like the previous study a statistically significant difference was reported. In the case of these two samples however, it was the comparison group who produced the higher average risk scores. Similar to the previous study though, the results demonstrated that the reoffending rates for those in the CoSA group were significantly lower than for those in the comparison group. Specifically, when comparing the CoSA group to the matched comparison group, there was an 83% reduction in sexual recidivism (2.3% CoSA vs. 13.7% Comparison), a 73% reduction in all types

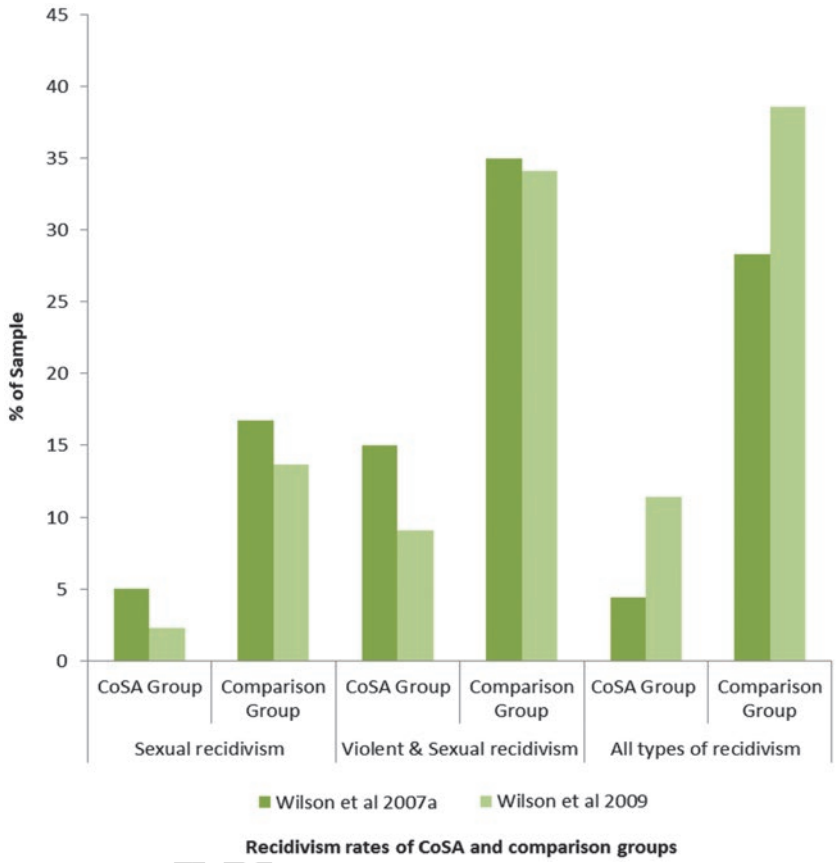

Fig. 3.1 Recidivism rates taken from Wilson et al. (2007a, 2009)

of violent recidivism (9.1% CoSA vs. 34.1% Comparison) and a 70% overall reduction in all types of recidivism (11.4% CoSA vs. 38.6% Comparison). The differences in recidivism rates are comparable to the previous study outlined as can be seen in the figure below (Fig. 3.1).

Despite using a shorter follow up period (3 years) than the 2005 study, Wilson et al. (2010) argue that the latter research supports the findings that CoSA are an effective rehabilitative and restorative initiative for high risk offenders who commit sexual offences. It is acknowledged however, that the lesser risk profile in the CoSA group, compared to the matched

offenders weakens the robustness of the findings (Wilson et al., 2009). In addition to this, Elliott, Zajac, and Meyer (2013) argued that if a Fisher's Exact Test had been used to analyse the results instead of the chi-square distribution test, as would be recommended due to the small number of recidivists, then a non-significant result would have been reported.

Alongside the above, Canadian research into CoSA has been criticised for providing limited information about the methods that were used to identify a suitable comparison group, and for basing their studies on small sample sizes (McCartan, Kemshall, Westwood, MacKenzie, & Pollard, 2014). Elliot and Zajac (2015) also make this argument, stating that in both studies, details of the methods used to match the groups for prior treatment was not described nor do the researchers explain why the control sample did not participate in CoSA. If the reason was that they were not suitable to participate, they may not have represented an adequate control sample due to confounding differences with the experimental group.

