

Understandings, Implications and Alternative Approaches to the Use of the Sex Offenders Register in the UK

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Summary: This paper reviews the current position in relation to sex offender registration and community notification in England and Wales. It reports on data collected as part of a wider research project evaluating law enforcement perspectives related to sex offender registration and notification and the management of sex offenders in the community. In examining law enforcement perceptions, it discusses issues that have been raised related to information sharing and the efficacy of such schemes. The authors also consider how the sex offenders register and Child Disclosure Scheme could be used more effectively in the future. Given that a similar child disclosure scheme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2016, issues that practitioners in that jurisdiction may find it useful to consider are highlighted.

Keywords: Multi-agency working, sex offender registration, Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme, police perceptions of registration, VISOR, information sharing.

Introduction

In the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition of the extent of sexual violence globally (World Health Organization, 2014). This recognition is linked to increased investment in sexual violence education, an increase in the reporting of historical cases, the growing recognition that anyone can be a victim or perpetrator, and an increased media profile for sexual violence cases, particularly in the anglophone countries (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2016). Currently there are 49,322 registered sex

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offenders (RSOs) in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2016). There are 1465 RSOs in Northern Ireland (PPANI, 2016). The UK¹ has a number of approaches to managing sex offenders in the community, including the use of ‘public protection sentences’, central to which is the sex offenders register and the development and implementation of multi-agency risk assessment and risk management of sexual offenders (Kemshall and McCartan, 2014).

One of the main strategies being used across the UK to monitor the risk from known sex offenders is the use of the sex offenders register. It was introduced in England and Wales as part of the 1997 Sex Offenders Act; that was a period of heightened ‘populist punitiveness’, especially towards child molesters (Thomas, 2010). Such ‘populist punitiveness’ (see Bottoms, 1995) is indicative of late modernity and the New Penalty (Garland, 2001; Kemshall, 2003), and has contributed to a sustained demand for tougher punishments, particularly of sex offenders (Brayford and Deering, 2012). This can be seen by the fact that the Act’s penal stipulations have often been increased, most notably as part of the 2003 Sexual Offenders Act – which extended police powers and registration requirements (Thomas, 2010). Such punitive amendments received support from successive Home Secretaries, with the register ‘strengthened’, ‘toughened’ or ‘tightened’ (Thomas, 2010: 65), resulting in increasingly onerous requirements placed upon sex offenders.

The sex offenders register contains the details of anyone convicted, cautioned or released from prison for a sexual offence against a child or adult since its inception in September 1997 but is not retroactive, so does not include anyone convicted before 1997. The register, which is run by the police, requires individuals to register within 72 hours of release into the community. Initially the register required convicted sex offenders, for a specified period of time, to notify the police of their whereabouts and circumstances, with sanctions applied to those failing to comply (Home Office, 1997). The length of time that a person spends on the register depends on the offence that they committed and their sentence, with offences covering the full spectrum of sexual offences and sentencing parameters. Those with:

- a prison sentence of more than 30 months for sexual offending are placed on the register indefinitely

¹ Please note that there are legislative, policy and practice differences between Northern Ireland, Scotland and England/Wales. The Republic of Ireland has similar legislation to the UK.

- a prison sentence of between six and 30 months remain on the register for 10 years, or five years if they are under 18
- a prison sentence of six months or less are placed on the register for seven years, or three and a half years if under 18
- a caution for a sexual offence are put on the register for two years, or one year if under 18.

The sex offenders register was not intended as a punishment; rather, by keeping police records accurate and up to date, its primary aim was public protection. To assist in this and better manage and preserve the register, a new intelligence database, called ViSOR (Violent and Sex Offenders Register), was developed. ViSOR tells police officers how many RSOs are in their area and the crimes for which they have been placed on the register, and has become a central tool in the administration of the register (Thomas, 2010). It has increasingly been used as the source of information for police decision-making about public disclosure.

Notification and disclosure

Initially developed as an aid to law enforcement, the sex offenders register quickly became associated with public notification, particularly following the Sarah Payne case in the UK, which followed the murder of Megan Kanka in the USA (Jenkins, 1998). 'Megan's law' started in New Jersey; it required state-level sex offender registration and made the whereabouts of those deemed as 'high risk' available to the public (Fitch, 2006). This law was subsequently extended to federal legislature, requiring all states to notify the public of 'dangerous' sexual offenders (Ackerman *et al.*, 2012). However, public notification in the USA actually takes a number of different forms, ranging from full active public disclosure to limited disclosure based on levels of risk with the onus on the public to make an application (see Kemshall, 2008 for a full discussion).

