

THE EXPERIENCES, ATTITUDES, AND MOTIVATIONS OF THOSE WITHIN  
CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the nature of attitudes held by students, members of the public, and volunteers towards individuals who have been convicted of a sexual offence, and considers the importance of better understanding these attitudes. This is explored within a group of individuals who volunteer within a community-based initiative providing support to those who have committed a sexual offence, along with their motivations for initially choosing to volunteer in such a programme. The experiences of those individuals within the programme who have been convicted of a sexual offence (Core Members) are also reviewed. Chapter 1 presents a general introduction to the concepts of sexual offending, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), and attitudes. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review regarding the experiences of Core Members (CMs) participating in a CoSA. Chapter 3 then presents a critique of a scale designed to measure attitudes towards individuals who have been convicted of a sexual offence and examines its validity, reliability, and the way in which it has been used within research. Chapter 4 presents an empirical research study regarding volunteers within CoSA. Their attitudes towards people who have committed a sexual offence are assessed and compared to both undergraduate students and members of the wider public. Their perceptions are also measured following exposure to vignettes depicting different types of sexual offences. Volunteers' motivations for joining the programme are also considered through Thematic Analysis. Additional reliability data regarding the attitudinal measure, the Attitudes towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993), is then presented within this chapter. Finally, Chapter 5 presents an overall summary of the thesis. The implications of the main findings are discussed, as well as potential directions for future research.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent estimates suggest that there are approximately four million individuals across England and Wales who have experienced some form of sexual assault since the age of 16 (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Furthermore, 6.6% of adults have reported being a victim of sexual assault at some point during their childhood (Office for National Statistics, 2016). However, the rate of attrition is high for convictions of sexual assault: only around 17% of survivors are thought to make a report to the police (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Commonly reported reasons for not doing so include perceiving the incident as being too trivial or embarrassing, viewing the incident as a private or familial matter that does not require any external input from the authorities, or holding a belief that there is not much that the police will be able to do in order to help (Ministry of Justice, 2013). Of those incidents which are reported to the police, and are then recorded as sexual offences, just 6% result in either a charge or a summons to court (Office for National Statistics, 2018b).

Offender management statistics indicate that, as of 31 March 2020, there were a total of 12,774 people in prison serving an immediate custodial sentence for the commission of a sexual offence, in addition to 575 individuals on remand (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). These individuals therefore make up 16.2% of the prison population within England and Wales. The average custodial sentence length for the offence of rape is 118 months, compared with 41 months for sexual assault, and 43 months for other sexual offences (Office for National Statistics, 2018b). Within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in England and Wales, there are a number of

accredited offending behaviour programmes which are available to Individuals Convicted of Sexual Offences (ICSOs), and are ultimately designed to reduce reoffending rates. Some examples of these are the Kaizen programme which supports high and very high risk ICSOs to develop a prosocial identity away from offending behaviour, and to develop their problem-solving and intimacy skills, as well as Becoming New Me Plus which shares similar treatment targets but is adapted for those whose intellectual functioning has been assessed as falling within or below the borderline range (Ministry of Justice, 2020b). While these contemporary programmes have undergone certification by the Correctional Services Accreditation and Advice Panel (Ramsay et al., 2020), they are yet to undergo thorough evaluation in order to determine their efficacy (Walton et al., 2017).

Upon release from prison, however, the level of support available to an ICSO often reduces dramatically, despite evidence suggesting that this is the particular period when a reoffence is most likely to take place. Proven recidivism rates for ICSOs have been calculated to be 11.1% after 5 years, increasing to 16.6% after 10 years (Helmus et al., 2012). However, public perceptions of reoffending rates appear to be much higher than this. When Floridian residents were asked to judge what proportion of ICSOs go on to commit another sexual offence, mean estimates were as high as 74%, with a median response of 80% (Levenson et al., 2007). The true risk of proven sexual reoffending appears to be at its highest in the first few years following release from prison (Hanson et al., 2014), and the longer an ICSO lives offence-free within the community, the more their likelihood of being convicted for a sexual offence declines (Hanson et al., 2018). After 10 to 15 years, this risk of committing a sexual offence appears to be similar to

that posed by an individual with a history of solely non-sexual offending (Hanson et al., 2018).

ICSOs are often subject to specific management arrangements within the community, more so than other individuals with different types of offending histories. For example, of the 82,921 people who were being managed within the community in England and Wales under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) on 31 March 2019, 72.7% of these were ICSOs (the majority of whom are referred to as Category 1 offenders; Ministry of Justice, 2019). A further 26.9% of these were individuals who had been convicted a violent offence, referred to as Category 2 (Ministry of Justice, 2019). However, despite making up almost three quarters of MAPPA-managed individuals, those within Category 1 committed fewer serious further offences ( $n = 68$ ) than those within Category 2 ( $n = 107$ ) between 2018 and 2019. The number of ICSOs managed under MAPPA has increased each year, although this is thought to reflect an aggregative effect driven in part by the length of time an ICSO is required to register as a sexual offender, which for some is indefinite (O'Sullivan et al., 2016). Some individuals who are subject to MAPPA have reported feeling as though the focus of these arrangements is primarily to maximise short-term control as opposed to promoting more long-term and meaningful change (Weaver & Barry, 2014).

As ICSOs return to the community, they often report feeling shunned, stigmatised, and shamed by those around them (Robbers, 2009). This shaming response from society is thought to serve some sort of punitive purpose, as well as conveying a public condemnation of the committal of the sexual offence (McAlinden, 2005). These experiences may be influenced in part by the portrayal of ICSOs within the press. A study of 543 articles from eight British newspapers identified that sexual offences were

overrepresented at a rate of nine times when compared to actual recorded crime statistics (Harper & Hogue, 2015a). This was higher than for both violent crimes, which were overrepresented at a rate of 2.5 times, and acquisitive crimes, which were underrepresented within the press. Furthermore, newspaper articles which reported on sexual offending used a higher rate of words reflecting anger and negative emotionality than articles which described other crime types. Harper and Hogue (2015a) suggested that expressing such high levels of emotionality is likely to convey an increased sense of risk which could influence readers' perceptions of ICSOs. This overrepresentation of sexual offending within the press is also likely to skew the public's estimate of offending rates. There is evidence to suggest that public opinion is significantly impacted by how favourably or unfavourably a news story is written, even when presented with contrary information reflecting the true base rates (Gunther & Christen, 1999). This portrayal of ICSOs within the press is therefore likely to influence the way in which they are appraised by the public, and potentially therefore the public's subsequent behaviours.

Experiencing social isolation and loneliness has been identified as being pertinent risk factors in the maintenance of sexual offending behaviour. Seto and Lalumière (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of studies which explored sexual offending in adolescent males. Overall, across the 59 studies, it was found that ICSOs were more likely to be socially isolated than non-ICSOs as indicated by both self-report and other-report measures, including those from parents, teachers, and clinicians. Marshall (2010) has also highlighted the role of emotional loneliness in sexual offending, suggesting that this loneliness can promote a self-serving approach to relationships, which could result in sexual offending. This is supported by research by Garlick (1991) in that ICSOs

within prison reported higher levels of loneliness and intimacy deficits through self-report measures than other offender types. Furthermore, engagement with a negative social peer group has been identified as an established risk factor for this type of reoffending (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015). In their meta-analysis, Mann et al. (2010) identified that negative peer influences were a significant predictor of sexual recidivism. This included peers who were themselves involved in criminal activity, or who helped in weakening the individual's level of behavioural control.

However, peer influence can also serve as a protective factor. Cullen (1994) has proposed that having some form of positive social support can help to reduce criminality, regardless of whether this is provided by families, communities, or criminal justice agencies. Moreover, the presence of a prosocial support network appears to be a relevant factor in protecting against sexual recidivism (Thornton, 2013). In fact, Farmer et al. (2012) identified that those individuals who had desisted from sexual offending typically reported being a part of some form of social group, whereas people who were still thought to be actively offending were more likely to describe being isolated and alone. Göbbels et al. (2012) argued that an important factor in facilitating desistance during the phase of community re-entry is the presence of a mentor who can provide support and social modelling, regardless of whether this mentoring occurs naturally or artificially. Kitson-Boyce (2018) has suggested that an opportunity for this artificial mentor to be provided to an ICSO exists within the Circles of Support and Accountability programme.

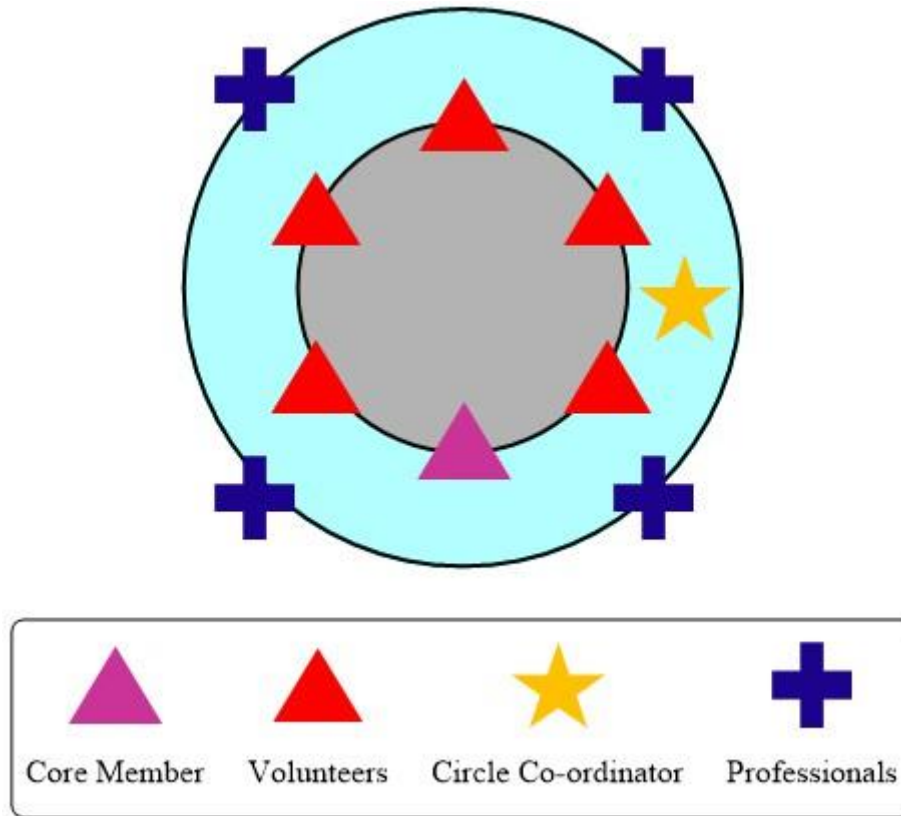
## **Circles of Support and Accountability**

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), or sometimes referred to simply as Circles, are a community-led intervention programme. They are typically reserved for those ICSOs who have been assessed as posing a medium to high risk of sexual reoffending (Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017). A CoSA is generally offered to an individual who anticipates that they would otherwise have little social support at the time of their release from prison (Youseff, 2013). Each CoSA typically meets on at least a weekly basis, and continues for a period of between 12 to 18 months (McCartan et al., 2014), although this varies between different CoSA providers and is dependent on the needs of each individual.

In the programme, an ICSO who is either approaching their anticipated release date from prison or has recently been released, meets with a small group of between three to six volunteers from their local community (Blagden et al., 2018). These volunteers, or lay members, comprise what is known as the inner circle where support is given and accountability is encouraged with the aim of easing the ICSO's transition back into the community, facilitating successful reintegration, and ultimately preventing recidivism. This network is presented within Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

The Configuration of a Typical Circle of Support and Accountability



*Note.* Adapted from “Circles of Support and Accountability: Engaging Community Volunteers in the Management of High-Risk Sexual Offenders,” by R. J. Wilson, A. McWhinnie, J. E. Picheca, M. Prinzo, and F. Cortoni, 2007, *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46(1), p. 9 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2007.00450.x>).

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This inner circle is immediately overseen by the CoSA co-ordinator, with the core function of providing support. It is also supported more widely by an outer circle of professionals who supervise and consult with the inner circle where necessary, and promote accountability (Höing, Bogaerts, & Vogelvang, 2017). This outer circle can be comprised of psychologists, probation workers, and police staff (McCartan et al., 2014).



For example, when volunteers develop concerns about any risk-related behaviours which they have observed, these can be passed on to the involved offender manager (McCartan et al., 2014). Throughout the programme, the ICSO is referred to as the Core Member (CM), and all members of the CoSA are expected to come together as equals. The use of the CM title (rather than any alternatives such as ‘sex offender’) serves to avoid labelling, and to detach the individual as a person from the previous offending behaviours in which they have engaged by separating the person from their actions (Blagden et al., 2018).

CoSA work by complementing a CM’s supervision, as opposed to duplicating this, and do so by exploring their motivation for change and supporting the pursuit of appropriate goals (McCartan et al., 2014). Fox (2015) has asserted that CoSA work on three levels. Firstly, they allow the lay members to model a normative and non-offending lifestyle to the CM. Secondly, they encourage a shared moral space for both CMs and volunteers where each member of the inner circle is perceived to be equal. Thirdly, sharing this space can facilitate a process of de-labelling which allows the community to begin to see the CM as more than simply an ‘offender’.