UK CoSA

Following the establishment of the CoSA pilot projects in the UK (for a detailed history of CoSA in the UK see Chap. 1), an evaluation of the first four years of the Thames Valley CoSA project was carried out by Bates, Saunders, and Wilson (2007). Different to the efficacy studies carried out in Canada, case files of the Core Members registered with CoSA between November 2002 and May 2006 (n = 16) were reviewed in the study. Although, as the authors acknowledged, the follow-up period (less than 4 years) was inadequate for a formal reconviction study, none of the Core Members involved in the CoSA reviewed were reconvicted of a sexual offence. This suggested that, as in the studies from other countries, involvement in CoSA may have reduced the likelihood of reoffending.

A detailed analysis found that one Core Member (6.3%) was convicted of a breach of a Sex Offence Prevention Order, four (25%) were recalled for breaching the conditions of their parole licence and five (31.3%) were reported to exhibit some form of recidivist behaviour. These outcomes, however, were still deemed as a success due to the fact

that early intervention was possible and no further victims were created (Wilson, McWhinnie, & Wilson, 2008). The authors went on to argue that breaches of parole and return to prison should not necessarily be regarded as a 'failure' due to the role that CoSA, and the volunteers involved, had played in gathering intelligence and passing on information to the relevant agencies, resulting in the prevention of further sexual abuse. Further to this, of the four recalled to prison, three retained contact with CoSA and returned as a Core Member for ongoing support on release. As Wilson et al. (2010) acknowledge, this provides clear evidence of the ability for the support and accountability elements of CoSA to co-exist alongside one another.

Another explanation for the results is that additional contact with ex-offenders through CoSA may inflate the detection of new offences (Elliott & Beech, 2012), meaning offence-related behaviour is being reported that would otherwise go undetected. Although CoSA in the UK has risk management alongside successful offender reintegration as its joint focus, it is argued that its ability to address recidivism is the sole attraction for support and funding of the initiative (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007). Some even go as far as to argue that initiatives such as CoSA are actually just a widening of the net of formal social control, under a disguise of reintegration or restoration (Hannem, 2011), a view that is contested by CoSA providers in the UK.

In 2012, Bates, Macrae, Williams and Webb were able to expand upon the above findings, focusing on the first 8 years of CoSA within the UK. Case files for the sample (n = 60) included information about each Core Member, since the beginning of their involvement with CoSA and during the follow-up period since. This included descriptive demographic information and outcome data (e.g. recall, reconviction, successful reintegration), which was examined and evaluated. These methods have been criticised however, due to a lack of objective measurement and an over-reliance on the researcher's judgement of the file information, making it difficult to ascertain whether the improvements reported were in fact due to taking part in CoSA (Elliott et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, 75% of the CoSA analysed were categorised as having a positive outcome, with any problematic behaviours demonstrated by the Core Members managed within the CoSA itself. Of the 25% deemed to

have not completed successfully, two Core Members had demonstrated behaviour that paralleled previous offending behaviour, resulting in Sex Offence Prevention Orders being made. Alongside this, one Core Member (1.6%) was reconvicted of a sexual offence and sentenced to 15 months imprisonment for downloading images of sexual abuse. Since the sexual reconviction was for an internet offence, as opposed to contact offending, the CoSA was still reported as making positive progress by the authors, through reducing the Core Member's risk of harm and the severity of his offending behaviour.

Although the studies discussed here go some way to demonstrating the efficacy of CoSA, the studies on this initiative have been criticised for the use of small sample sizes (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2013). Armstrong and Wills (2014b) explain how the lack of any large-scale research of reoffending post CoSA is attributable to the low base rate for sexual offending in the first place. For example, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2009) recently reported a sexual recidivism rate of 11.5%, which is comparatively low when comparing to recidivism rates for any new offence (33.2%). In addition, projects within the UK specifically face criticism due to the absence of a comparison group (Duwe, 2012). Bates et al. (2012) acknowledged this limitation to their research, which Hanvey, Philpot, and Wilson (2011) agreed with by stating that a comparison group matched to Core Members on as many variables as possible, in relation to the prediction of reoffending, is an ideal method to be used in CoSA efficacy studies.

In an attempt to overcome these criticisms Bates, Williams, Wilson, and Wilson (2014) carried out a larger comparison study on 71 of the 100 CoSA established in the South East of the UK since its commencement. Unlike previous efficacy studies of CoSA, this research involved a ten-year follow up period, which is considered by some to be a credible length from which to derive conclusions of effectiveness (Hanvey et al., 2011). The average time a Core Member was involved in CoSA was 15.9 months with the average follow up period being four years and four months. Behavioural outcomes of the Core Members, along with formal reconviction data were reviewed and compared to a group of 71 offenders, convicted of sexual offences who were referred to, but did not receive CoSA. Reasons for not receiving CoSA were lack of availability, lack of

motivation to engage or withdrawal after being assessed as suitable. Although both groups were matched as having broadly similar risk scores using the RM2000 risk assessment tool (Thornton et al., 2003) and therefore held similar projection rates of reoffending, the Core Members actually reoffended sexually or violently at a lower rate than those who were not involved with CoSA.