In the UK full public disclosure was initially rejected on public protection grounds, amid fears of sexual offenders 'going underground' (Kemshall *et al.*, 2011). Critical to such resistance were the practical difficulties associated with offender transience foreseen by the Home Office (2007). Additionally, they were concerned by empirical evidence of Megan's law; specifically, public disclosure's lack of efficacy and myriad unintended consequences (Home Office, 2007; Kemshall and Weaver, 2012; Fitch, 2006). Finally, in 2008 the Home Secretary announced that

a pilot of the Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS) would be instituted (Kemshall *et al.*, 2011), to enable members of the public to make an enquiry about a person in order to determine whether that person had previous convictions for sexual offending against a child.

The scheme is not a US-type community notification scheme and is actually quite limited (see Kemshall *et al.*, 2010 for a full discussion). An enquiry must be made via the police about a named person, the person must be in contact with or have access to a child or children, and the person enquiring will only be told something if the subject of the enquiry meets certain criteria of risk, and has previous convictions for sexual offences against children. In essence, the scheme has three stages: stage one is an enquiry to the police; if this meets the criteria it is processed as a formal application; and if risk levels and previous conviction requirements are met then a disclosure is made.

On 15 September 2008 a 12-month pilot study commenced across four police force areas. Expected take-up and potential disclosure rates across the four pilot areas were anticipated to be around 2400 based on population size of the police force area, known number of RSOs in the area, known offence rates for sexual offending, and significant media campaigning for disclosure (see Silverman and Wilson, 2002; Thomas, 2011). However, evaluation of the pilots identified low take-up compared to projections (only 585 enquiries from members of the public against the projected 2400). Of these, only 315 enquiries met police criteria and were processed; the number of members of the public disclosed to was only 21 across four pilot areas (see Kemshall *et al.*, 2010). Despite this, the then Home Secretary announced that the scheme would be nationally implemented at the pilot's mid-point. In March 2010 a further 18 forces joined, with the rest following suit in August that year (Kemshall and Weaver, 2012).

On 14 March 2016 a version of CSDOC became operational in Northern Ireland. The scheme is similar to that in operation in England and Wales; however, in Northern Ireland it is not just about sex offenders, as the provisions also enable disclosure about violent offenders who pose a risk to children. At the time of writing the scheme has been in place for four months and a small number of applications have been made.

It is therefore timely to consider the effectiveness of the disclosure scheme in England and Wales, and any lessons learnt in that jurisdiction.

Barriers to disclosure

Figures released by the Association of Chief Police Officers show that application and disclosure rates in England and Wales have been low; indeed College of Policing figures from 2015/16 show a significant reduction in the volume of applications made as well as disclosures. Research suggests a range of barriers to using the scheme: most notably, the hurdle of entering a police station and agreeing to a Criminal Records check before an application is processed; lack of trust in police and 'the authorities'; perceptions of 'stranger-danger' rather than risks within families and networks; and significant under-use in the ethnic minority communities where discussion of sexual matters is taboo (see Kemshall and Weaver, 2012). Additionally, at times there were not sufficient grounds for a disclosure to be made, yet this did not categorically guarantee no future risk of harm. Conversely, when a disclosure was made, it was not necessarily accompanied by a clear risk management strategy (Kemshall *et al.*, 2011). Despite this, user attitudes to the scheme remained positive, particularly among those who had favourable experiences with case officers (Kemshall *et al.*, 2011). This suggests that the disclosure scheme serves a symbolic as well as an instrumental function (Sample *et al.*, 2011). For example, it may provide public and community reassurance as well as individual disclosures (Kemshall, 2014). However, the symbolic and instrumental effects of a policy are not necessarily congruent (Sample *et al.*, 2011). While instrumental outcomes, for example in terms of volume of disclosures, may be low, the perceived policy and political function of such schemes can be high, despite evidence to the contrary (see Kemshall (2014) for a full discussion).