The programme also assists the CM in developing a sustained motivation to address some of their behaviours, as well as to monitor their own risk factors in order to support long-term desistance during and following the end of their CoSA (Höing et al., 2013). The theoretical approach of CoSA is supported in part by Braithwaite (1989) who distinguished between the concepts of stigmatisation and reintegrative shaming, where an individual’s criminal actions are shamed as opposed to the individual themselves. He argued that while stigmatisation has the propensity to drive people towards criminality or antisocial peers, reintegrative shaming can instead facilitate

repentance and desistance. Within CoSA, the inner circle therefore continues to hold the CM accountable for their behaviours whilst providing a non-judgemental atmosphere for them as an individual.

Within an interim report of the programme, Saunders and Wilson (2003) proposed that CoSA within the United Kingdom might predominantly address three key principles. The first of these is to provide support in order to reduce the level of isolation and loneliness experienced by the CM, to model healthy relationships, and to demonstrate basic humanity towards the ICSO. The second is to allow behavioural and risk monitoring to take place by working closely with the relevant authorities, including the police and probation services, in an attempt to maximise public protection. Thirdly, they argued that CoSA operate on the principle of maintenance. The inner circle continues to hold the CM accountable for their behaviours which helps them to develop a trusting relationship, and therefore to maintain shared anticipated CoSA outcomes. Saunders and Wilson (2003) described how they believed that each of these could potentially play an important role in the reduction of reoffending, by representing a restorative, retributive, and rehabilitative approach.

However, Höing et al. (2013) have asserted that Saunders and Wilson's (2003) model of CoSA is purely theoretical and remains unvalidated by empirical research. Instead, they proposed a new model of CoSA based on their own qualitative analysis of CMs', volunteers', and co-ordinators' experiences. Within this revised model, desistance is presented as the long-term goal of CoSA. This is comprised of not only an absence of reoffending, but also the development of a positive narrative identity and effective participation in society. A number of intermediary goals are also proposed, including the development of hope, improved self-esteem, and successful community

reintegration, as well as an increase in self-regulation and relapse prevention skills. Höing et al. (2013) proposed that these objectives are achieved through social inclusion, the promotion of individual change, monitoring and reducing risk, and by ensuring that the process of the CoSA runs effectively. The integrity of the CoSA model is described as being dependent on the characteristics of both the volunteers and the CMs who are involved, in addition to the receipt of effective volunteer training and supervision. Finally, they argued that the communication which occurs between the inner and the outer circle is an important factor in order to allow the swift reporting of risk-related information, and the intervention of relevant professionals if necessary.

Preliminary evidence from CoSA within the United Kingdom has suggested that ICSOs who engage with CoSA are significantly less likely to be reconvicted than those within a comparison group (Bates et al., 2014). However, members of the public have generally been critical of the introduction of the programme. Richards and McCartan (2018) analysed a total of 768 public comments made across social media pages, and on an online petition website, regarding the CoSA programme, the majority of which were written in opposition of it. A number of reasons were given for this: the belief that government money would be better spent on the victims as opposed to the perpetrators of these sexual offences; the perception that ICSOs are incapable of rehabilitation; and a misunderstanding of the practical aspects of the programme, such as believing that this would be offered in place of a prison sentence. There are therefore likely to be significant barriers to the extension of this programme into some areas, if this approach is not generally accepted by the wider community. As Harper (2018) has noted, the recruitment of CoSA volunteers can only occur where there are members of the local community who are willing to come forward in support of the programme. Richards and

McCartan (2018) suggested that some form of community education could be beneficial in addressing these negative and somewhat inaccurate beliefs held by members of the public, and recommended that this communication might be best led by current CoSA volunteers who could be perceived as holding more realistic beliefs than both professionals and academics.

### **Attitudes**

The concept of an attitude can be further divided into the components of affect, behaviour, and cognition (Breckler, 1984). These concern an individual's emotional response, the actions or statements they demonstrate, and their thoughts or perceptions, respectively. Exploring each of these components therefore provides a wider scope of one's attitudes, all of which are important in understanding subsequent behaviour. Trafimow and Finlay (1996) considered 30 behaviours exhibited by university students and found that for the majority of participants, behavioural intentions were driven by attitudes more so than by alternative factors including subjective norms. The importance of understanding attitudes is therefore evident in understanding subsequent behaviours.

This research area has demonstrated the importance of studying attitudes in order to better understand and predict the specific behaviours exhibited by individuals. The attitudes held by those individuals working with ICSOs, for example, has been associated with providing more effective therapeutic intervention (Blagden et al., 2018). The study of attitudes is therefore vital in further exploring how programmes involving ICSOs function, including CoSA.

Furthermore, the MODE model of behaviour (Fazio, 1990) has highlighted that attitudes are typically more likely to influence behaviours in situations where the

individual has sufficient motivation and opportunity to deliberate on their action. In situations where an individual does not have this motivation and opportunity, they are likely to engage in a more spontaneous behaviour which may or may not correspond to their own attitude, depending on the accessibility of this. Therefore, when individuals are highly motivated and able to process the information at hand, or when their own attitude is easily accessible to them, they are more likely to act in line with this attitude. It is likely that the decision to join a CoSA, whether made by a CM or by a volunteer, is likely to be a deliberated rather than a spontaneous action, and so the impact of attitudes and experiences in preceding this behaviour is significant.

### **Aims of this Thesis**

The present thesis aims to better understand those individuals who comprise CoSA. Initially, it will explore and review the experiences of CMs in order to determine the influence of CoSA. Additionally, it is recognised that CoSA could not function without the involvement of community volunteers who are willing to give up their time in order to support the CM. Further aims of this thesis are therefore to consider the attitudes which are held by these individuals towards ICSOs, how these can best be measured, and how they differ between the volunteers who support them and the wider community. The reasons for which these individuals are initially motivated to take up this role will also be explored. By considering what both CM and volunteer groups bring to CoSA throughout the present thesis, a wider understanding of the factors which are integral to the successes and difficulties of CoSA can be gained.

The second chapter explores the experiences reported by CMs within CoSA across a number of qualitative studies. This is presented as a systematic review of the

literature where 10 relevant articles were identified and synthesised. CMs reported a number of common themes across studies, including experiencing stigma from the wider community and learning how to manage this, receiving different forms of support from CoSA volunteers, learning how to better understand and monitor their own risk factors, concerns about recidivism, and desired changes to the programme.

The third chapter considers the measurement of attitudes regarding ICSOs, due to the significant implications that these can have on policy implementation and therefore on community reintegration. One such scale is the Attitudes towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993). Psychometric properties of the scale such as its reliability and validity are considered within this chapter, in addition to the standardisation of the measure's use. Alternative techniques for measuring attitudes regarding ICSOs are also outlined and critiqued, including a more recent short form of the ATS scale.

Chapter 4 presents an empirical research study regarding the attitudes and perceptions which are held regarding ICSOs. The research considers how these differ across groups of CoSA volunteers, undergraduate students, and members of the general public, as well as how exposure to different subtypes of sexual offences might impact these. Volunteers' motivations for joining the project are also explored qualitatively using Thematic Analysis in an attempt to better understand how volunteers might be recruited and retained by both CoSA and other community programmes in the future. Reliability data is also presented which provides additional support for the shortened version of the Attitudes towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS-21; Hogue & Harper, 2019).

The final chapter then presents a summary of the main findings of the thesis, integrating both the experiences of CMs and the attitudes and perceptions of volunteers in order to consider the CoSA process. The implications of these are discussed along with potential future research directions. Finally, an overall conclusion is presented.

This thesis considers the value of the CoSA programme and the nature of the CMs and volunteers who comprise it. Exploring the attitudes held towards ICsOs and the tools used to measure this is important in facilitating societal reintegration and therefore in preventing further victims. The findings of this thesis have important implications both within CoSA and across wider systems, in terms of both policy and practice.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REGARDING CORE MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES OF CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Abstract**

A Circle of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is a network formed around a Core Member (CM) who has previously been convicted of a sexual offence. The intention of this programme is to facilitate their re-entry into the community following incarceration by providing them with sufficient support, but also by encouraging them to remain accountable for their actions and the choices that they have made. The present systematic review examined the ways in which CMs experience and respond to their CoSA. The review considered studies using qualitative methodologies in order to provide an exploration of in-depth, commonly reported themes. Ten relevant articles published within the last 19 years were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria for the present systematic review, and were also assessed as having a quality percentage score of at least 50%. The relevant data were synthesised and a number of themes were identified, such as experiencing and managing stigma in relation to their offending history in addition to receiving practical and emotional support from the CoSA. Notably, positive outcomes were even reported by those CMs who had engaged in further offending behaviour following the onset of their CoSA. Clear and rigorous qualitative analysis techniques were not a prominent feature of all 10 articles, and it is noted that many studies might also have been subject to a publication bias. The findings of this review have implications for use within probation and offender treatment



pathways in terms of identifying the key challenges faced by individuals at this period of re-entry, and how these might be appropriately addressed. Further research into the process of and reasons for disengagement of CMs from CoSA might be a difficult topic to pursue but could also prove to be beneficial for better understanding this process of reintegration.

## **Introduction**

The first CoSA was initially configured on an individual basis by a church congregation in Canada in 1994 in response to concerns that a high-risk ICSO was being returned to the local community with little social or professional support around him (Wilson et al., 2002). Members of a community Mennonite church agreed to form a circle in order to support him in the process of being released from prison. This was based in part on the concept of healing circles, an approach first practised by indigenous people which allow discussion and reflection on a problem in order to support community cohesion (Mehl-Madrona, 2014). As this initiative progressed, the concept of accountability was also introduced in order to address outstanding areas of concern, such as how the circle could respond appropriately to offence-supportive attitudes, and develop more effective risk management techniques (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2016). This framework was then replicated for other ICSOs within Canada, and later the concept was introduced to the United Kingdom by the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers (Wilson et al., 2008). CoSA were first facilitated in England in 2001, with Circles UK being granted charitable status in 2007 (Wilson & McWhinnie, 2010). In March 2019, there were 157 CoSA in operation across the United Kingdom, and 66 ICSOs who were on the waiting list to join one (Circles UK, 2019). CoSA have also been introduced in the United States of America, the Netherlands, and Belgium (Hanvey & Höing, 2012), in addition to Australia and New Zealand (Wilson, 2018).

Aside from the traditional community model where a CoSA begins shortly after an ICSO's release from prison, CoSA have also been initiated prior to this release date in an attempt to better support reintegration. This prison model of CoSA is the standard approach within Minnesotan CoSA (MnCoSA; Duwe, 2018), and has also operated

within one region of the United Kingdom since 2014 (Kitson-Boyce, 2018). Within this model, the CoSA begins when the CM is still residing within the prison environment, and continues throughout the release process and into a community setting, providing a form of ‘through the gate’ support at a time where offenders might otherwise be at risk of becoming destabilised. CMs are supported to meet regularly with their CoSA, particularly on a very frequent basis at the onset of their programme, in order to encourage the development of a strong and stable social support network.

The CoSA model is based on the three principal factors of support, monitoring, and maintenance (Wilson, 2018). Aside from the CoSA offering support to the CM, they are also in a position to monitor risk-related behaviours, as well as helping to maintain rehabilitation and reintegration. The approach of CoSA is theoretically underpinned in part by the Good Lives Model (GLM; Ward & Brown, 2004). The GLM is a strengths-based approach to rehabilitation which proposes that all individuals seek out certain goals known as primary goods. The proposed goods suggested by Ward and Brown (2004) were reviewed and refined by Purvis (2010) in order to establish a total of 11 primary goods: life (including health), knowledge, excellence in play (such as hobbies), excellence in work, excellence in agency, inner peace, relatedness (in platonic, romantic, and familial relationships), community (connectedness), spirituality (with regards to having some sense of purpose or meaning), pleasure, and creativity. The GLM suggests that offending behaviour can be either directly related to these goods, as in the case of a person who offends in an attempt to achieve these goals, or indirectly, where a person might offend as a result of their difficulties in otherwise satisfying such goods (Willis & Ward, 2013). Rehabilitation can therefore be facilitated by supporting an individual to develop the abilities required to achieve these primary goods and

encounter the opportunities in which they may be able to do so. Within CoSA, this approach falls within the support role of the inner circle.

CoSA were also developed on the principles of restorative justice. The restorative approach seeks to create a dialogue in order to explore the needs of all stakeholders involved in a particular offence, including the victim, the person who committed the offence, and the wider community who might also be affected (Zehr, 2015). Such approaches utilising restorative justice have generally been supported by the public, as well as by survivors of sexual violence (Marsh & Wager, 2015). Victims have perceived this approach as being procedurally just, in addition to being responsive to their individual needs in a way that a retributive justice system might not always be (van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). In a survey of people who had engaged in a restorative justice programme for sexual offences in the United States of America, 100% of survivors and 95% of perpetrators reported that they had participated in order to prevent the ICSO from doing the same thing again to somebody else (Koss, 2014).

Although the victim of a CM would not typically be present within their CoSA, the community is represented by lay people within the inner circle. Survivors of sexual assault are also often present within CoSA, with between one in 10 (Cesaroni, 2001) and one in five volunteers reporting that they have been the victim of such an offence in the past (Quaker Peace & Social Witness, 2005). Although the victim of the CM's offence is not directly involved in this process, the CoSA practises restorative principles as the CM is supported to remain accountable for the commission of their offence, and for the harm they have caused through it (Kitson-Boyce, 2018).