Out of the 71 Core Members involved in CoSA, 54 had not engaged in any criminal behaviour involving a legal sanction, since formally starting their CoSA. Of the 17 Core Members that did, three were identified as having nonsexual reconvictions, four obtained convictions for failing to comply with the Sex Offender's Register requirements and another four returned to prison due to violating the terms of their conditional release. In addition, two Core Members were convicted for violating the terms of their Sex Offence Prevention Order (SOPO). In one of these cases, this was following the CoSA reporting the violation to the police. Similarly, one Core Member was subject to a SOPO during his time on CoSA due to concerns about his behaviour. This arguably still demonstrates CoSA effectiveness, due to action being taken before any future victims were created. Finally, four sexual reconvictions were identified within the Core Members, one for a historical sexual offence and three for non-contact sexual offences. For two of the non-contact offences, previous offences had been for a contact sexual offence, therefore, similar to previous efficacy studies, a harm reduction effect was documented by the authors when compared to their original conviction.

Despite the above, in terms of actual versus expected re-offences (using the risk levels of the RM2000 tool), neither group reoffended sexually at a rate significantly different to that which was predicted (Elliott, 2014; Elliott & Zajac, 2015). In addition, Bates et al. (2014) included a '90 day rule' to the sample in their study, in order to ensure Core Members had sufficient time to have benefited from the CoSA process. The rule stipulated that only Core Members who had been with CoSA for a minimum of 90 days would be included in the study. This was based on the assumption that those who had spent less than 90 days in their CoSA would not have not have had sufficient time to have significantly benefited from their involvement.

Their rationale for the inclusion of this was stated as being due to the use of such a rule in prior Canadian studies. However, as Elliott and Zajac (2015) highlight, no reference of this is made in either of the Canadian studies that have been outlined earlier in this chapter. If such an exclusion criteria was used then one could question the extent to which the true effectiveness of CoSA are reported. This is due to the early stages of release from prison, being a particularly sensitive period in terms of desistance (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010), with reoffending expected to occur within the first few weeks (Elliott & Zajac, 2015). Indeed, the authors themselves reported how, during this 90 day period, five Core Members had been recalled to prison for breach of licence conditions and four withdrew from their CoSA; all of which were excluded under the 90 day rule. The use of a 90 day rule in CoSA efficacy research, such as Bates et al. (2014), therefore excludes data from a period during which there is a higher likelihood of CoSA failures and Core Member dropouts (Elliott & Zajac, 2015).

In conclusion Bates et al. (2014) highlight how a Core Member's lack of ability to refrain from reoffending may not relate entirely to the quality (or lack thereof) of support and accountability (Bates et al., 2014). Instead an individual's motivation to desist from offending or the opportunities available to them to access a balanced, self-determined lifestyle consistent with the theories outlined in Chap. 2 also need to be considered. In addition, although the length of follow-up and the use of a reasonable comparison group were comparable to the CoSA efficacy studies carried out in Canada, Bates et al. (2014) acknowledge that using a randomised clinical trial, or matched participants, would have been preferable.

The RCT Debate

The only study to date that has randomly assigned participants to either an experimental group (CoSA) or a control group (non-CoSA), was carried out by Duwe (2012) in the US. Duwe (2012) utilised a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) design by randomly assigning 62 men, previously convicted of sexual offences, to either an experimental group, whereby

they took part in CoSA, or a control group, where they did not. All of the participants involved in the study had previously been deemed suitable for the Minnesota CoSA programme and expressed interest in becoming involved, therefore controlling for offender motivation. As Elliott, Zajac, and Meyer (2013) point out, using this randomised procedure goes some way to resolving the issue of potential differences between CoSA and control group. The findings of the study were not however as positive as the previous mentioned results. There were no significant reductions in the reconviction or re-incarceration rates. However, a statistically significant reduction in re-arrest for any offence (38.7% CMs vs 64.5% controls) was reported, as well as a non-significant reduction in sexual recidivism over a 2 year follow up (0% CMs vs 3.2% control). The short follow up period of the study was held responsible for the lack of a statistically significant results (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2013).

