

# **Resist not Desist**

**A retrospective exploration of viable prevention strategies - helping individuals to avoid committing their first sexual offence against a child**

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# Context

## HMP Whatton

- One of the largest sex offender prisons in Europe (approx. 840)

## Safer Living Foundation (SLF)

- Registered UK charity
- Collaboration between NTU, HMP Whatton, Police and Probation
- Rehabilitative initiatives to prevent sexual offending and reduce victims
  - E.g. Prison-based Circles of Support and Accountability



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# A Little Background...

## Rates of child sexual abuse

- **Police recorded 47,008 sexual offences against children in the UK in 2014/15** (*Bentley et al., 2016*)
- **Research estimates one in 20 children have been sexually abused in the UK** (*Radford et al., 2011*)
- **5% of men are sexually attracted to children** (*Seto, 2008*)

## Underreported

- **Surveys have found as many as 50% of cases of child sexual abuse are unreported** (*Horn et al., 2015; Radford et al., 2016*)

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# A Little Background Cont...

## The gap – when does a thought become a behaviour?

- **Stop it Now:** 13.5% of calls from adults concerned about their own sexual thoughts/behavior had not committed any offence (*self-reported; Brown et al., 2014*)
- **Prevention Project Dunkelfeld:** Nearly half of the 358 participants interviewed had never had sexual contact with a minor (*Self-reported; Beier et al., 2009*)
- **Research estimates a time frame of almost a decade between onset of sexual fantasies and the time of the first arrest** (*Piché, et al., 2016*)
- **Having a sexual attraction to children does not mean a person will offend against children**

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# The Current Situation in the UK

## Reactive not proactive

- Criminal Justice System offer treatment only after an offence has occurred.
- Only for those known to the authorities / CJS.



## Preventative initiatives

- **Stop it Now** - free, anonymous helpline providing information, advice, and guidance to anyone concerned about child sexual abuse.
- Currently no free community treatment available for individuals who are concerned about their sexual thoughts and/or about sexually offending.

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# The Current Study's Aims

To explore in a sample of convicted sexual offenders...

1. The experience of living with offence related sexual thoughts in the community
2. Help seeking behaviour prior to offending
3. What may have helped participants to resist offending
4. Thoughts on a proposed community prevention scheme

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# Methodology

## Participants

- Convicted adult male sexual offenders
- Mean age 48 (SD = 7.72; 31 - 57)
- White British
- n = 17

## Index Offence

- 10 participants committed sexual offences; 6 violent & sexual; 1 violent
- 10 participants committed child sexual offences; 7 adult
- Of the sexual offences, 14 were contact

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# Methodology

## Data collection

- Semi-structured interviews
- 1-2 interviews per participant

## Analysis

- Thematic analysis

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# Results

## Five broad themes emerged

1. Living with offence related thoughts
2. Inadequate help
3. “I wanted to be caught”
4. Fear of Help
5. The service

I felt dirty

I felt disgusted

I have thoughts of  
going out and  
abusing someone

I thought they would just  
blow out of  
there and that they'd go  
away and they never  
really did and they're still  
kind of there

I thought it was,  
just a phase that  
everybody goes  
through

...explode

I done everything to try  
and get the thoughts out  
of my head

...decide, trying to  
trying to decide  
... I should reveal all  
these things

...remains in your  
head

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## 2. Inadequate Help

**This theme summarises the outcome for participants who actively sought help (n=8) and the restrictive factors for those that did not seek help for their sexual thoughts prior to coming to prison.**

- Participants sought help in different ways – police; drop in centre; parents; doctor (GP); psychologist; Hospital; Counsellor; Spouse.
- Some participants were not offered any support.
- Others were offered inadequate support, e.g. assessment with no treatment.
- Fed into helplessness and lack of trust.

## 2. Inadequate Help

“so we sat down, started explaining what these fantasies were like the impact that was having on me life and the fact that I’d get more stressed. Anxiety. Debt. You know those were all triggers. And again she says **I’m sorry Mr Nathan, but until you commit an offence there’s nothing we can do**”

“All that happened was it was an **assessment** [by psychiatrist]. There was no treatment...More time went by, still events were happening, I was still having these thoughts.”