Hannem (2011) has argued that although CoSA were initially based on these restorative principles, at present they simply pursue the intention of protecting individuals within the wider community. This report also highlighted that in addition to this, engagement with CoSA can and does also facilitate the surveillance and monitoring of CMs. Furthermore, the programme serves to support CMs and encourage the importance of treating them with humanity in order to aid their efforts of rehabilitation. Three factors have been identified by Hannem and Petrunik (2007) as assisting in improving the effectiveness of CoSA. Firstly, although the CoSA work collaboratively with their CM, it is important that they can maintain a level of objectivity in order to be able to acknowledge any significant shortcomings or potential barriers to progress. Secondly, a CoSA ought to consist of one cohesive group who are all working together to achieve common objectives. Thirdly, an open dialogue must be maintained between the volunteers within the inner circle and the professionals who are involved with the CM, such as probation or social work staff.

Data from quantitative studies have demonstrated that CoSA appear to be effective in inciting change. Wilson et al. (2005) evaluated the Canadian pilot of CoSA by comparing a group of CMs within a CoSA to a matched comparison group of ICSOs. They concluded that CMs were 70% less likely than the comparison group to reoffend after an average period of 4.5 years. More specifically, this group was less likely to be charged for a new offence of a sexual nature or for breaching their licence conditions. They also noted that the nature of new offences which had been committed by CMs were not as severe as the previous offence for which they had most recently served a sentence.

A risk assessment specifically designed for use within CoSA, the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR), was developed in 2009 in order to assess any changes in the risk posed by CMs across time (Dwerryhouse, 2018). The tool is comprised of a total of 17 items across four risk domains which relate to CMs' sexual interests, offence supportive attitudes, self-management, and social functioning. Bates and Wager (2012) considered the risk ratings of 13 CMs who had been engaging with a CoSA based within the United Kingdom for at least 9 months. A significant decrease in risk scores were identified in 69% of CMs, however 15% had demonstrated an increase in risk ratings across two of the DRR subscales. These increases were noted across the factors of inappropriate sexual attitudes, over-confident hostile sexualisation, and inadequacy. This study showed promising support for the influence of CoSA on risk reduction, although it is not clear why an increase in risk was identified within a minority of CMs. Furthermore, the DRR scales were completed by volunteers within the CM's inner circle which could potentially raise questions regarding the accuracy of these ratings. Although volunteers are likely to be the most well-informed given the level of engagement that they have with the CM, it is possible that they may struggle to remain objective throughout this assessment process as they are likely to be invested in the CM's progression after having contributed so much time and effort to this. The reported pattern in CMs' risk ratings might therefore have looked less positive had they been completed by an independent assessor.

Furthermore, a randomised control trial conducted by Duwe (2018) considered the cost-effectiveness of CoSA in Minnesota as well as their impact on recidivism rates. This study involved a sample of 100 ICSOs, 50 of whom had engaged in a CoSA. Over a follow-up period of approximately 6 years, four ICSOs within the control group had

been reconvicted of a sexual offence compared to none of the CMs. However, one CM had been rearrested for a sexual offence although this did not result in a new conviction. It was concluded that engagement with a CoSA was associated with an 88% decrease in proven sexual recidivism. ICSOs within the control group had also been reconvicted for committing other types of offences at a higher rate than CMs had. Whilst engagement in a CoSA was generally associated with a reduction in the rate of reconviction and resentencing, this data was collected within a limited time period, and as such may be subject to change if the sample had been followed up over a longer period of time. Moreover, there are obvious ethical concerns which arise from conducting a randomised control trial within an offending population. For example, had the ICSOs within the control group also had access to their own CoSA, it might have been the case that engaging with this intervention could have prevented additional victims from coming to harm. Furthermore, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2017) have criticised this study for failing to 'blind' the researchers to participants' condition allocation (as might be expected within a randomised control trial) which could have had some influence on reported outcomes.

Duwe (2018) also calculated the cost-benefit of CoSA to the state. Due to the lower rates of reconviction and imprisonment in the CM group, it was estimated that for every \$1 spent on CoSA, \$3.73 was yielded in return. This figure will undoubtedly vary across countries due to the major differences between penal systems internationally. For example, within the United Kingdom, the delivery of each CoSA costs approximately £8,850 on average, or £14,500 when factoring in volunteers' travel and subsistence costs (McCartan et al., 2014). Nevertheless, these findings suggest that CoSA can

benefit the wider community due to using fewer financial resources overall, and also by inciting the principal goal of the programme: to prevent further victims.

Bates et al. (2014) has considered the effectiveness of those CoSA operating within the United Kingdom. A total of 71 CMs from CoSA operating within the South East of England were followed up after an average period of 53 months, and compared to a control group of 71 ICSOs who had been referred to the programme but did not go on to participate in a CoSA. There was a significantly higher number of reconvictions for contact sexual or violent offences committed by the ICSO comparison group (14.1%) than by the CMs (0%). However, more CMs had been reconvicted for a non-contact sexual offence (4.2%) than ICSOs within the control group (2.8%), at a statistically significant rate. Bates et al. (2014) suggested that this effect can be described in terms of harm reduction, as CMs caused less direct harm to victims than they would have done had they committed a contact offence.

However, despite these promising outcomes, there are some limitations in drawing comparisons between CMs and other ICSO groups. Firstly, Elliott and Beech (2012) identified that the additional contact provided to CMs by the programme could serve to increase the detection rates of any reoffending behaviour. Whereas the behaviour exhibited by an ICSO without such a network might carry on undetected, volunteers within CoSA are often responsible for identifying and reporting concerns which then lead to a reconviction or recall, such as a CM breaching their license conditions. When considering such recidivism studies, it is important to recognise that these rates of reconviction do therefore not necessarily reflect the true rates of reoffending. In fact, the efficacy of CoSA might be underestimated. Secondly, it might be considered reductionist to assume that the only difference between CMs and



comparison groups is the presence of the CoSA itself. In the research of Bates et al. (2014), for example, it was not recorded precisely why the control group of ICSOs had not engaged in a CoSA, despite having been referred to the programme. The nature of the differences in individual factors between these two groups might also play a relevant role in the likelihood of subsequent reoffending. For example, the minimisation of one's own sexual violence, issues relating to self-awareness, and problems with substance misuse might all be significant factors which could prevent an individual from being able to engage effectively with a CoSA, and are also considered to be pertinent factors in assessing the risk of sexual reoffending (Hart et al., 2003). Those ICSOs who choose not to participate in a CoSA might therefore have a potentially higher number of risk factors for reoffending, and so comparing them to CMs might not necessarily represent a well-matched control group. For these reasons, it is unlikely that a study could ever accurately investigate the precise differences between CMs and a genuine comparison group.

Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain the success of CoSA solely from quantitative data alone. Wilson (2018) recounted the story of one of the first CoSA which took place within the United Kingdom. The CM was an individual who had numerous convictions for sexual offences against children, and had been assessed as posing a significant risk of serious sexual reoffending upon release. After approximately one and a half years of engaging with CoSA, an improvement in the CM's confidence, self-esteem, and accountability for his previous offending behaviour was reported by a number of sources. However, at this stage the volunteers also became aware that the CM had attempted to groom a group of children by trying to befriend them. Although the CM was subsequently charged for breaching his Sexual Offences Prevention Order, the

sentencing judge remarked that they felt that the progress and presence of the CoSA programme had been pivotal in preventing the committal of a more serious crime due to their intervention at an early stage. From reoffending rates alone, this incident might be considered to be an example of an unsuccessful or ‘failed’ CoSA. However, the programme did appear to help the CM in maintaining an 18-month period of desistance, which might otherwise have been much shorter without this intervention. Furthermore, the presence of the CoSA was perceived to be essential in monitoring and reporting this risk-related information at the earliest opportunity before any further harm could be caused.

In a review of case files regarding two CoSA pilot projects operating within the United Kingdom, some degree of positive change in the CM was recorded in approximately two thirds of cases (McCartan et al., 2014). Among these were a reduction in anger and in grievance thinking, as well as an increase in more appropriate coping strategies, the establishment of a relapse prevention plan, and the development of additional insight into their offending behaviours. However, concerns were also noted for some CMs, such as having difficulties in engaging openly with the CoSA, being reluctant to manage one’s own risks, having little self-awareness, and failing to implement their relapse prevention plan effectively.

CoSA also appear to play a role in facilitating psychological transitions within CMs. In a study of 14 CMs based in the Netherlands, participants reported a significant increase in their levels of self-esteem as they spent more time engaging with the programme (Höing et al., 2013). They also reported a significant increase in their coping skills, specifically with regards to their level of emotion regulation and

developing an internal locus of control. However, it should be highlighted that these were self-reported outcomes and as such may be subject to particular biases.

An initial scoping search exercise identified one literature review into CoSA which had previously been conducted. Clarke et al. (2017) used a systematic approach to review the literature exploring outcomes for CMs who had engaged in CoSA. Fifteen primary studies had been identified which were deemed to be appropriate for consideration and synthesis within their review. Only those outcome studies which had reported quantitative methodologies were collated. They identified a number of studies in which a lower rate of recidivism was reported for CMs than for a comparison group. However, they also highlighted that these differences were not found to be statistically significant. Cost-benefit analyses generally revealed some return on CoSA investment, ranging greatly from 4% to 82%. Some improvements in psychosocial outcomes had also been noted in three studies, yet none of these had been compared to a control group. As such, it was difficult to assess the extent of the impact that CoSA had on these changes. Furthermore, many of the studies were noted to have failed to consider these factors at all.

The present systematic literature review was therefore intended to build upon the findings of Clarke et al. (2017) by considering those articles which went beyond quantitative techniques in order to explore the in-depth experiences reported regarding CoSA more widely. This review focuses on the outcomes reported in qualitative studies regarding CMs' experiences of their CoSA. The inclusion of qualitative data was expected to allow for a deeper exploration of individual experiences, such as psychosocial factors, which Clarke et al. (2017) noted to have previously been somewhat restricted within the quantitative research studies.

In addition, the present review aimed to better understand the divergent nature of CMs' experiences. It is difficult to extract from quantitative data alone, such as rates of recidivism and reoffending, the way in which CoSA have impacted CMs. That is, identifying why the programme was effective at helping certain CMs to desist from offending but not others is difficult to summarise solely from studies using quantitative methodologies. The inclusion of articles using a qualitative methodology in the present review is therefore intended to provide an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the processes at work within the programme, and how this may differ from one CM to another.

The review aimed to explore the unique experiences of CMs engaging in CoSA as they re-enter the community, and the impact that this programme had on individuals. Conducting a systematic review into the literature regarding CoSA allowed the exploration of the experiences and outcomes of an intervention which unlike many others is delivered towards the end of, or following, the custodial sentence. It was expected that considering these experiences of CoSA could assist in further improving the development of these programmes internationally, in addition to understanding which social factors might support ICSSOs more generally in achieving desistance from offending.

## **Method**

### **Scoping Exercise**

Initially, a scoping exercise was undertaken in order to explore the extent of relevant literature regarding CoSA. This was also administered in order to identify any other literature reviews which had been conducted on the subject. This scoping process

allowed the focus of the review to be revised in order to better adapt to the current state of the literature. A systematic review regarding the outcomes of CoSA was identified (Clarke et al., 2017), however this was noted to have exclusively incorporated studies utilising quantitative methodologies as described above.

### **Sources of Literature**

The main search was conducted on April 19, 2020 within the following databases: EMBASE (comprised of literature published from 1974 to 2020), APA PsycInfo (1967 to 2020), Web of Science (all databases; 1900 to 2020), and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (1743 to 2020). This choice was based on the overall relevance of available databases and took care to include a thesis repository in order to increase the likelihood of identifying any relevant unpublished work on the subject.

### **Search Strategy**

The search terms selected for this systematic literature review were “sexual offending” and “Circles of Support and Accountability”. Truncated versions of these search terms were utilised, and the full syntax and results of this search can be found in Appendix A. Specific outcome measures were not included within the search terms in an attempt to avoid any introduction of researcher bias to the search.

### **Study Selection**

#### ***Inclusion Criteria and the Participants, Interventions, Comparators, Outcomes, Study Design (PICOS) Framework***

In order to determine the relevance of the identified articles, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was defined in advance of the screening process. These criteria are

summarised in Table 1 below. The final version of the inclusion and exclusion form which was used to identify appropriate articles within the study selection process can be found in Appendix B.

**Table 1***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

PICOS	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Participants	Individuals who have been convicted of committing a sexual offence	Individuals who have not been convicted of committing a sexual offence
Interventions	Impending, present, or past engagement in CoSA, which may have started in a prison or a community setting	Lack of any engagement with the CoSA programme
Comparators	Circles of Support and Accountability might be referred to by acronym (CoSA) or simply as Circles of Support	
Outcomes	Self-reported outcomes which may include social factors, cognitive impacts, employment, accommodation, self-esteem and offending behaviours	Purely quantitative outcomes such as rates of recidivism or cost-benefit analyses
Study Design	Qualitative or mixed methodology where the CM has provided some form of qualitative data	Exclusive use of quantitative methodology; mixed methodology in which CMs have only undergone quantitative methods; opinion pieces, reviews and meta-analyses
Other	Written in English	Written in a non-English language

It was essential that all participants had some experience of being a CM within a CoSA in order to share their unique experience of this phenomenon. Their CoSA may have initially commenced in a prison setting in order to support the participant through the process of re-entry into the community where the CoSA then continued, or they may have originally commenced within the community following release. Both types of CoSA were included within the present systematic review in order to ensure that an appropriate number of studies were retained, and that experiences across different scenarios could be explored.