The use of short follow up periods is a limitation consistent across CoSA research internationally (McCartan et al., 2014; Thomas, Thompson, & Karstedt, 2014; Wilson & McWhinnie, 2013). Cann, Falshaw, and Friendship (2004) reported from a reconviction study involving a 21 year follow up period, that individuals, convicted previously for sexual offences, were actually at risk of reoffending for many years after being released from prison. The sample consisted of 413 participants previously convicted of a sexual crime, 103 of whom reoffended sexually during the 21 years they were followed. Thus, using a 5-year follow up period, with the same individuals, may have missed over one third (36%) of new sexual re-offences, with one fifth of those who reoffended living offence-free lives for at least ten years before committing their first sexual re-offence. Although there are many limitations of using such a long follow up period, that is the research can become out-dated by the time of publication, it does provide evidence of individuals who have remained offence free for many years (see Cann et al., 2014 for more detail). This demonstrates that using a short follow up period similar to that of the CoSA research will not always provide an accurate picture of the true impact of CoSA on reconviction rates.

With regard to study design, the use of RCTs is often considered the 'gold standard' in evaluation research. However, it is not always a straightforward process when applying this design to those who commit sexual

offences. With regard to sex offender treatment Marques, Wiederanders, Day, Nelson, and van Ommeren (2005) conducted an RCT which uncovered some significant design issues, one in particular which is relevant to the use of an RCT in CoSA research. Participants in the treatment group all received exactly the same number of treatment sessions over the same length of time, in line with the requirements of an RCT design. No treatment effect was found within the study, possibly due to the fact that the treatment had been developed to be tailored to each individual and their needs, in order to be effective (Marshall & Marshall, 2007). Indeed, desistance is both an individualised and subjective process (McNeill, 2009) meaning that one-size-fits-all interventions will not always work. CoSA therefore, works with the Core Member on an individual basis and offers support that is specific to their needs. A strict RCT design may change the length and content of the CoSA sessions, reducing the individualised nature and therefore undermining the potential effectiveness.

In addition to design issues, Marshall and Marshall (2007) argue that RCTs are unethical, when used with individuals who have committed sexual offences, due to the control group being denied access to a programme or treatment. In the case of CoSA, whereby those participating are at a high risk of reoffending sexually and are due for release in to the community, the use of RCTs becomes an ethically questionable concept (Lussier & Gress, 2014). Hanvey et al. (2011) highlight the ethical issues surrounding the use of RCTs to demonstrate CoSA effectiveness, stating that the use of a control group denies individuals at risk of committing further sexual crime a place on a supportive initiative that has already been shown to reduce risk of reoffending. Duwe (2012) countered this criticism of his study however, by explaining that the use of an RCT design did not result in any individual being denied involvement in CoSA purely for the benefit of the research. Instead, he stated, that the number of individuals, willing and able to take part in CoSA, exceeded the number of volunteers and therefore CoSA available. One could still question however, whether it is ethical to engage in discussions with individuals regarding motivation and willingness to engage in CoSA, in the knowledge that places will not be available for everyone.

In summary, despite a growing body of literature regarding CoSA efficacy, critics have argued that there is not yet enough evidence to suggest whether or not CoSA significantly reduces sexual recidivism by the Core Member, with existing research varying in quality and involving a lack of statistically significant results (Elliott et al., 2013). In part, due to some of these limitations of the quantitative data, calls have been made for further qualitative evaluations in order to explore the factors contributing to the success of CoSA at a deeper level (McWhinnie, 2015). These will now be discussed in the following sections.

How Effective Are CoSA in Preventing Social Isolation

In addition to considering the impact on recidivism rates, Wilson et al. (2007a), explored Core Members' experiences of being involved in CoSA and their motivations for participating. In line with the criteria for being selected as a Core Member, 83% of the participants reported that having no other form of social support was the main reason for deciding to take part in CoSA. Using a different sample to the recidivism study, over half of the twenty-four male offenders who had been convicted of a sexual offence and were current or past Core Members, stated that negative community reaction to their release was also a motivating factor for becoming involved in CoSA. Worryingly, the study demonstrated the difficulties the Core Members would have had in adjusting to the community without being involved in CoSA, with the majority stating they would have felt lonely, isolated and powerless. This is particularly concerning given that isolation and emotional loneliness are significant risk factors in sexual recidivist behaviours (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Marshall, 2010) and indeed approximately two-thirds of the participants reported they thought they would have returned to crime without CoSA.