Another criticism that can be levelled at the register and CSODS is that they are largely vested in the criminal justice system, with a focus on response after offending has occurred, albeit with a preventative focus to reduce further offending (a tertiary preventive approach). However, they only target offenders within or known to the system, and have limited efficacy in offence prevention. Over time, these measures have become increasingly restrictive, controlling, punitive and exclusionary (Brayford *et al.*, 2012), with limited, and at times ambiguous, evidence about their effectiveness on long-term offence prevention (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2016). In addition, such measures require resources, for example the administration of the sex offenders register, and multi-agency community management responses can be particularly costly (Hilder and Kemshall,

2013). The data from the 2014/15 MAPPA annual report indicate that the number of individuals being supervised by MAPPA in the community for sexual-related offences is steadily increasing, presenting resource challenges particularly for police and Probation in an era of austerity. With ever-increasing additions to the sex offenders register,² continuing its maintenance as well as fully supporting multi-agency work, and sustaining CSODS, remains challenging.

With this in mind, it is important to understand police perceptions of the workings of the sex offenders register and CSODS.

Methods

This paper reports on data collected as part of a wider research project evaluating law enforcement perspectives related to sex offender registration and notification and the management of sex offenders in the community. It is the first large-scale study of sex offender registration and notification in the UK. The research had two components, as follows.

- *A mixed-methods online questionnaire*, based on research conducted in the USA (Harris *et al.*, 2014) but reformatted to fit context relevant to England and Wales's policy and practice. The survey was sent, via the College of Policing, to the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Within each force it was then distributed to three main groups: senior police leaders; personnel working directly in roles related to registration, community notification and registry enforcement; and personnel engaged in the investigation of sex crimes. A total of 227 responses from 37 of the 43 forces were received.
- *Semi-structured interviews*: The research team conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with a random sample (Robson and McCartan, 2016) of participants who had taken part in the online questionnaire, ranging from police staff to Detective Chief Inspectors, which followed up on issues identified within the survey but enabled participants to discuss in much greater depth and detail their experiences of using and perceptions of the sex offender register and CSODS in England and Wales. This paper presents data from the interview component of the project.

² Evidence indicates a rise in the reporting, recording and prosecution of sexual offences, which, when coupled with the length of time that offenders stay on the register, points to a constantly growing sex offender population that needs to be managed.

A process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the interview data, identifying key recurring themes across the interview participants. The data subsequently included in the analysis section of this paper were selected for their representativeness in terms of illuminating the wider body of data within each of the thematic categories.

Results

Four main themes emerged from the interviews, as follows.

- *Information sharing* – the importance of ViSOR for managing those subject to the sex offenders register, specifically as a tool to store and share information on such offenders with other agencies and force areas.
- *Public and professional utility of CSODS* – functioning more as a tool for the public to manage risk, rather than assisting offender managers (OMs) with their core business.
- *Issues with the CSODS process* – participants addressed some of the key reasons why take-up of CSODS has been so low, and considered the potential consequences for OMs should there be an increase in applications.
- *Rethinking how the sex offender register and CSODS could be used* – acknowledging that in the present age of austerity an increase in OMs is unlikely, alternative approaches to deal with the increasing demand are explored.

Information sharing

Although not introduced for eight years following the inception of the sex offenders register, ViSOR is now championed by officers as the principal component in the management of those subjected to the register (78%, $n = 21$). An organisational and information storing tool, it was viewed as part of an OM's core business.

It's essential, absolutely essential. Until they build a new database, that is what we use ... it's how you organise your workloads. (Participant 14)

However, officers complained that it is slow and repetitive, and freezes users out.

it is very, very slow, and very lumpy and you get thrown out all the time, and that causes a lot of problems. (Participant 26)

Despite such flaws, participants suggested that what makes ViSOR so effective is its ability to store so much information (67%, $n = 18$). When an offender is subjected to the register, all information pertinent to their management is uploaded on the database, with OMs updating the system following any contact or intelligence. In turn, such meticulous record keeping ensures defensibility should something go wrong.