Although it was expected that the majority of participants would be male due to the disproportionate number of men who are convicted of sexual offences (Grayston & De Luca, 1999), and are therefore referred to CoSA, this was not set as a strict inclusion criterion for fear of any unnecessary exclusion. Articles which qualitatively considered the experiences of female ICSOs partaking in CoSA would therefore have been eligible for inclusion in the current review.

Self-reported outcomes of CMs' experiences were required for inclusion, and studies which had solely reported quantitative outcomes, such as reconviction, housing, or employment rates, were excluded. This is due to the fact that quantitative outcomes provide limited information regarding how each CM uniquely experienced their CoSA, and were also likely to have already been captured within the review of Clarke et al. (2017).

Initially, the inclusion criteria were designed in such a way that articles using a mixed methodology approach were deemed to be eligible, providing that they had reported some form of qualitative data within the study. However, this criterion was



noted to require adaptation as the initial screening process took place. It became evident that multiple studies had used a mixed methodology in which they had collected quantitative data, such as rates of recidivism, regarding CMs, and had only reported on qualitative data provided by other participants, such as volunteers, professionals, or members of the public. Although technically meeting the initial inclusion criteria, these studies were deemed insufficient to explore the distinct experiences of CMs in depth. This inclusion criterion was therefore adapted in order to ensure that those studies using mixed methodological designs had included the use of a qualitative methodology directly with CMs themselves during the study.

Finally, it was essential that studies had been written in English in order to be included within the systematic review. Constraints on time and resources in addition to the monolingualism of the researcher dictated the necessity of this criterion.

### ***The Search Process***

A total number of 4,349 studies were initially yielded using various truncations of the above search terms. However, upon further investigation, 301 of these studies were found to be duplicated across different databases, and were therefore removed. Nineteen studies were written in a non-English language, and were removed on the basis of not meeting the specified inclusion criteria (i.e. written in English). Following this initial screening, 4,029 studies remained.

In the second screening stage, the title and abstract of each study was considered, and those which were either evidently irrelevant to the subject area or obviously failed to meet the inclusion criteria were removed. This included alternative formats such as opinion pieces, meta-analyses, and reviews. Many articles reviewed

within this stage concerned another kind of programme or intervention, including pharmacological approaches, day treatment programmes, group therapy, and multisystemic approaches. These empirical studies were removed due to not meeting the 'interventions' inclusion criteria, as they did not include participants involved in a CoSA. A total of 3,980 studies were removed for these reasons.

At the beginning of the final screening stage, 49 studies remained. Two studies were excluded as full versions of these studies proved to be unobtainable. The remaining 47 studies were then accessed in full and considered in relation to the inclusion criteria.

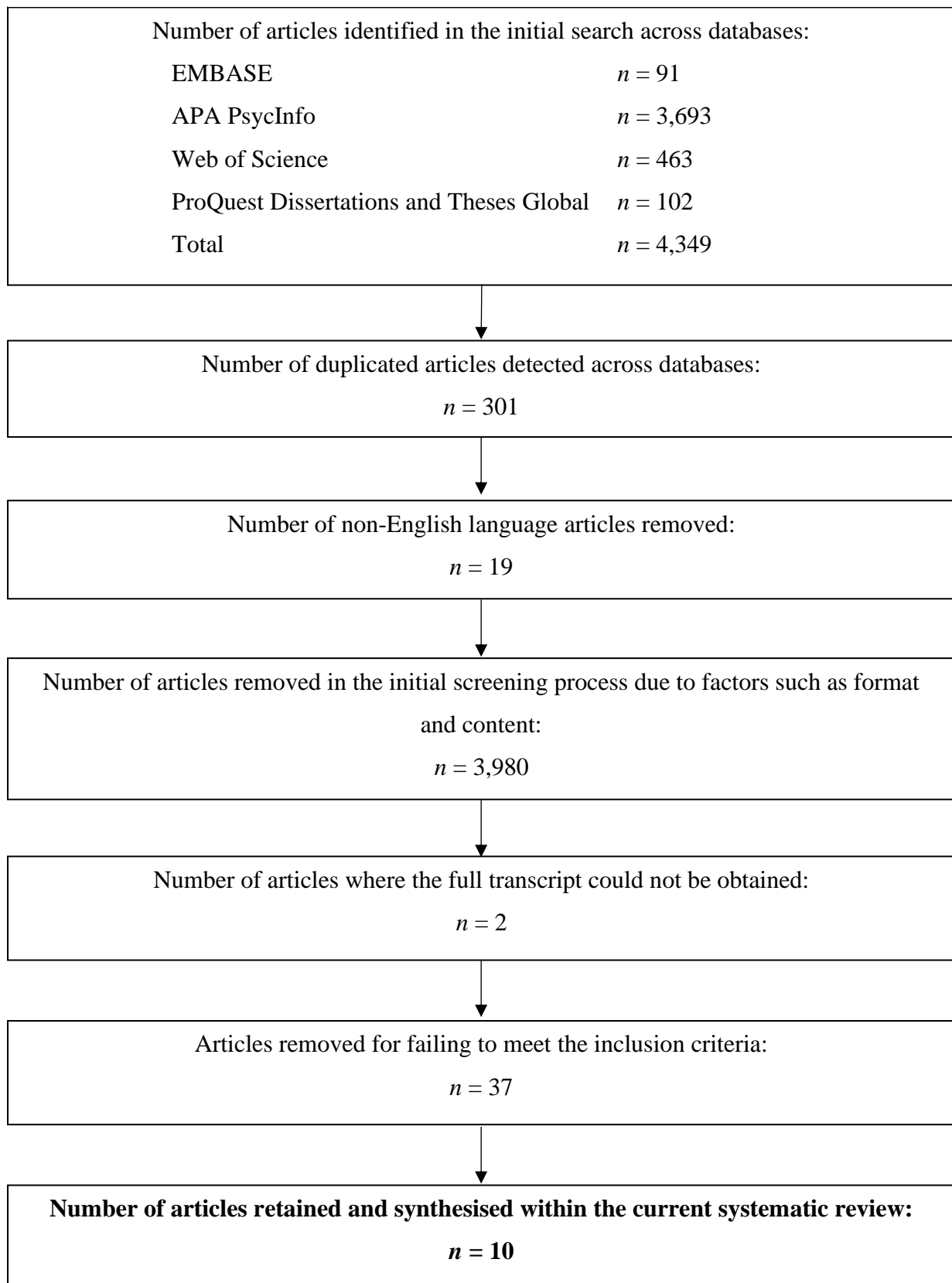
These final 47 studies were compared against the inclusion criteria and the aforementioned PICOS framework. A total of 21 studies were removed within this stage due to their sole use of quantitative data. These studies were thus deemed to be irrelevant to the present systematic literature review which focused exclusively on qualitative methodologies. In addition, 15 studies which only considered attitudes of the public, or the experiences of volunteers and professionals working within CoSA, as opposed to the views of CMs themselves, were also excluded at this point. One study was excluded as it had simply summarised the case files of CMs but no further interviews or surveys had been conducted and no qualitative analysis had taken place. A total of 10 studies were retained for the present review.

The conviction history of participants was not always made explicitly clear within studies. Information relating to this inclusion criterion was unclear in a number of cases, and studies were therefore assessed in this regard with the use of contextual

information. A diagram depicting the full study selection process is illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*A Flowchart Depicting the Process of the Systematic Search*



### *Quality Assessment*

The remaining 10 studies were assessed for their quality. The quality assessment tool used was adapted from a checklist produced by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). The original checklist was designed to focus exclusively on the quality of qualitative research and is widely used across literature reviews (Hannes et al., 2010). A copy of the checklist used in the present systematic review can be found in Appendix C. The quality assessment checklist included 10 questions regarding the study's validity, results, and the applicability of the findings. The first two questions acted as screening questions; that is, studies had to clearly state their aims and the use of a qualitative methodology had to be deemed appropriate in order to be retained and further quality assessed. The checklist also considered the appropriateness of the design, the recruitment process, data collection techniques, an appropriate consideration of the relationship between participants and researcher, ethical issues, rigorous data analysis techniques, clearly stated findings, and finally the overall value of the research. Each study was then quality assessed, and was awarded two marks for each criterion it clearly met, one mark where the criterion appeared to be partially met, and no marks where this criterion was not met. These scores were then converted into an overall percentage so that each of the retained studies could be directly compared in terms of their level of quality.

A trainee psychologist with psychological research experience conducted quality assessment ratings on five of the 10 studies. The primary researcher then compared the scoring on each quality assessment item for each of the five studies, and calculated interrater reliability to be 84% overall. Scoring for both raters is provided within Table 2. Disagreement between quality assessment ratings were due to discrepancies on a

number of CASP item ratings, including the appropriateness of the methodology and research design, the appropriateness of the recruitment strategy used, the consideration of ethical issues, the consideration of the relationship between the researcher and participants, and whether the research was deemed to be valuable. Items with a discrepancy in ratings were revisited by the primary researcher for reconsideration and to ensure accurate scoring. The lowest scoring study's quality was assessed to be at a level of 50% (Cesaroni, 2001), and the highest studies were rated at 90% (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a, Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b). Ordinarily, a rating of 60% would be used as a cut off for study retention. However, due to the small number of studies available at this stage of the screening process, each of these studies was retained for use within this review.

**Table 2***Interrater Quality Assessment Ratings*

Study	CASP checklist	Primary rater	Second rater	Agreement
Cesaroni (2001)	Item			
	Statement of aims	1	1	Yes
	Appropriate methodology	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate research design	1	1	Yes
	Appropriate recruitment	1	1	Yes
	Data collection	2	2	Yes
	Relationship	0	0	Yes
	Ethical issues	0	1	No
	Rigorous analysis	1	1	Yes
	Statement of findings	1	1	Yes
	Value	1	2	No
	Quality assessment rating	50%	60%	
	Item scores in agreement			80%
Höing et al. (2013)	Item			
	Statement of aims	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate methodology	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate research design	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate recruitment	1	2	No
	Data collection	1	1	Yes
	Relationship	1	1	Yes
	Ethical issues	1	1	Yes
	Rigorous analysis	1	1	Yes
	Statement of findings	2	2	Yes
	Value	1	1	Yes
	Quality assessment rating	70%	75%	
	Item scores in agreement			90%

Study	CASP checklist	Primary rater	Second rater	Agreement
Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018)	Item			
	Statement of aims	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate methodology	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate research design	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate recruitment	1	1	Yes
	Data collection	2	2	Yes
	Relationship	1	2	No
	Ethical issues	2	2	Yes
	Rigorous analysis	2	2	Yes
	Statement of findings	2	2	Yes
	Value	2	2	Yes
	Quality assessment rating	90%	95%	
	Item scores in agreement			90%
Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019b)	Item			
	Statement of aims	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate methodology	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate research design	2	2	Yes
	Appropriate recruitment	1	1	Yes
	Data collection	2	2	Yes
	Relationship	1	2	No
	Ethical issues	2	2	Yes
	Rigorous analysis	2	2	Yes
	Statement of findings	2	2	Yes
	Value	2	2	Yes
	Quality assessment rating	90%	95%	
	Item scores in agreement			90%
Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018)	Item			
	Statement of aims	1	1	Yes
	Appropriate methodology	2	1	No
	Appropriate research design	2	1	No
	Appropriate recruitment	2	2	Yes
	Data collection	2	2	Yes
	Relationship	0	0	Yes
	Ethical issues	1	1	Yes
	Rigorous analysis	1	1	Yes
	Statement of findings	2	2	Yes
	Value	2	1	No
	Quality assessment rating	75%	60%	
	Item scores in agreement			70%
All studies	Item scores in agreement			84%



### ***Data Extraction***

Data extraction was guided by a form adapted from the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (2007). The adapted version of the form as used in the present review can be found in Appendix D. The information collected for each study included items such as the primary aims of the research, participant demographic information, evidence of ethical considerations, methodology, identified themes, strengths and limitations, the implications of the findings, and a consideration of whether the role of the researcher and their relationship to the participants had been appropriately recognised within the study.

### **Results**

Data from a total of 10 studies was collated. Each study was assessed to have met the inclusion criteria as summarised above, and was judged to have met at least 50% of the quality assessment criteria. The mean percentage of the assessed quality of studies used within this systematic review was calculated to be 75%. Initially, a textual narrative synthesis approach was taken (Lucas et al., 2007) in order to explore the scope of these studies. A summary of each study's sample, geographic location, methodology, findings, and quality assessment rating is represented within Table 3.