Being involved with the CoSA however, helped to combat this social isolation and loneliness with 92% of the Core Members stating they experienced a sense of support and acceptance when they first joined, that they would have tried anything to help them reintegrate back in

society, and expressing relief and gratitude for having a Core Member place made available to them. These psychosocial outcomes are important to consider due to a recognition within the literature that isolation and emotional loneliness can be factors significant in sexual recidivist behaviours (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Marshall, 2010). With its focus on support, however, CoSA provides a meaningful sense of belonging and inclusion helping to counteract the social isolation and feelings of loneliness and rejection that are argued to be associated with sexual reoffending (Wilson et al., 2009).

Developing this body of research Fox (2015a) conducted the first qualitative study in the US in order to explore the relationships formed between the Core Members and volunteers. Fox collected interview data from a sample that included both Core Members (n = 20) and volunteers (n = 57) from the CoSA project in Vermont, US. No established qualitative method was reported as being used to analyse the data, however details were given to suggest a form of thematic analysis was undertaken (Elliott & Zajac, 2015). It is also important to note that Vermont provides CoSA for individuals with a wider criminal history than just sexual offences, for example, high risk offenders, who have committed homicide (Fox, 2015b). All offence types were included in the research making it problematic when generalising the results to other CoSA projects who only include individuals convicted of at least one sexual offence.

From the results, Fox (2015a) reported how involvement in CoSA could help mitigate the isolation felt by many of the Core Members on their release from prison. In addition, they stated that CoSA created a space for the Core Members to practice and rehearse ordinary, pro-social relationships with members of the community and help support them in their ability to sustain pro-social healthy relationships. Although the Core Members reported motivation to desist from reoffending, they also explained how they felt excluded and labelled by the community due to their crimes. This is an issue that is very current in the literature, due to the barriers this ostracisation causes to successful reintegration (Mingus & Burchfield, 2012; Tewksbury, 2012). This is discussed at length within Chap. 6 of this book where the media and societal views are explored. Fox (2015a) reported that the volunteers were combatting these feelings of exclusion through the inclusion of the Core Members. This created a

sense of belonging for the Core Members, which Weaver and McNeill (2015) highlighted as being necessary for successful desistance from crime to take place. They reported from their research that social relations characterised this solidarity, supported the individual to realise their aspirations, in the case of CoSA achieving a crime-free life, without feeling dependant. Following this, further research is now required to explore further the context of the social bonds formed through CoSA, in relation specifically to the role they play in supporting the Core Member reach desistance from sexual offending (Fox, 2015a).

In summary, the qualitative nature of this research, particularly given the previous criticisms of the quantitative studies of CoSA, helps to inform best practice of CoSA by identifying the factors involved in their success, something that Wilson et al. (2015) argue is critical. It is not without its criticisms, however, with the research outlined above involving small, unrepresentative samples. As Fox (2015a) argues however, rather than determining the effect on recidivism, qualitative studies such as these provide an in-depth exploration in to a given topic that is the impact CoSA has on reduction social isolation in those who commit sexual offences.

Can CoSA Improve Psychological Wellbeing

Alongside research exploring the role of CoSA in the reduction of social isolation and loneliness, other psychosocial benefits, such as the impact of CoSA on the Core Member's psychological wellbeing, are also considered within the literature. Bates, Macrae, Williams, and Webb (2012) study sought to address the impact of CoSA on the life of a Core Member and the benefits of being involved. From their findings, it was reported that 70% resulted in an improvement in the Core Members' emotional wellbeing, due to their involvement with volunteers with whom they could relate and share issues with, thus reducing their emotional loneliness and social isolation. Nearly 50% of Core Members had improved links with their families, had increased their support networks, and were encouraged to access employment and education. Alongside this, 61% had displayed attitudes and behaviours that were pro-social and 50% had

increased their engagement in age-appropriate relationships. This is of particular significance due to the fact that the majority of Core Members had been convicted previously of sexual crimes involving child victims (48/60).