“to have people basically, especially the experts not take it any further I thought then, they can’t believe me. You know, and **do I actually have to do something to prove that I need, I need help.**  
And it wasn’t long after that, that the attack on the [victim] happened.”

Nathan

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## 2. Inadequate Help

"I went in [drop in centre] and asked if I could speak to somebody.. and one.. I spoke to this female, can't remember what her name was but went into a little room told her all about the thoughts and feelings I was having and then she turned round and said **what do you want me to do..** and I went well that's a lot of help"

"I felt that you know if there's no help for me then **I just might as well carry on** you know just go that next step and... and that was the.. that was the start of the downfall really."

## 2. Inadequate Help

"I kept going to me doctor umm and I told him when I was grooming and I even told me mum.. and me mum told me dad and **me dad beat me up for it** and so I ended up leaving home"

Kyle

"I feel like if at that point if **early on I'd been able to go to someone and say look I got these feelings, I got these problematic attractions. Help me. Then, I feel like I wouldn't of ended up going down the paths I did subsequently"**

Samuel

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# 3. “I wanted to be caught”

- Lack of resources or abilities to face life's challenges
- Avoiding issues, trying to ignore them
  - Build up of problems, increased negative mood states e.g. anxiety
- Wanting to stop offending/thoughts but not having the ability to
- Led to a desire to be caught
- Incarceration a more attractive option
  - Removes responsibility
- Desperation to be caught in order stop victimising
- Relief upon arrest

### 3. “I wanted to be caught”

“I wish I had been caught at that time, it would’ve stopped a lot of more abuse going on”

Brad

“so when I got when I got caught it was just overwhelm overwhelming thing thank Christ I didn’t do anything”

Rick

“er that’s I think where my problems begin whereas when I’m confined in prison it’s easier, I don’t have to worry about bills or problems or looking after me children you know it’s basically running away from life’s problems”

Robert

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### 3. “I wanted to be caught”

“I went to the police meself and handed meself in and realised what I’d done is hurt people I’d hurt her.. and that’s when I.. I ended up in here so I tried asking for help and nobody would help me and that was the only way I could do it”

Kyle

“yeah I wanted to get caught, many times. And I wanted it to stop but, um I wasn’t willing or able to um I didn’t have the strength or um I was frightened as well of the consequences”

Rick

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# 4. Fear of Help

- Fear of the consequences of seeking help
- Fear of the authorities and prison, mistrust
- Taboo – sex offender label

## 4. Fear of Help

"I really need to try get some help in this but thinking back to what this counsellor had said if I did do that it'd go and tell someone that I was doing it and I needed help and the first thing that would be happening was that **I'd be arrested for the very thing I was trying to get help for**"

Rick

"I had it in my head, that if I told people what I was actually thinking that, **they would ostracise me**, they would **call me names**, you know, uh I'd be **locked up in a mental institution**...So that's why I kept things to myself."

Nathan

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# 5. The Service

## Issues of confidentiality & disclosure

*"the biggest worry that most people have is.. if they ask for help.. what is the ripple effect of that. are they gunna.. be **stigmatised** for it are they gunna end up in **prison**.. is there life going to be **ruined** you know" - John*

## 1 to 1 vs. Group Sessions

*"me if your outside and you got all this stuff and you wanna talk to someone you aint wanna do it **I wouldn't of done it group environment** I would've want to talk some one to one with somebody first" - Rick*

## 7 Day Service

*"9 times out of 10 that's when I reoffended [the weekend]" - Adam*

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# Implications & Conclusions



- There are convicted offenders who spent much of their time struggling with thoughts and not offending
- Many experiences of failed help-seeking
- Need for community intervention
- Clear advertising - who can be helped, issues surrounding confidentiality and disclosure
- Sensitivity around group work
- 7 day service – helpline

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