**Table 3***A Summary of the Characteristics, Data, and Quality Assessment Ratings within Retained Studies*

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Cesaroni (2001)	Ontario, Canada	<i>n</i> = 12 Male Age not specified	Open-ended survey developed for face-to-face interviews	Narrative approach	Motivations included avoiding unwanted attention, a lack of social support, and perceiving this as being their last chance  Felt that they would have reoffended sexually, used substances or engaged in non-sexual offences if they had not worked with their CoSA	CoSAs fill a void for ICSOs with little professional support and no contact with family	Interviews conducted on a first name basis only may have contributed to openness  Data collected from only well-engaged CMs  Unclear analysis process	50%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
					Reported learning how to socialise, and receiving emotional and practical support from volunteers			
Fox (2015)	Vermont, United States	<i>n</i> = 20 Gender and age of participants not specified	Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews	Conceptual themes produced from coded transcripts	CMs felt their CoSA helped them to become less isolated, both physically and emotionally CMs were able to develop a new personal narrative that was unrelated to their history of offending	CoSA demonstrates the potential of positive labelling Community integration precedes desistance	Clearly defined aims Inclusion of a range of CMs from a number of different cities No named method of data analysis Commissioned by the Department	65%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Gilliam et al. (2020)	Minnesota, United States	<i>n</i> = 10 Male 25–54 years ( <i>M</i> = 38)	Semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or by telephone	Thematic analysis	Perceived benefits to volunteers: helping others, learning about offenders, personal growth, developing friendships  Suggested changes to the programme: references for particular volunteer characteristics (e.g. older age), desire for more consistently available volunteers, desire for	Volunteers' commitment and availability should be a target within future recruitment  The goals of CoSA ought to be outlined explicitly	of Corrections, which may have influenced response styles  Clearly defined method of analysis  CMs limited to only those posing a moderate risk of reoffending  Ten-year delay between data collection and	75%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
					more frequent CoSA, belief that other types of offenders should also be involved, a wish that they had originally approached the programme with a more open mind, experiencing less stigma, a desire for additional resources, and no desired changes whatsoever	during recruitment	study publication	
Höing et al. (2013)	United Kingdom and The Netherlands	<i>n</i> = 14 Male 20–60 years ( <i>M</i> = 46.7)	Face-to-face semi-structured interviews; card sorting technique	Grounded theory approach	Stages of group development: assessment, building, equilibrium, transit, and occasionally dysfunction	Offers an extension of the CoSA model Effective CoSA require positive	Transparency in the development and refinement of categories	70%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
					<p>Progress of the CM: self-regulation, social skills, outlook, perception of self, and perception of risk</p> <p>Influencing factors: characteristics of the CoSA, strategies utilised by the CoSA, and CM characteristics</p> <p>Dynamics of change: self-regulation, social skills, outlook, perception of self, and perception of risk</p>	<p>group development and implementation of these strategies</p>	<p>Participants involved in the refinement of categories and concepts</p> <p>Categories developed from a combination of CM, volunteer, and co-ordinator reports</p>	

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Höing, Vogelvang, and Bogaerts (2017)	The Netherlands	<i>n</i> = 17 Male 36–64 years ( <i>M</i> = 47.9)	Semi-structured interviews	Kwalitan computer program based on a grounded theory approach	Cognitive changes: self-reflective skills, improved self-image and self-confidence, increase in hope and trust, better awareness of relevant problems  Developing skills: openness, assertiveness, problem solving, social skills, emotional regulation, and self-care  External transitions: improved social network, better participation, increase in acceptable leisure activities, safety	Many CMs demonstrated changes towards desistance  CoSA contributed towards these changes	Incorporated data across different time points  Clear, pre-defined approach to qualitative analysis  Shorter interviews may have limited richness of data collected  Only the first year of a CoSA was explored	65%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018)	United Kingdom	<i>n</i> = 9 Male 45–78 years ( <i>M</i> = 61.1)	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretative phenomenological analysis and repertory grids	Fears with regards to their release from prison including feeling apprehensive about the process, having a lack of social support, and being aware of the stigma surrounding their offence history  Developing insight into their risk-related behaviours and acknowledging the professional support around them  Taking a step in the right direction and realising	CMs were fearful of isolation and stigmatisation, which could be reduced by a prison model of CoSA	Clearly defined approach to qualitative analysis  Limited to a prospective view of CMs' needs	90%



Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
					that help would be available			
Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019a)	United Kingdom	<i>n</i> = 7 Gender unspecified 51–78 years ( <i>M</i> = 62.6)	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	Ambiguous practice: the volunteer role is limited within prison, a lack of commitment from volunteers, confusion regarding the role of risk management  Supporting desistance: volunteers supported them to stay on track and remain accountable, CMs lacked prosocial relationships outside of the CoSA	The significance of expressive support should be emphasised to volunteers  Volunteer commitment should be reinforced regularly  Accountability does not necessarily require	Researchers actively attempted to elicit balanced responses  Clearly defined analysis process  Many participants also appear to have been involved in the above study	90%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019b)	United Kingdom	<i>n</i> = 9 Male 45–78 years ( <i>M</i> = 61.1)	Semi-structured interviews	Interpretative phenomenological analysis with repertory grids	Believed release from prison would be different to previous releases as they had support and had experienced some form of cognitive shift with regards to developing a sense of agency  Concerns about the future, such as never being free from the stigma of their offence history	offence-focused discussions  The prison model of CoSA reduces feelings of being alone, potentially facilitating desistance	Clearly defined approach to analysis  Data collected across time points  Small sample size, particularly at the second time point  Many participants also appear to	90%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018)	Minnesota, United States	<i>n</i> = 10 Male 25–51 years ( <i>M</i> = 38.0)	Face-to-face and telephone interviews with open-ended questions	NVivo software for systematic analysis	Receipt of instrumental social support from volunteers (e.g. employment, transportation, accommodation)  Receipt of expressive social support from volunteers (e.g. friendship, help with substance misuse, moral support)  Generally reported feeling they had made progress in these areas, despite	Expressive social support was critical for CMs', although instrumental support was also important	Interviewed CMs within the community in addition to those who had been returned to prison  Only CMs with at least one years' involvement in CoSA were invited to participate	75%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
Thompson (2015)	United Kingdom	<i>n</i> = 30 Male 18–65 years ( <i>M</i> = 43.3)	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive and deductive approaches to produce themes	Experienced stigma which they found techniques to manage and felt free from within their CoSA Acknowledged temptations which the CoSA helped them to manage View of CoSA as part of a wider 'web' of criminal justice agencies which induced uncertainty in CMs Desire for changes in their cognitions, perception of identity, and social	CMs feel that CoSA support ICSOs to achieve desistance more quickly CoSA complement the work of professional agencies, and provide additional support to these	Large number of participants interviewed Participants represented a variety of regional providers No clear approach to data analysis Unclear to what extent CoSA were responsible for	80%

Study	Geographic Location	Participants - Core Members	Qualitative Methodology Used	Data Analysis Technique	Key Findings - Core Members' Experiences	Conclusions	Strengths and Limitations	Quality Assessment Rating
					networks (although there were barriers to these)		reported changes	

## Summary of the Studies

### *Study 1: Cesaroni (2001)*

Cesaroni (2001) used open-ended questions in order to understand the experiences of both CMs and of volunteers within CoSA. The present review focused on the data collected from CMs. The CMs within this study had been invited to engage in CoSA by the Mennonite Central Committee when they were leaving prison due to the expiration of their warranty (as opposed to being released on parole). These CMs had typically been assessed as posing a high risk of reoffending, had little social support around them, and were deemed to be high profile within either the media or their local community.

These questions were posed within in-person interviews, where CMs were asked about their experiences of their CoSA, the difficulties which they had faced in reintegrating, how CoSA had impacted on this, and their initial motivation for engaging with the programme. The study aimed to explore whether community reintegration, accountability, and perceived public safety, were goals of a conflicting nature in the management of ICSOs. It also aimed to understand how CoSA aided reintegration to the community, and how volunteers and CMs were involved in this process. The experiences reported by CMs were presented in a narrative format.

Generally, a number of respondents reported relatively similar experiences. Many described being motivated to join their CoSA, as they felt that they would have no alternative methods of support upon release from prison, they had a desire to avoid unwanted attention from professionals and from the media which they felt could be appropriately mitigated through engaging with the programme, and some viewed

joining a CoSA as a final option for them. Many CMs reported being drawn to CoSA because of the fact that within Ontario, engaging with a CoSA often meant that the police would choose not to release a public statement regarding the CM's release from prison.

Others were motivated by the fact that CoSA were offered by an organisation which was independent of correctional services. Participants also reported that they believed that they would have engaged in further offending behaviours, both sexual and non-sexual, had they not engaged in CoSA. When asked about how they had been helped by the volunteers, the majority of CMs reported that they had received at least either practical or emotional assistance within the inner circle. Participants also perceived that they had developed their interpersonal skills throughout the meetings. One CM described feeling as though he would not have been able to leave his house without the support of his CoSA.

The way in which data were analysed within the study was not immediately clear. As opposed to using a precise and clearly defined method of coding and concept formation, brief descriptions of the opinions of particular CMs were presented. This narrative approach suggests that the findings of this paper are potentially relatively superficial and insufficient to thoroughly understand the unique experiences of CMs. Furthermore, research interviews were only conducted with those more engaged CMs who continued to meet regularly with their CoSA, as opposed to individuals who had stopped attending their meetings, perhaps due to a geographical relocation or a lack of motivation. It is therefore likely that these findings focus on the unrepresentative positive experiences of CMs who continue to make progress in their reintegration

process rather than reflecting the experiences of those individuals who feel that they have not benefitted from being in their CoSA.

***Study 2: Fox (2015)***

Fox (2015) used semi-structured interviews involving open-ended questions in order to explore the experiences, challenges, and opinions of participants engaging with CoSA. CMs, volunteers, and CoSA co-ordinators who comprised a CoSA, all engaged in these interviews. Clear aims of this study were defined, including an exploration of the nature of the relationships between CMs and volunteers, and developing an understanding of how this integration related to CMs' offending cessation. The way in which data were analysed in this study was briefly mentioned, although no particular method was reported specifically. After being transcribed, the interviews were coded in order to identify whether saturation had yet occurred, and then common themes were deduced by the researchers involved.

CMs generally reported feelings of isolation; they felt particularly restricted and excluded due to the legal conditions imposed on them upon release, such as having to remain in approved accommodation and being limited in who they were permitted to associate with. This was addressed with the help of practical support received from volunteers, which led them to feel more included and supported by the CoSA. Developing a sense of trust and learning to understand the sincerity of the volunteers was also an experience shared by many CMs. Although some were initially suspicious, they were soon able to learn that volunteers did not have any ulterior motives but simply wanted to support the CM to succeed. In addition to reducing this sense of exclusion, participants reported feeling included and supported by their inner circle. Volunteers



assisted CMs by modelling a pro-social lifestyle and supporting them to respond appropriately to arising life stressors by taking a solution-focused approach. Another key theme was the removal of traditional labels. CMs initially felt as though they were out of place within the community but recognised that volunteers had assisted them in building an identity that they felt was unique and separate to their history of offending behaviour.

Twenty CMs were interviewed, facilitating the ability to consider the commonality of particular themes within this group. However, this piece of research was documented to have been commissioned by the local Department of Corrections which may have impacted on the results. Once CMs were made aware of this fact, they might have felt more inclined to report positive outcomes and experiences, which would have been welcomed by the commissioners, and may have therefore felt less likely to disclose anything that might have put them at any risk of returning to prison. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that while the majority of CMs within the study were presumed to be ICSOs, Fox (2015) indicated that this was not necessarily the case for all CoSA operating within the area. Rather, participants were described as medium- to high-risk offenders who had been recently released from prison, and were 'typically' an ICSO. The themes found within this study might therefore not necessarily reflect those specific to ICSOs within CoSA.

### ***Study 3: Gilliam et al. (2020)***

Gilliam et al. (2020) conducted research which was primarily focused on the experiences of volunteers within CoSA, however they also sought to explore CMs' values, hence the study's inclusion within the current review. This study aimed to

explore how CMs' and volunteers' perspectives on the CoSA programme differed, and how both parties perceived the benefits to volunteers. Individual interviews lasting between 60-120 minutes were conducted with 10 CMs and with some of the volunteers involved in each of their CoSA. An iterative coding process of the transcribed interviews was then performed by two researchers, and Thematic Analysis was conducted in order to develop common themes.

CMs reported a number of perceived benefits for the volunteers involved in their CoSA, including being able to help others, learning about ICSOs beyond the stereotypes which they were already aware of, contributing to their own personal growth, and the opportunity to form new friendships. CMs were also asked what they would change about their CoSA, if given the opportunity. Half of the CMs interviewed reported that they would prefer volunteers to be more consistent in their attendance, and to have more availability for the programme. Some felt frustrated with how busy volunteers were with other responsibilities in their lives outside of the CoSA, whereas others found that certain volunteers appeared to lack interest and would simply fail to show up to meetings. Many also expressed specific characteristics which they would value in CoSA volunteers such as being of an older age and being female. CMs also reported that they would like to see volunteers from a wider diversity of racial backgrounds, suggesting that their experiences had been dominated by volunteers of one or few ethnic groups. CMs reported a desire for CoSA meetings to be offered more frequently and for a longer period of time, and for the programme to be made available to people with different offending histories. One participant remarked that, in hindsight, he wished that he had first gone into his CoSA with a more positive mindset. Another felt that more could be done in order to remove the stigma associated with being an ICSO within a

CoSA. There was also a desire for more resources to be made available to the programme, although the nature of such resources was not explicitly explained. Finally, three of the CMs reported that there were no changes whatsoever that they would have liked to see in relation to their CoSA.

Although this study's main focus was on the impact of volunteers, CMs' perceptions and opinions towards volunteers are crucial to understand as this directly affects how they experience their own CoSA. These findings are useful in determining what a CM seeks in a volunteer and how they can best be supported by their inner circle, which in turn will be useful in guiding more effective and appropriate volunteer recruitment. Further exploration of this aspect could be valuable in order to better understand not only what changes CMs would like to see but also how and why they feel that these adjustments would be beneficial to them. Furthermore, it is not overtly clear within this study how themes were developed, nor how many differences in coding between researchers were present and how these were resolved. It is therefore difficult to conclude what influence the researchers had on the production of these themes.