Similarly in 2012, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a small independent study of the NOMS-funded CoSA pilot studies in order to understand the added support and value CoSA provides. Although no face-to-face data collection took place, file reviews of 32 Core Members revealed that the CoSA pilots had provided both practical and emotional support to the Core Members. In addition, the Core Members were able to successfully identify, develop and take part in prosocial activities and networks, such as safe leisure activities, volunteering, education courses and going to church (McCartan et al., 2014). Alongside this, 21/32 Core Members had been recorded as reporting positive changes in their motivations and attitudes after being involved with CoSA. These included increased coping skills, a reduction in anger, greater insight into offending and the development of coping strategies. Unlike previous studies, negative or mixed reports of CoSA were also documented. These included the Core Member having a lack of engagement, openness and honesty along with a reluctance to engage with the relapse prevention plan and manage their risk. Whilst it is essential to include all aspects of a CoSA project in order to make future improvements, the study did not document what the result of these negative cases were, for example whether the Core Member was recalled to prison or dropped out of the CoSA early (see Chap. 5 for more detail on this issue).

In 2013, Höing, Bogaerts, and Vogelvang (2013) conducted interviews with Core Members on Dutch (n = 10) and UK (n = 4) CoSA. A temporal card-sorting task (see Höing et al., 2013 for details on the exact procedure) was also administered in the Dutch CoSA with six of the Core Members, to further explore the categories and concepts derived from the interviews. Core Member progress was represented by less rumination and stress, more active problem solving behaviour and improved social and relationship skills. Some of the Core Members developed a more positive outlook on the future and their ability to live a 'normal' life. This finding in particular is significant due to the links made between hope and desistance. For example, LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, and Bushway

(2008) reported from their research with repeat offenders that a belief in one's ability to leave crime behind, along with a sense of hope, is a necessary condition for an individual to be able to desist from crime. Höing et al. (2013) also reported some of the difficulties faced by Core Members during their Circle, something that has been arguably missing from the early CoSA research generally (Elliott, 2014). Some of the Core Members had difficulties with open communication, especially at the beginning of their CoSA and the volunteer interviews in particular reported some Core Members' behaviour as secretive, avoidant and even manipulative.

From their findings, Höing et al. (2013) argued that in order to be effective in supporting the Core Member to successfully desist from sexual crime, CoSA must be inclusive; defined by trust, openness, belonging, equality and acceptance. These qualities support the internal motivation to change within the Core Member and provide a safe place for the new pro-social identity to be developed. Further evidence for this can be taken from Weaver and McNeill's (2015) research involving repeat offenders and the exploration of social relationships. They argued that it was the sense of belonging, and social bonds, such as that Höing et al. (2013) highlighted within the CoSA they examined, that can encourage change within an individual and a shift towards desistance. In relation to the potential impact of social bonds being formed within CoSA, further research could consider how many of the Core Members displaying difficult communication behaviour or who withdraw from the process, are part of an inclusive CoSA. This would explore further the relationship between social bonds within the CoSA and it's 'success'.

To explore further the contribution of CoSA in the desistance process of the Core Members, Höing et al. (2015) collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Contrary to the other countries discussed so far, Core Members in this Netherlands CoSA project had to have completed, or currently be engaging in, a sex offender treatment programme (SOTP) before being accepted onto CoSA. Data collection took place at three different time points during the Core Members' CoSA journey and involved both interviews and questionnaires being administered ($n = 17$). The qualitative analysis discussed the internal and external transitions deemed to be necessary in order to reach successful desistance from crime (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). After six months of being involved with CoSA, Core Members reported cognitive, internal transitions such as improvements in

openness, self-reflection and assertiveness, along with the development of self-regulation and social skills. With regard to external transitions, little change was reported at the six month point, although two Core Members had begun to develop more appropriate leisure activities. In addition, some Core Members reported feelings of stress which they attributed to volunteers being too demanding or demonstrating excluding behaviour.

By the 12-month time point Höing et al. (2015) reported a continuation of the positive changes in interpersonal skills, which they state coincided with increased self-confidence or a more positive self-image. Increased problem-solving skills were identified as the most prominent positive change from the Core Member interviews. External changes had also taken place by this point for some Core Members, with reports of improvements in existing relationships or the extension of social networks outside CoSA. Interestingly the quantitative data highlighted no improvement in the Core Members with regard to participation in society and the size of their own network. This leads to the question therefore, of how successful the CoSA had been, in terms of reintegrating the Core Member back in to the community and becoming a fully functioning member of society. In order to explore the impact of the low rate of external transitions reported by the Core Members, further research would be required over longer periods, which the authors highlight in their conclusions. Overall, the study demonstrates the positive impact being part of CoSA has for the Core Member with regard to making steps towards successful desistance.