It records absolutely everything that we do. It contains all of their information ... Absolutely everything that comes out of their mouths is on there. (Participant 01)

Its primary purpose I would say is to document and make us accountable for how we manage sex offenders. (Participant 21)

Although it was commended as a mechanism for recording data, there was ambiguity regarding ViSOR's capacity to share information with other agencies. Most participants felt that ViSOR was predominantly a police-led tool (70%, $n = 19$), with use by Probation and prison services sporadic at best. Officers generally accepted that these agencies have their own systems, and thus little time to populate ViSOR. Despite this, a number of participants noted that inter-agency information sharing was improving (30%, $n = 8$), although a handful warned of extending access to the database beyond the three lead agencies (19%, $n = 5$).

Some Probation Officers put in their contact with sex offenders actually on the ViSOR, which is great, but obviously it depends on your Probation Officers ... Prisons put in input, they can put nonsense in sometimes ... I don't know if I would be happy about too many people accessing it. (Participant 06)

It's all going in the right direction, and now obviously they are encouraging Probation to have more access to it, and ultimately the prisons have had a lot of training recently and they're doing an awful lot more. (Participant 12)

However, there was conflict concerning its ability to share data with other forces. For instance, a number of participants considered inter-force information sharing to be ViSOR's primary function (41%, $n = 11$), yet a

commonly raised caveat was the lack of consistency of stored information between force areas and individual OMs (41%, $n = 11$).

Its strengths for me are around sharing information across police area boundaries; that's the main issue you know we get a lot of offenders that come in and out of the area, and it simplifies it massively if you can just look at a ViSOR record and you know exactly what they have been up to. (Participant 11)

They all do it [ViSOR] completely differently. When you get a transfer in from another force it's like it's come from an alien planet: it's just completely different. (Participant 05)

The information, or lack thereof, stored on ViSOR was a key issue throughout the study: officers stated that its efficacy was limited by the material held on the database.

ViSOR is only as good as what you put into it. (Participant 06)

Such reservations extended beyond the daily supervision of offenders to other components of offender management, such as the CSODS. Indeed, when deciding whether or not to disclose, officers considered the available information on ViSOR.

We then assess the information that has been given to us, and the offender himself, because it could be that they are subject to the register. (Participant 25)

Public and professional utility of CSODS

The introduction of CSODS was intended to serve a dual purpose: empower members of the public to request information in order to manage risk better; and contribute to the overall risk management of RSOs by extended pre-existing third party disclosures.

Examining CSODS further, 10 (37%) participants explicitly stated that it added little to the management of sexual offenders. Instead, it was viewed as a tool for the public, to help parents or guardians manage risk should they have a concern regarding an individual (81%, $n = 22$).

[CSODS is] not for managing sex offenders, no. For mitigating risk because managing sex offenders is my job and Probation's job, and we already have that information and more. (Participant 01)

Its primary purpose is to empower a member of the public with information that would enable them to safeguard their child. (Participant 02)

Nevertheless, a few participants conceded that at times CSODS highlighted new relationships (22%, $n = 6$). However, this was an occasional occurrence, with some suggesting that when doing their job properly, they would already know of the contact and have disclosed via an alternative route (30%, $n = 8$). This chimes with Kemshall *et al.*'s (2010) findings, where officers felt that CSODS formalised good practice in child protection.

You could come out of it, that there is a relationship that offender has not disclosed. That would be the one benefit, but I have to say in my experience they are fairly rare. (Participant 02)

If we are doing our job properly then we are proactive in establishing who they have contact with, and therefore delivering the disclosures in advance, as opposed to waiting for an application to come through. (Participant 26)

Issues with the CSODS process

Officers (52%, $n = 14$) argued that low take-up of the CSODS was affected by poor public understanding of the scheme, which also contributed to its paltry conversion rate. This supports findings from the scheme's pilot evaluation (Kemshall *et al.*, 2010).

I still think that there will be a large proportion of the community that probably don't know. (Participant 21)

Could it be used more often? Potentially, but I think that it is very borderline whether it is a fishing trip or a genuine concern ... that is why we have the follow-up interview, which I think should hopefully weed that out. (Participant 25)

Despite limited CSODS applications, officers complained that they were time-consuming and impacted on core business (48%, $n = 13$). Beyond

this, it was suggested that should their volume increase, this would overburden already creaking resources.