***Study 4: Höing et al. (2013)***

Höing et al. (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with CMs, volunteers, and CoSA co-ordinators. The study aimed to understand how and why CoSA succeed in reducing reoffending. A clear approach to qualitative analysis was defined within the study. The use of the grounded theory technique allowed initial categories and concepts to be developed. These were refined later through the use of further interviews and with

the support of a card task in which initial concepts were altered and added to by participants.

Of the 14 CMs interviewed within the first stage of the study, six had a conviction for an internet-based sexual offence, including grooming and possession of child sexual exploitation material, and eight had been convicted of child sexual abuse. Six CMs were then interviewed at the second stage in order to support the development and refinement of themes. Four main categories of experiences were identified across these interviews. These were described as group development, progress of the CM, influencing factors, and the dynamics of change.

The group development category presented four main stages of the CoSA's process. The first of these was the initial assessment stage in which volunteers assess the CM, but the CM also informally assesses the character of their volunteers in return. Within the second stage, participants reported experiences of being open and honest in order to identify shared goals, which helped in building appropriate relationships. This was supported by the inner circle co-operating and trusting each other, and was generally when CMs began to feel accepted by their CoSA. In the third stage, participants felt that their CoSA had reached a stage of equilibrium, where the group became cohesive and were able to jointly work things through. Participants felt that within this stage they came together as equals and reported a sense of solidarity. At this stage, there was less of a focus placed on the CM as an individual because the inner circle would also discuss volunteers' problems, as well as engaging in more social activities together. Fourthly, a transit stage was described in which the CoSA explored potential future steps, and where some CMs described that they felt that the group had transitioned to being friends. However, some participants instead described ineffective

group development. This was labelled by Höing et al. (2013) as a fifth dysfunctional stage, and was characterised by the inner circle experiencing disagreement and arguments. Participants who had experienced this stage felt that there was a lack of trust and openness, that the CoSA did not feel cohesive, and that the CM did not appear to be committed to the programme. This stage typically culminated in some kind of crisis, such as either lay members or the CM threatening to leave the CoSA. Participants who had experienced this dysfunctional stage described valuing the input of their CoSA's co-ordinator to help in rebuilding the inner circle.

The second main category concerned the individual progress which CMs had made. The first subcategory within this was self-regulation, as it was felt that CMs were better able to solve problems and experienced a reduction in both rumination and stress. Secondly, there were perceived benefits to their social skills and relationships. For many, this was associated with becoming more open and honest within the CoSA. CMs were also able to refine their communication skills and became more receptive to those around them with the help of their CoSA. Thirdly, CMs developed a more positive outlook on their own lives. They felt hopeful for their future and experienced a sense of belonging from engaging with their community. Fourthly, CMs' self-perceptions improved as they developed an improved sense of self-esteem and gained self-confidence. Finally, CMs developed further insight into their own risks and acknowledged that they remained accountable for managing these.

Höing et al. (2013) also identified a number of factors which influenced the progress of the CoSA. The first of these was the characteristics of the CoSA itself. These were divided into structural characteristics (such as the frequency of meetings, consistency of volunteer attendance, and diversity of volunteers) and inclusive

characteristics (including trust, openness, acceptance, and belonging). Secondly, strategies taken by the CoSA were considered. These included inclusive strategies, where volunteers provided moral and practical support; change-promoting strategies, including confrontation, praise, practice, and encouraging accountability; and risk-reduction strategies, including the discussion of the index offence and of any risk management or relapse prevention plans. Thirdly, the influence of the CM's own characteristics was reported. Remaining co-operative with the inner circle by practising skills helped to develop CMs' insight, while engaging in open and honest communication supported group development.

Finally, the study also explored which of these categories best supported CMs to make meaningful changes in their lives. Having a positive group dynamic and the inclusive characteristics of the CoSA were most commonly reported as contributing to this change.

A number of relevant and prevalent categories were clearly outlined from the narratives of these participants. This study explored a particularly wide breadth of factors in an attempt to better understand how CoSA operate. In addition, the way in which these conclusions were reached was made explicitly clear within the study. This transparency is useful in being able to consider the legitimacy of the findings, and in developing a richer understanding of these individuals' experiences. However, these categories were formed from a combination of reports from CMs, volunteers, and coordinators within CoSA, and as such are impossible to disentangle from each other. Unfortunately, it was therefore unclear as to what extent these categories would have been produced from the reports of experiences of CMs alone.

***Study 5: Höing, Vogelvang, and Bogaerts (2017)***

Höing, Vogelvang, and Bogaerts (2017) used a mixed methodology approach in order to gather qualitative in addition to quantitative data. The present review focused solely on the qualitative data. Interviews were conducted with CMs, in addition to the professionals who were involved with their case, and lasted approximately 20-45 minutes. This approach was chosen in an attempt to corroborate reports by CMs in order to minimise the effect of any socially desirable responding. Of the 17 CMs who engaged in this study, eight were noted to have been convicted for non-contact offences, and nine had convictions for contact sexual offences.

The study aimed to understand how CoSA facilitated CMs' desistance from offending and whether any of the changes experienced by CMs were related to their engagement in CoSA activities. CMs were interviewed at three different time points: prior to the commencement of their CoSA, after 6 months of engagement, and again after 1 year of engagement. The interviews were guided by a pre-defined list of topics, such as their expectations, the structure and quality of their CoSA meetings, any relevant transitions, and the future directions of the CoSA. Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed with the assistance of Kwalitan, a specialised computer software, and subsequently approached using Grounded Theory. Transcripts were coded using inductive coding in order for categories to be identified, which were subsequently placed in a hierarchical order by one researcher. Clusters of concepts were then identified by the researchers.

After the first 6 months of engaging with their CoSA, CMs within the study reported having experienced changes across a number of domains. These categories

were described as cognitions (such as self-confidence and trust), skills and improved self-regulation (including problem solving and social skills), and social transitions (for example, engaging in appropriate leisure activities and beginning to develop social networks outside of the CoSA).

Following 12 months of engagement with their CoSA, CMs began to report a more varied range of different experiences. Two CMs had chosen to disengage from their CoSA due to discord arising between their volunteers and themselves. One CoSA had been dissolved by the programme's co-ordinator due to the CM's failure to co-operate with the programme. These individuals were therefore not all able to be interviewed at the 12-month follow-up stage. The 13 remaining CMs who did continue to attend active CoSA reported experiencing further changes, including the development of problem-solving and interpersonal skills, improved self-confidence and self-reflective abilities, and the development of insight into relevant problems such as their risk factors and empathy towards their past victims. Some CMs also reported having developed appropriate relationships outside of their CoSA. However, two CMs did report that they had generally noticed few changes over this time period.

The majority of changes identified within this study were internal, such as the development of cognitive and self-regulative skills. These were facilitated by having ongoing support from volunteers for both large and small issues, in addition to the way in which CMs were encouraged and supervised to complete novel tasks. External changes, such as forming appropriate relationships or engaging in meaningful activities, however, were supported by the CoSA helping the CM to identify achievable goals and then motivating them to develop the relevant skills to meet these. Höing, Vogelvang,



and Bogaerts (2017) suggested that these changes are likely to have supported CMs to develop an increased sense of agency, which in turn helped to facilitate their desistance.

This study made use of a clearly defined topic list in approaching interviews and included appropriate open-ended and follow-up questions to gather extensive information from CMs. The analysis process of the qualitative data was clearly outlined, with a wide range of experiences being reported by CMs and then clustered into pertinent concepts. However, this data analysis process was undertaken by only one of the researchers. It appears that the process of coding, categorisation and the formation of the conceptual hierarchy did not involve input from other researchers. This suggests that the categories identified within this study might be specific to the experiences of one researcher, and it ought to be noted that other researchers presented with the same raw data might reach different conclusions about those experiences reported by CMs. Moreover, the length of the interviews was relatively short which is likely to have significantly limited the richness of the data gathered. Furthermore, the data provided from both CMs and professionals were analysed together, and as such is it impossible to predict which of these changes would have been produced from CMs' accounts alone.

***Study 6: Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018)***

The work of Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018) differed from the other primary studies included within the present review, as it focused solely on CMs' experiences prior to their engagement with CoSA. This study was included within the present review as it identified common difficulties which might be experienced by many CMs at the beginning of their CoSA journey. Each of the nine participants had been offered a CoSA based within a prison setting and had accepted this programme, although they

had not yet met the volunteers with whom they would be working. Furthermore, four CMs were assessed as having intellectual disabilities and seven were deemed to be elderly in comparison to the UK prison population due to being over the age of 55, with three participants falling into both categories. All CMs were expected to have little social support within the community, and had been assessed as having a medium, high, or very high risk of reconviction. Eight of the participants had been convicted of committing a sexual offence committed against a child, and one had been convicted of committing a sexual offence against an adult. CMs participated in semi-structured interviews lasting between 60-90 minutes, which were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Repertory grids were also used within interviews in order to better understand the experiences of these participants. These were primarily focused on CMs' expectations and future aspirations.

The first identified theme related to participants' impending release from prison including their fears and anxieties about returning to the community. Some expected to move to a new location which caused them unease, particularly for those CMs who were elderly or experienced difficulties in relation to their health. All participants foresaw that they would have little to no social network upon release, and many reported that they generally found it difficult to establish and maintain appropriate friendships. They also anticipated the stigma that they might experience within their community due to the nature of their offence history, and the long duration which they expected this to last for.

The second theme was described as finding a turning point in order to work towards desistance. CMs generally expressed having a level of insight into their own offending behaviour, and were aware of the relevant risk factors to be mindful of. They

also recognised the professional support they had around them at that point in time from members of prison staff. Finally, they made reference to acknowledging the support they knew they would gain once they had begun their CoSA. A third theme was also reported which was concerned with moving in the right direction, although this was not further elaborated on by Kitson-Boyce et al. (2018).

Whilst this study does not explore the experiences of physically engaging in a CoSA, it does provide insight into the needs of CMs at the beginning of this journey, and an overview of what they might hope to gain from the programme. This prospective enquiry could therefore be useful in better tailoring CoSA to CMs prior to their engagement, particularly for those who follow a similar prison model. Moreover, it is noted that these experiences might be similar to those of other ICSOs who are nearing their release from prison, regardless of whether or not they will be able to access support from a CoSA.

***Study 7: Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019a)***

Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019a) interviewed both CMs and volunteers who were engaged in a CoSA, which began in a prison setting and then continued into the community as the CM was released. One-to-one interviews completed with CMs lasted approximately 90 minutes. IPA was used with the aim of better understanding the experiences of those involved with this prison model of CoSA. Of the seven CMs who participated, two had been assessed as having an intellectual disability, and six were deemed to be elderly prisoners as they were over the age of 55. The number of sessions which each CM had participated in varied greatly, with a range of between two to eight occurring within prison, and eight to 44 taking place within the community.

The first overarching theme identified was ambiguous practice in relation to the volunteers. It was felt that despite the CoSA beginning in prison, volunteers appeared to believe that they were only able to have a minimal impact on the CM prior to their release. Only after the CM's release did volunteers believe that they could then begin to perform their role more effectively. It was also reported that a lack of attendance at meetings by some volunteers was perceived to reflect a lack of commitment to the role, and there were concerns that this could contribute to a breakdown in the CoSA in the future. Some volunteers also felt unsure about how the aspect of risk management fit within their role, and how they were expected to balance this with the supportive aspect of the programme.

The second theme was concerned with how the CoSA supported the CM's desistance upon returning to the community. CMs described how volunteers had assisted them in managing their problems appropriately, and encouraged them to stay accountable for their actions. However, it also appeared that all of the CMs within the study had struggled to develop any additional social support networks aside from their CoSA.

It is evident that the researchers took care to elicit balanced responses by inviting participants to share both positive and negative aspects of CoSA. However, these themes were identified across the data given by both CMs and volunteers. It appears that the theme of ambiguous practice was predominantly supported by volunteers' interviews, whereas supporting desistance emerged from CMs' interviews. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conclusively establish which themes would have emerged from just CMs' contributions alone. Furthermore, it is noted that two CoSA had become inactive at the time point when the data was being collected. It is unclear why these

became inactive or whether attempts were made to invite these CMs to participate in the research. Although these CMs are likely to have reported separate and distinct experiences to those otherwise identified within the study, this might have been an opportunity to explore the occurring themes for those CMs for whom CoSA did not run more successfully.

***Study 8: Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019b)***

Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019b) considered the experiences and expectations of CMs engaging in CoSA within a prison setting, and how these related to desistance. Seven of the CMs within this study were over the age of 55, and four had been assessed as having an intellectual disability. CMs were interviewed for approximately 60 minutes prior to their initial engagement with CoSA, and then again prior to their release. Repertory grids were also used in order to explore how CMs perceived themselves and their own experiences. Although nine CMs were initially interviewed, only five could later be interviewed again prior to their release. The duration of these prison sessions varied from 2 to 15 weeks, although one participant was serving an imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence and had not yet been given a date for his parole hearing.