In summary, the research appears to identify CoSA as having a positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of Core Members, resulting in substantial internal transitions towards a crime-free life. Although Core Members appear, through the support of the CoSA, to be progressing towards desistance, further research after the CoSA journey has ended, would help to determine whether this was in fact reached.

How Do CoSA Impact on the Volunteers?

Whilst efficacy research has mostly focused on the Core Members involved in CoSA, such projects would not exist or survive without members of the community volunteering their time to work with them (Bates

et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2010). It has been argued that gaining a deeper understanding of how volunteers engage the Core Members so effectively is essential (Bates et al., 2014).

The use of volunteers has also been described as the strength of CoSA, allowing Core Members to feel part of the community by having contact with 'real people' other than just professionals (Armstrong & Wills, 2014a). Indeed, the importance of using volunteers has been highlighted many times by Core Members too who believe the success of CoSA is down to involving members of the community who want to spend time with them and support them and are not being paid to do so (Hanvey et al., 2011). Despite this, until recently, very little research has focused upon the direct impact participating in CoSA has on the volunteers.

Höing et al. (2015) have considered this area in detail however, focusing on a sample of 40 active volunteers on Dutch CoSA. Using a quantitative research design, volunteers were asked to complete a web based questionnaire, which explored the positive and negative aspects of being involved with CoSA. Several measures were used to examine outcomes in volunteers' satisfaction, mental wellbeing, social capital, job demands, self-esteem, external job resources and volunteer connectedness. Similar AU4 to Wilson et al. (2007) the findings demonstrated that volunteers' main motivation for participating in CoSA was community improvement, through the reintegration of the Core Member and prevention of further sexual reoffending. This provides evidence in support of CoSA as a restorative justice initiative, a concept which is debated within the literature (see McAlinden, 2011 for more detail).

Restorative justice initiatives aim to engage offenders in order to help them appreciate the consequences of their actions, seek reconciliation between the victim and offender, where possible, and reintegrate them back within the community (McAlinden, 2005). In CoSA, the victim is not involved directly, as is usually the case in other restorative initiatives. Despite this, it is argued that the volunteers, and therefore community's, involvement, means CoSA can be understood as a restorative intervention (see Chap. 2). This is through their disapproval of offending, encouragement of prosocial behaviour and ability to hold perpetrators of sexual crime to account (McCartan et al., 2014). In addition, victim reparation can be worked towards through the healing of fractured communities, achieved by holding offenders accountable for their offending and reas-

serting shared community norm (Ward, Fox, & Garber, 2014). Volunteer-led initiatives, such as CoSA, empower the community to take responsibility for their own protection and participate in decisions about the reintegration of offenders (Bazemore & Erbe, 2004; McAlinden, 2005); behaviour, which Höing et al. (2015) reported to be satisfying with positive effects on the volunteers' mental wellbeing.

An increase in social awareness as a result of volunteering for CoSA, was also documented within the findings, with low levels of burnout or secondary traumatic stress. The finding of increased connectedness, however, was reported as both a benefit and a risk to volunteers. Höing et al. (2015) explained how an increase in connectedness can potentially blur the boundaries, between the volunteers and Core Member involved, resulting in observations of risk being biased in favour of the Core Members. Although acknowledging that the dual role of connectedness and vigilance is a complex issue, they believe that this issue can be overcome through expert supervision of the volunteers by an experienced coordinator. Supervision of this nature, they argue, can ensure observations of risk are still recognised alongside support being given. Although the authors acknowledge that further research is required, the findings highlight to CoSA providers, the benefits of volunteering on a project and the importance of the role of the coordinator with regard specifically to the supervision they offer.

CoSA through the Eyes of the Public

Despite the seemingly positive benefits of CoSA for both Core Members and volunteers, it has been argued within the literature that, rather than whether society can resettle offenders on release from prison, it is more a question of whether it really wants to (Maguire & Raynor, 2006). This is even more relevant for those convicted of sexual offences who despite consistent support from CoSA volunteers may still be faced with the stigmatization that is so prevalent society today (Tewksbury, 2012). Indeed, Northcutt Bohmert, Duwe, and Hipple (2016) reported, from their research focusing on the Minnesota CoSA programme in the US, that despite the support received some Core Members' were still unable to overcome the structural barriers to reintegration. Although only a small

sample was used (n = 10 Core members) making generalisations to other CoSA projects difficult, the barriers to reintegration, which left them feeling stigmatised, were too great for some and resulted in a violation of their supervision.