You know when you're allocated a CSODS there is a lot of work involved; it takes a lot of time away from the day job. (Participant 13)

I think at the moment, as it stands we are coping with the enquiries. I think if it was on a billboard somewhere and it was pushed I think we would go under. We are already dealing with our own case load, managing our 80-odd offenders per person. I think if we were then inundated with enquiries amongst other things I think we would struggle. (Participant 04)

Disquiet surrounding resources was not restricted to CSODS. In particular, there were growing concerns regarding the steady rise in registered offenders, conflated with diminishing public sector budgets. This has led to increasingly precarious offender/manager ratios (52%, $n = 14$).

You're going to get more and more registered sex offenders as time goes on, but we don't get the increase in staff to correlate with that ... because of the cuts to funding and all the rest of it, it's always going to be a struggle to put more people in the department because they haven't got the money. (Participant 23)

Rethinking how the register and the CSODS could be used

This is a growing concern across public protection units and the police force as a whole, as the present age of austerity continues to demand that public services do 'more with less'. Consequently, a number of officers discussed measures to help reduce the strain. It was admitted an increase in number of OMs was unlikely, although preferred; alternatives centred on reducing the number of registered offenders (41%, $n = 11$) and refocusing resources in accordance with risk (44%, $n = 12$). However, support for such initiatives was nebulous.

Either the criteria of the register needs to change, or police forces need to make braver decisions about the rationale about who we are actively going to manage; for example, do we actively [manage] low-risk offenders ... or do we make a brave decision to say we are going to put them on the back burner, so to speak, and we are going to focus our resources on the high-risk people? (Participant 26)

I vehemently disagree with that, and always have done because they are the people that we need to be looking at, because they are the people that we are seeing once a year and it needs to be done right. (Participant 08)

Discussion and an alternative approach

The current research indicates that although the police are supportive of the offender management aspects of the register and the disclosure scheme, they do not believe them to be without issues, especially in light of their continual growth and the impact of austerity on public protection policing (Kemshall and McCartan, 2014). Consequently, alternative approaches, particularly those that emphasise a more holistic and preventative approach to sexual offending, should be considered. Such approaches tend to adopt principles and strategies from the public health arena (McCartan *et al.*, 2015), focusing on three prevention categories based on when the intervention occurs (for a comprehensive review of public health approaches to child sexual abuse see Brown *et al.*, 2011; O'Donnell & Erooga, 2011; Letourneau *et al.*, 2014). These levels include:

- *primary prevention* – approaches that take place before sexual violence has occurred in order to prevent initial perpetration or victimisation
- *secondary prevention* – an immediate response after sexual violence has occurred to deal with the short-term consequences of violence
- *tertiary prevention* – a long-term response that follows sexual violence, designed to deal with the lasting consequences of violence and provide treatment to perpetrators.

The aim of these levels is to effectively position the appropriate interventions to prevent harmful behaviour and the subsequent negative consequences. In regard to sexual violence prevention, the core aim of these three levels is to stop offending and reduce the impact of sexual violence (McCartan *et al.*, 2015; Smallbone *et al.*, 2008). Increasingly, such approaches are seen as complementary to more traditional criminal justice approaches.

The current Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, 2016–2021 drawn up by Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Ireland is an important example of such an approach. The strategy (Cosc, 2016: 2) aims to:

- change societal attitudes to support a reduction in domestic and sexual violence
- improve supports available to victims and survivors
- hold perpetrators to account.

Changing societal attitudes is usually done through public awareness/education campaigns, most recently 'Bystander' campaigns that encourage bystanders to literally challenge inappropriate behaviours or conduct (Fenton *et al.*, 2016). They are most commonly used in schools, colleges and universities (see Coker *et al.* (2011) on effectiveness, and Green Dot³ and the Intervention Initiative⁴), but they can also have wider applicability (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2016). Bystander programmes target both individual attitudes and beliefs (for example victim blaming, denial and avoidance of responsibility) and the relationships and networks within which sexual violence may occur. However, public awareness/education campaigns have to be done with care in order to achieve impact, and Cosc provides guidelines for this (2015). The guidance is particularly useful because it is aimed at: 'smaller organisations who have neither resources nor budget to mount large awareness raising activities or advertising campaigns' (Cosc, 2015: 1), but makes the point that well-conducted and well-targeted activity can have impact.