Many CMs had previously spent time in prison and reported anticipating that this release would be different to other prior releases. This was in part due to receiving ongoing support from the unpaid non-professionals comprising their inner circle, where they had never experienced such prosocial support in the past. Participants also described experiencing a cognitive shift in how they perceived their situation and previous offending behaviour. For some, this involved the development of a more prosocial narrative identity. CMs also reported accepting the reality of their future. They acknowledged that despite the support of their inner circle, they were likely to retain the

label of ‘sex offender’ upon release, and to encounter stigma from the wider community in relation to this.

Kitson-Boyce et al. (2019b) triangulated data from semi-structured interviews and repertory grids, suggesting that the analysis is less likely to be influenced by the researchers’ interpretation of meaning. The study also considered the views of CMs across different time points, which allowed both expectations and genuine experiences of CoSA to be explored and compared. However, although participants were not offered any incentive for taking part in the research, they may have been inclined to give socially desirable responses about the effectiveness of CoSA in an attempt to present themselves in a positive light, particularly at the time point prior to their release. Furthermore, at the second time point, some CMs had only experienced 2 or 3 weeks’ worth of CoSA. While this therefore provides some insight into their initial engagement with the programme, additional changes would only be anticipated after more prolonged and sustained participation in the CoSA, and therefore would be unlikely to fall within the scope of this study.

***Study 9: Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018)***

Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018) conducted face-to-face interviews with both CMs and volunteers of CoSA, which generally lasted between 60-120 minutes. Participants were also asked to complete questionnaires concerning their demographic information, as well as their attitudes regarding the criminal justice system and sexual offending. The authors’ main aims were to explore whether CMs required social support from their CoSA, whether they received this, and how this related to any pertinent outcomes including recidivism and the progress of the CoSA. For the purpose of the present review, only the qualitative data collected from CMs was considered further.

This data had been coded or analysed with the assistance of the NVivo software programme.

A wide variety in the level of social support available upon release from prison was reported. Some CMs did report receiving some form of support from friends, family, or other formal support networks. However, issues with practical factors such as gaining employment and securing accommodation were prevalent. The participants reported benefitting from the social support they received from volunteers within their CoSA, which was categorised into instrumental and expressive subtypes of social support. The instrumental social support category was comprised of reports of incidents where the CM had received practical assistance, such as help in searching and applying for work, or in making a journey when they did not have access to their own transport. The most frequently cited example of instrumental support was assistance with employment. Expressive social support, however, was more focused on factors such as companionship, interpersonal advice, and receiving help with issues relating to substance misuse. The most commonly reported type of this expressive social support received within the study was moral or emotional support.

Many CMs reported receiving both types of support from their inner circle. However, receiving this social support was sometimes insufficient for CMs to abstain from reoffending. Of the six CMs who were thought to have received the greatest amount of support, as assessed by volunteers, four returned to prison. For example, one CM returned to substance misuse and was recalled to prison for committing an acquisitive offence in order to fund this use. Another CM who had also resorted to drug use reported that he felt that by engaging with his CoSA he had delayed what he viewed as an inevitable relapse. CMs generally felt that they had been able to develop positive

relationships and a sense of hope, even if their outcomes were less than ideal. One CM continued to engage with his CoSA after returning to prison, and felt that he continued to benefit from being surrounded by the positive role models within his inner circle.

This study generally provided a balanced outlook on CoSA by interviewing both those CMs who had remained within the community and some who had returned to prison. However, the findings were somewhat restricted by the decision to consider solely the role of social support within CoSA. This may have excluded relevant themes such as how the CMs benefitted from and responded to being held accountable for their actions, which is an integral aspect of the programme. In addition, CMs were only sought out for interview if they had participated in a CoSA for at least one year. The experiences of those who were newer to the CoSA programme were not represented within this study.

***Study 10: Thompson (2015)***

Thompson (2015) conducted interviews with 30 CMs with the aim of understanding how they had experienced their CoSA, as well as their perceived outcomes of participating in the programme. Participants were recruited from a number of regional providers across England and Wales. All CMs had participated in a CoSA for at least five months, and interviews appeared at face value to be relatively extensive, lasting almost 2.5 hours on average.

The first overarching theme related to participants' experiences of stigmatising situations. All of the CMs interviewed reported experiencing some form of stigma from others, which they believed had impacted on their relationships and housing opportunities. Participants described techniques which they initially utilised in order to manage stigmatising situations. These included an avoidance of disclosing their offence



history, self-isolation, withdrawal, and the denial or minimisation of the index offence. CMs were supported by their CoSA to develop more appropriate ways to manage this stigma, such as making a voluntary disclosure about their offence history at an early time point where possible, and by making declarations to friends and family regarding their intentions to remain free from offending behaviours. Participants also reported experiencing their CoSA as a non-stigmatising environment due to the perceived genuineness of the volunteers.

Secondly, CMs described experiencing temptations which they found impacted on their ability to reintegrate with the community. While some of these were sexual in nature, others related to participants' desires to breach the conditions or restrictions imposed on them. These were managed through self-control strategies which they had developed or learned within offending behaviour programmes, which could be practised within the CoSA.

Thirdly, CMs acknowledged that whilst some level of trust could be built between themselves and their CoSA, they were also aware that the programme is part of a wider network of criminal justice agencies where any concerns relating to their risk would likely be passed to the relevant authorities. Some CMs appeared to engage only superficially despite strictly following their licence conditions, whereas others were perceived to be more internally motivated to sustain some form of behavioural change.

Finally, participants reported a number of individual changes which they believed to have been facilitated by their engagement in the CoSA. For example, volunteers supported CMs to challenge their cognitive distortions, and to discuss and transform these where they could within CoSA meetings. CMs believed that their CoSA had helped them to improve their self-esteem, become more accountable for their

behaviours, and to develop their own individual narratives. However, the extent of these changes was noted to be somewhat limited for some of the participants.

This study offered some insight into the positive impact of CoSA as well as their caveats, such as the perceived limitations of trust. However, there is no clearly defined approach to the qualitative analysis of this data. As such, it is possible that the developed themes were influenced by preconceptions of the researcher, more so than if a more clearly defined approach such as IPA had been used. Furthermore, Thompson (2015) notes that CMs' prior engagement with offending behaviour programmes were partially responsible for their changes in thinking patterns. As such, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the CoSA impacted on the nature of this change.

## **Data Synthesis**

### ***Demographic Information***

An extensive set of demographic information, such as age, gender, and previous convictions, was not presented in certain studies (Cesaroni, 2001; Fox, 2015). This was presumed to be in response to either the confidential or anonymous interview approaches used by some researchers. However, studies which did include this information reported exclusively male participants. The primary studies reported a sample size of between seven to 30 CM participants, and it was calculated that a total of 138 participants had provided data across the 10 studies. However, where the same researchers were involved across multiple studies, it is possible that rather than gathering data from separate and independent participants, the experiences of the same CMs were instead captured at different time points. Studies which included data on the age of CMs reported this to be within the broad range of 18 to 78 years. Studies took place across Canada (Cesaroni, 2001), the United States of America (Fox, 2015; Gilliam

et al., 2020; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018), the United Kingdom (Höing et al., 2013; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b; Thompson, 2015), and the Netherlands (Höing et al., 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017).

### ***Data Collection***

Each of the studies employed qualitative approaches to data analysis in order to comprehend the unique experiences of CMs within CoSA. All 10 studies conducted interviews in order to gather their data. Höing et al. (2013) also utilised a card sorting method in order to build and refine the themes which had initially been developed through a grounded theory approach. Repertory grids were also used in some studies in order to triangulate the data provided (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b). All studies included first-hand reports from CMs themselves, and many also considered the views of voluntary members (Cesaroni, 2001; Fox, 2015; Gilliam et al., 2020; Höing et al., 2013; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018). A number of the primary studies also invited the opinions of CoSA co-ordinators (Fox, 2015; & Höing et al., 2013) and professional stakeholders who were involved with the CMs' programme of reintegration (Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017).

### ***Data Analysis***

The rigour of qualitative data analysis approaches appeared to vary greatly across studies. Six studies contained a great deal of detail regarding the way in which data was analysed to produce themes, whilst two made reference to their use of computer software to aid qualitative analysis, and two simply provided a narrative account of their findings.

## *Themes*

Data was then further synthesised using a thematic synthesis framework (Lucas et al., 2007). This approach was taken as it encourages the development of both descriptive and analytical themes across qualitative research studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The researcher initially coded the data within the primary studies by hand using a free coding approach. This data included those findings described by authors, in addition to the direct quotes provided within the articles. This allowed common concepts across the studies to emerge, and these could then be collated. Initial descriptive themes were then identified from these, revisited over time, and consolidated in order to produce these common themes which were evidently present across studies. Analytic themes were then developed by considering what else might be inferred from the data, in order to generate themes over and above those directly reported within the primary studies. Each of these themes were refined in order to determine the final themes presented below. This allowed information from different studies, and thus data provided by different CMs from different CoSAs, to be synthesised in order to uncover common experiences. Studies generally highlighted the way in which CMs responded to and benefitted from engaging in CoSA. Many of the studies also attempted to explain how the programme had impacted CMs in these ways, and some of the difficulties which they had faced.

**Stigma.** A common theme reported by CMs across the primary studies was experiencing the stigma that is associated with the label of 'sex offender'. For some, fears relating to this stigma played a role in first motivating CMs to join the CoSA programme (Cesaroni, 2001). Other studies acknowledged the stigmatising situations which CMs had experienced (Gilliam et al., 2020; Thompson, 2015) or anticipated

encountering in the future (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b). However, CoSA provided an environment which was generally free from this stigma, where CMs often felt that they were accepted. The CoSA also provided an opportunity to develop appropriate techniques in order to manage and respond to these experiences (Thompson, 2015). CMs reported that CoSA allowed a process of de-labelling to occur (Fox, 2015), where they were able to develop a more positive self-identity (Höing et al., 2013) and self-image (Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017). CMs felt that CoSA supported them to build a more prosocial narrative identity which was separate to their previous offending behaviours (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b; Thompson, 2015), in part due to the presence of positive role models within the inner circle (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018).

**Support.** CMs across a number of the primary studies reported that upon joining their CoSA, they had little to no other support system in place (Cesaroni, 2001; Fox, 2015; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018; Thompson, 2015). Many of the primary studies detailed the different types of support which CMs had received from their CoSA. They firstly reported expressive or emotional support, such as receiving advice, friendship, moral support, and spiritual support (Cesaroni, 2001; Höing et al., 2013; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018). CMs also described receiving instrumental or practical support in relation to their housing, employment, finances, and transportation (Cesaroni, 2001; Höing et al., 2013; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018). Additionally, some CMs felt that they had been able to develop their social skills through the support of the CoSA, including improved communication skills, openness, and assertiveness (Cesaroni, 2001; Höing et al., 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018; Thompson, 2015).

Finally, some reported having been able to build appropriate relationships outside of their CoSA (Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017), although this was not true for all CMs (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a).

**Accountability.** CoSA promoted accountability by assisting CMs to better understand their own risk factors, and helping them to practise strategies for monitoring and managing these (Höing et al., 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017; Thompson, 2015; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a). Four studies highlighted the presence of some kind of cognitive shift in which CMs reported feeling determined to change, and developed a sense of self-reflection and agency with regards to their behaviours (Höing et al., 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b; Thompson, 2015). CoSA also provided CMs with an opportunity to practise problem-solving skills (Höing et al., 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017), to identify and challenge cognitive distortions, and to discuss their recent behaviours and short-term plans, which helped in encouraging accountability (Höing et al., 2013; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a). Those CMs who were yet to engage with their CoSA reported that they were beginning to understand how to better address relevant risk factors in future in order to avoid returning to prison (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018).

**Desistance and Recidivism.** CMs generally felt that they would have reoffended, in terms of both sexual and non-sexual crimes, without the assistance that they had received from their CoSA (Cesaroni, 2001). Some experienced temptations in relation to breaking the law or breaching licence conditions which their CoSA helped them to address (Thompson, 2015). Cesaroni (2001) identified that a key theme which related to maintaining an offence-free life was generally being able to use their CoSA in order to better integrate themselves into the community. This may also have been in part

due to volunteers modelling a non-criminal lifestyle (Fox, 2015; Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018). Across the primary studies, most CMs predominantly reported positive outcomes about their experiences within CoSA. However, some CMs had returned to prison (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018), and others had had their CoSA dissolved, although the reason for this was not always explicitly given (Cesaroni, 2001; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a). Those CMs who had returned to prison reported that they still felt that they had benefitted from engaging with the programme, for example through developing hope and learning that they were indeed able to maintain positive interpersonal relationships with others (Northcutt Bohmert et al., 2018).

**CoSA Development.** A number of desired changes to CoSA were reported which included more consistent attendance by volunteers (Höing et al., 2013; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a), an opportunity for more frequent meetings, and longer-term CoSA (Gilliam et al., 2020). Preferences for specific volunteers were recorded including those who were older, female, and came from other racial backgrounds (Gilliam et al., 2020). There was also a desire for additional resources to be made available, as well as the suggestion that CoSA should be offered to individuals with different types of offending histories (Gilliam et al., 2020). Finally, some CMs expressed concerns that they felt somewhat ‘softly’ controlled by their CoSA due to their awareness that the programme is distantly linked with the criminal justice system (Thompson, 2015).

## Discussion

### Main Findings

The present review was intended to synthesise the qualitative research concerning CMs' experiences within CoSA. This was conducted in order to better understand the process by which this network of social support, assistance, and accountability can encourage ICSSOs to desist from offending behaviour, and to embark on a lifestyle which is not rooted in crime. During the initial search process, a high number of articles were identified. These underwent a screening process in order to ensure that they were relevant and met the inclusion criteria for retention within the review.