To explore this area further Richards and McCartan (2017) have taken a different approach to the evaluation of CoSA, through the consideration of public perceptions of CoSA and their perceived effectiveness. As they argue, this is an important area of research to consider, due to the fact that CoSA projects rely upon volunteers from the local community, therefore deeming at least some community support necessary. In addition, they acknowledge that public policy on community safety is swayed by public opinion, meaning that informing the government of the publics' views on CoSA may encourage more resources to be channelled towards the initiative. Richards and McCartan's sample consisted of individuals (n = 768) who had posted on four online social media sources, in response to the stories relating to the introduction of CoSA in Adelaide, Australia. As Richards and McCartan (2017) acknowledge, data collected from English language social media sources do not have the same representativeness expected from random samples and can result in exclusion of, for example, those who are illiterate in using online technologies or who are non-English speaking.

The results demonstrated that the majority of the individuals who had posted a comment online regarding the subject opposed the introduction of CoSA in the community. The two main reasons given for this opposition were first, a belief that the perpetrators of sexual crime did not deserve and therefore should not receive government funding. It was believed, that the resources should be spent on the victims of sexual offences instead. Second, there was a perception held, that those who offend sexually against children could not be rehabilitated and thus programs or initiatives that support this would be ineffective and a waste of resources. Some people stated that CoSA providers and supporters were 'idealistic', 'naïve' and 'do gooders' (Richards & McCartan, 2017, p. 8).

These negative views towards those who commit sexual offences are in line with the wider literature. For example, Brown, Deakin and Spencer (2008) conducted a large-scale study (n = 979) examining how individuals perceive those who commit sexual offences in the UK. From their findings, they reported that although there was a general acceptance that

these individuals would return to the community, their risk of reoffending was significantly overestimated resulting in feelings of fear, anger and anxiousness. Similar to the Richards and McCartan (2017) study, a high level of pessimism was expressed in relation to the ability for those who commit sexual offences to be rehabilitated, with a particular concern regarding such individuals living within close proximity to them. Similar results were found in Northern Ireland (2007) with individuals, interestingly in relation to the potential for effective CoSA, unwilling to recognise the role of the community in helping those who have previously been convicted of sexual offences to reintegrate successfully.

Although few and far between, Richards and McCartan's (2017) study a small amount did resist the dominant view, expressing support for CoSA due to its potential to help prevent further sexual victimisation and therefore prevent future victims. The views were overall, however, heavily weighted towards the negative with the majority opposing the establishment of CoSA in their community. These negative perceptions held towards those who commit sexual offences can have a detrimental impact on their successful reintegration back in to the community in terms of, for example stigmatisation and the denial of suitable housing or employment opportunities (Tewksbury, 2012). It can be argued therefore, the effectiveness of CoSA may be restricted whilst public perceptions of CoSA projects, and those who commit sexual offences, remain as they are. Richards and McCartan (2017) acknowledge that due to these ingrained community attitudes, simply providing further information regarding the topic is unlikely to be effective in promoting positive change. They do suggest however, that community education may be more effective if delivered by the volunteers themselves who are involved in the CoSA projects; an area that is yet to be investigated. This is something that is further discussed in Chap. 6 of this book.

General Discussion; Do CoSA Work?

In conclusion, the literature to date demonstrates promising and encouraging evidence of the effectiveness of CoSA with clear psychosocial benefits for the Core Members. For the Core Members, a reduction in social isolation and loneliness along with an improvement in psychological

wellbeing have been reported, both of which have positive effects on the likelihood of achieving a crime-free life as is discussed above. The volunteers also appear to benefit from their involvement in CoSA, although more research is required to confirm this.

Despite these results, the initiative cannot yet be considered evidence-based due to a lack of high-quality, experimental evaluations that clearly illustrate a reduction in reoffending rates when compared to a control group (Elliott & Zajac, 2015). More controversially, Elliott (2014) has stated that the intense *wanting* of CoSA to be successful has resulted in an evidence base vulnerable to many valid and grave criticisms, which in turn may damage the initiatives credibility. Indeed, there is very little independent evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of CoSA.

Despite the mixed views of CoSA both within the literature, and from the public, there seems to be a general consensus that researchers and practitioners should remain optimistic and continue to develop a research base that involves a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of CoSA projects (Elliott & Zajac, 2015). There have been arguments that efforts to achieve this should now be focused towards qualitative evaluations, due to the limitations to collecting ethically and statistically sound quantitative data from those who have offended sexually (McWhinnie, 2015). The following chapters will report on some of the most recent attempts at the qualitative evaluation of CoSA.

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