The wide-ranging body of research literature on public awareness/information campaigns suggests that to be successful they must maximise the relevance of the message to the audience, maximise audience perception of susceptibility to the risk, give a clear message about benefits and promote self-efficacy and key actions that can be taken by the individual (see Tabachnick *et al.* (2016) and McCartan *et al.* (2015) for longer discussion). It is important to note, as Cosc does, that social media, digital marketing and community spaces are also key in delivering these messages.

Similarly, there are campaigns targeting those who may potentially sexually offend (particularly self-identified paedophiles) but have not yet done so. The most recognised internationally is Prevention Project Dunkelfeld,⁵ a social marketing campaign aimed at engaging them in early treatment and prevention which shows positive (although early and emerging) results: the treated group, as opposed to the non-treated group,

³ <https://www.livethegreendot.com/index.html>

⁴ <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/bl/research/interventioninitiative.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.dont-offend.org/>

have improved emotion functioning and sexual self-regulation and decreased cognitive distortions (Beier *et al.*, 2009, 2015). There are others including Help Wanted, Lucy Faithfull Foundation and VirPed (Virtuous Paedophiles).

Conclusion

Building ‘communities that do not allow sexual violence’ (Banyard *et al.*, 2007) is a long-term and challenging task, and will require more than public awareness/education campaigns or targeting potential/actual sexual offenders for prevention.

Cohen and Swift (1999) have argued for a ‘spectrum of prevention’, which offers a reasonable starting point and is reflected in whole or in part within some emerging policy approaches (e.g. Cosc Second National Strategy, 2016), with six key components.

- *Influencing policy and legislation* – presenting evidence and advocacy for prevention legislation, and social policy responses to sexual offending that emphasise early prevention, treatment and safe reintegration wherever possible.
- *Changing organisational practices* – mandating practices that create safe organisations and environments, for example through safe recruitment, supervisory practices, reporting processes and codes of conduct (Erooga, 2012).
- *Fostering coalitions and networks* – improving partnership work and collaboration between professionals and the public to improve levels of public understanding of sexual offending as well as trust in government organisations. This will result in wider reporting, and greater discussions, of sexual violence within communities.
- *Educating providers* – professionals and providers of services to children and families are seen as critical links in the overall system, often with direct access to known or potential victims, vulnerable families, and persons ‘at risk’ of offending and/or victimisation. Knowledge and appropriate skills are essential for this group, as is a more positive commitment to multi-agency and ‘joined up’ working.
- *Promoting community education* – recent and emerging research into ‘what works’ for community education should be better utilised in the formation of guidance and programmes for awareness campaigning (see Cosc (2015) as a good example of this).

- *Strengthening individuals' knowledge and skills* – utilising the most effective educative and 'bystander' programmes to enhance the knowledge and skills of parents, children and 'bystander' adults. To use such programmes to challenge inaccurate framings and understandings of sexual offending, and to work towards communities that have 'zero tolerance' of sexual offending. Targeting and encouraging actual and potential offenders to come forward for treatment/interventions at the earliest possible stage.

Working in a coherent way across the 'spectrum of prevention', rather than relying on punitive criminal justice measures alone, is more likely to lead to positive outcomes and overall reductions in sexual offending. Primary and secondary prevention can play as central a role in reducing sexual abuse as tertiary prevention can. Given their extensive experience of managing sexual offenders, police and Probation can play a key role in educating and working with 'at risk' populations. Information on the sex offender register, and from other databases, could be used to identify vulnerable families and other communities 'at risk', thus enabling effective targeting for awareness and education campaigns. In addition, criminal justice personnel could contribute to effective outreach and work with those who believe they may be 'at risk' of committing a sexual offence.

By developing policies and practices that can operate alongside existing criminal justice approaches to reduce offending and reoffending, positive outcomes can be achieved and many of the issues identified from the literature and current research about the use and effectiveness of the sex offender register and CSODS overcome. For example, popular punitiveness can be challenged through increased public and political awareness about successes of treatment and management of sex offenders. Partnership working can increase intervention across the 'spectrum of prevention', thereby strengthening data sharing and the management and rehabilitation of offenders, which in turn could increase the accuracy and utility of data systems such as ViSOR.

Finally, in a period of increasing restrictions on police and Probation time and resources, expanding involvement in sex offender management, treatment and rehabilitation to organisations in the public health sector could help to alleviate pressures and reduce reoffending without disproportionately burdening any one organisation.

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