The primary studies identified that CMs had generally reported positive experiences of CoSA, and felt that they were less likely to re-offend due to their engagement, partially due to the accountability aspect of the programme. Even those CMs who had been returned to prison reported that they had still benefitted from engaging in their CoSA. Most CMs experienced some form of stigma in relation to their offending history, but they were able to manage this appropriately with the help of their inner circle. CMs described receiving practical and emotional support, as well as feeling accepted and being able to build an offence-free identity for themselves. The ability to develop this redemption narrative or non-offending identity has been recognised as one important aspect in maintaining desistance from offending (Maruna, 2001). A significant feature of this is not only how the individual has internalised their own desistance script, but also how this is perceived by the groups around them, including their local community (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). The findings of the present review



therefore suggest that CoSA can successfully provide an opportunity for this developing prosocial identity to be reflected back to the CM, which in turn supports their continued desistance.

Areas for CoSA improvement were also identified within some of the studies. These included CoSA operating for a longer period of time, being offered to other people with a different type of offending history, and having access to additional resources. CMs also understandably reported a preference for volunteers who were able to attend meetings more consistently and who displayed commitment to the programme. Many of the desired changes related to volunteer characteristics, including targeting the recruitment of women, older people, and individuals from more diverse backgrounds. Interestingly, Gilliam et al. (2020) explained that although women were not underrepresented within the volunteer pool, CMs particularly highlighted the input of female volunteers within their CoSA. Their presence appeared to be particularly valued due to a perception that it took courage and bravery for women to join the programme and discuss sexual offending.

The nature of qualitative research is that it aims to explore the unique experiences of individuals, and in this case of CMs engaging in CoSA. Whilst a number of these themes appeared to be present in the reports of CMs across different studies, the overall sample size was relatively low when compared to the population of CMs, and it is not possible to conclude that these themes are necessarily indicative of how other CMs may experience their own CoSA.

## Quality of the Literature

Each of the 10 studies underwent a process of quality assessment, and was judged to have a quality percentage of at least 50%. Many of the researchers failed to clearly demonstrate the way in which their data analysis had taken place, which negatively impacted on their quality assessment percentage rating. In addition, few articles clearly considered the role of the researcher and their relationship to the participants within the study. The omission of these considerations as part of the qualitative research process prevents a clear insight into the analytic approaches utilised, and how the themes produced were likely to have been influenced by the researchers' own perspectives and biases. In qualitative analysis, more so than quantitative analysis, the researchers' own experiences are likely to influence their understanding and interpretation of the data. Having a clear understanding of this could instead allow a consideration of how different themes might have emerged if the data analysis process had been undertaken by another researcher with a different personal or professional background.

Despite the aforementioned concerns regarding the variation in quality across articles, all but one had been retrieved from published journals, and the final study was a doctoral thesis. This suggests that all studies had undergone some form of peer review or examination process before their final iterations. However, many of these studies may also be subject to publication bias. It is possible that articles might have been more likely to be considered for publication due to identifying a number of positive experiences which were generally supportive of CoSA. It might be the case that some qualitative studies exploring CoSA have previously been conducted, and identified a more balanced combination of positive and negative experiences reported by CMs, but

that these articles were not published due to the non-compelling and unremarkable nature of such findings. Moreover, a number of the primary studies were conducted by the same groups of researchers, and as such there is likely to be a disproportionate focus on particular regional providers of CoSA. It is important to consider that the experiences of CMs which are published in peer-reviewed journals might therefore not be representative of those experienced by every CM.

The characteristics of individual CMs are also likely to have influenced their involvement within the research in addition to what they reported. Firstly, it is important to consider why a CM within a CoSA might be inclined to agree to an interview regarding their experiences and progress. It is likely that the CMs who are motivated to engage in such interviews are primarily those individuals who have generally received positive feedback from their CoSA, and perceive themselves to be making good progress. Contrastingly, CMs who feel that they are struggling with reintegration, or have engaged in significant risk-related behaviours, may feel less inclined to consent to the research interview if they are concerned that this could reflect badly on themselves. This assumed dynamic of participants could indicate that the predominantly positive experiences reported by CMs was due to a self-selection bias, in which mainly those CMs who felt that they were succeeding agreed to discuss their situation. It may well be the case that a number of CMs are having poorer experiences within their CoSA, but that these are not captured in the research due to their lack of willingness to engage with researchers in order to disclose these concerns.

Furthermore, CMs who did participate in the research might not have necessarily felt able to answer the questions posed to them openly and honestly. Many of the CMs were being closely supervised by professionals, and they might have

therefore felt reluctant to discuss their concerns, or further offence-related thoughts or actions, for fear of breaching their conditions and potentially being recalled to prison. Participants would have likely been informed during the consent process of many of the studies that the disclosure of any criminal activity would have triggered a report to the appropriate authorities. As it is unlikely that CMs would have been inclined to incriminate themselves in the name of this research, it is suggested that participants within the 10 studies would have been keen to present themselves in a relatively positive light, and so may not have felt able to report the true extent of any negative occurrences. This could therefore produce a skewed representation of participants' experiences within CoSA, and it may be the case that CMs generally face more issues than these participants were necessarily willing to disclose.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Present Systematic Review**

The present review made use of a search strategy in which potential outcomes were not pre-defined by the researcher. This was done in an attempt to prevent the introduction of any unnecessary bias to the search process. For example, searching for specific outcomes, such as “self-esteem”, “social support”, or “reoffending”, might have excluded articles which considered CMs' experiences outside of these domains. This wide search strategy identified a large number of initial hits which were sifted through with care to ensure that no key articles were missed during this process.

The initial search process remained systematic due to the sole reliance on identifying studies through a search of databases. This search strategy is clearly defined, and therefore easily replicable by other researchers, although as previously mentioned is likely to be somewhat limited by publication bias. One criticism of this strictly

systematic approach to a literature review is that the findings can quickly become outdated. Whereas including current studies which have not yet been published would allow an incorporation of recent and potentially novel findings, the present systematic review considers only studies which have already been published through peer review, and are therefore likely to be based on qualitative data collected in previous years. For example, Gilliam et al. (2020) stated that their research interviews had taken place in 2010, despite the study not being published for another ten years. This systematic review might therefore reflect the state of the world a number of years prior to the time of writing, as opposed to the true state of the world at present. Furthermore, only studies written in the English language were sought for inclusion. It is possible that any relevant literature published by non-English speaking researchers has therefore been inadvertently disregarded within the current review.

One item initially identified to be an inclusion criterion was the use of qualitative methodology within a study. However, this would technically have allowed the retention of studies using a mixed methodology approach, in which CMs had been invited to provide only demographic information and interval or ratio level scale data but not qualitative data. The inclusion criteria therefore had to be adapted in response to this issue in order to ensure that qualitative studies were only deemed suitable for review if they had used these qualitative methodology approaches with CMs.

Furthermore, although quality assessments were also conducted by a second rater, it was only possible for half of the studies to be reviewed. Had all of the studies been quality assessed by the second rater, this would have allowed for a more accurate assessment of inter-rater reliability, and further highlighted any discrepancies in the quality assessment process. One study scored slightly below the cut-off of 60%,

however was included due to the small number of studies available for the present review. It is worth considering the possibility that the inclusion of this poorer quality study could have had a negative influence on the present synthesis.

In addition, the content of the present review is directly influenced by the approaches taken by the authors of the primary studies. These studies used a range of qualitative methodologies, some of which were clearly defined and others which were described in less detail. This had a notable impact on quality assessment ratings, with a number of studies scoring lower on the checklist item relating to evidence of a rigorous analysis process. The use of these methodologies within the primary studies are also likely to have influenced the final themes presented within this review. Had different methodologies been used, different themes might have been produced within the primary studies, and these may have been supported by different data, both of which would likely impact the final themes presented within the present review.

A total of 10 studies were included within the systematic review. Whilst these provide some insight into the experiences of CMs, this is a small number and as such it is not possible to say whether these themes would be shared by all CMs. Furthermore, certain CoSA projects appear to be overrepresented within the primary studies. Two studies are authored by the same author groups (Höing et al. 2013; Höing, Vogelvang, & Bogaerts, 2017), and as such may reflect experiences from within the same CoSA providers. Additionally, three of the studies appear to capture the experiences from within the same participant group (Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019a; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2019b). However, these studies were all deemed worthy of inclusion within the review due to capturing data from different timepoints. The present themes are therefore greatly influenced by the experiences of these participants, as well

as any researcher biases which may have in turn influenced the production of these outcomes.

Although the present review considered international research in order to maximise the number of potential primary studies available to the researcher, this could also be considered a limitation when drawing conclusions across these findings. This is due to the fact that CMs' experiences are likely to differ between different geographical locations. For example, Fox (2015) highlighted that CMs within Vermont are typically subject to strict restrictions upon release (such as not being allowed to drive a motor vehicle), whereas this would not usually be the case for CMs in Canada who are more likely to be released without any restrictions after serving their maximum sentence within prison. Moreover, there are significant differences which exist between CoSA providers. Within Canada and the United Kingdom, for example, the majority of CoSA are provided by independent voluntary organisations, whereas those within the United States of America and the Netherlands are often provided by governmental agencies (Höing et al., 2017). The needs and experiences of CMs across CoSA provided within different regions are therefore unlikely to be homogenous. However, the purpose of the present review is to explore the qualitative experiences of CMs reported across these primary studies, and not necessarily to attempt to generalise these to any other CoSA in different locations.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings within this systematic review support the notion that CoSA are a useful tool which can support ICSOs. CoSA have previously been demonstrated to be effective through an exploration of quantitative factors, such as the decrease in

recidivism rates following engagement (Clarke et al., 2017). However, over and above these findings, the present review can facilitate an improved understanding of the process by which these CoSA are able to assist and support individuals. An in-depth knowledge of this process could be beneficial to any individuals involved within a CoSA, as it could encourage the group to ensure that they are all working towards meeting common goals. These findings might also support the formation and development of further CoSA, such as by creating more targeted recruitment for particular volunteers with specific demographics or characteristics. This might therefore also assist offender treatment organisations and probation staff by signposting appropriate interventions, or simply by identifying pertinent needs and challenges which ICSOs experience when re-entering the wider community.

The negative outcomes identified by Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018) and Höing, Vogelvang, and Bogaerts (2017), however, suggest that engagement with CoSA alone may not be sufficient for success and desistance in all cases. The present review therefore suggests that whilst CoSA may be appropriate and helpful tools for use with ICSOs, CMs ought to have access to other intervention or supervision strategies where appropriate, as they may require additional support which cannot be provided from their CoSA alone.

Furthermore, a number of CMs reported a desire for volunteers to have more availability and greater commitment to the CoSA. The significant level of commitment required by volunteers within CoSA should not be minimised. For example, at the beginning of the programme, some CMs may require daily contact from volunteers on an informal basis. Additionally, in some programmes, volunteers are expected to be on call throughout the duration of the CoSA in case of any personal crises (Cesaroni,



2001). It would be beneficial to emphasise the importance of this requirement at an early stage of the recruitment process. Although this might deter a small number of potential volunteers, this is also likely to reduce the rate of drop out within operating CoSA, and therefore have a positive effect on the CM.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future qualitative research into the experience of CMs within their CoSA could be beneficial in order to further understand the common themes reported by participants. Only a small number of studies have explored this question qualitatively, and even fewer of these have used clearly defined, thorough approaches to qualitative data analysis. In a number of the primary studies, it is generally difficult to ascertain precisely how categories were developed or the extent to which other key stakeholders across the CoSA influenced their formation.

There also currently appears to be very little qualitative data available regarding unsuccessful CoSA, such as those from which the CM has disengaged or been recalled to prison. Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018) conducted interviews with two CMs whose CoSA had been dissolved, however even these primarily focused on the benefits of their prior engagement with the programme. It would be beneficial to understand and explore these collapsed CoSA in order to consider why they were unsuccessful, what more could have been done to prevent this, and how this outcome might be avoided by others in the future. Although it might be pragmatically challenging to recruit participants from this population, it would be beneficial to explore the nature of these problems, and to understand why CoSA were not effective in these instances. This could assist in further

refining future programmes and identifying any behaviours or experiences which might place a CM at a higher risk of disengaging.

In addition to this, it would also be worthwhile to conduct research with CMs at a later time point following the successful completion of their CoSA. While the present review predominantly explored the experiences of those CMs currently or soon to be engaged in the programme, such a follow-up would assist in understanding the long-lasting effects which persist following the withdrawal of support from their CoSA.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this systematic literature review considered 10 studies regarding CMs' involvement in CoSA. The use of qualitative methodologies within the primary studies allowed for an in-depth account of these unique experiences. A number of pertinent themes were identified regarding CMs' experiences of stigmatisation, the support and accountability received within the inner circle, factors relating to desistance and recidivism, and potential areas for future refinement and enhancement. As such, this review can be useful in guiding future policy and practice regarding the supervision and community reintegration of CMs, and of ICSOs more widely. This review predominantly considered the experiences of CMs, although the process of each CoSA is also dependent on the contribution and impact of other CoSA members. The influence of CoSA volunteers will be further considered within Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A CRITIQUE OF THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL OFFENDERS SCALE**

#### **Introduction**

An attitude has been defined as an overall evaluation that a person makes, which is comprised of cognition, affect, and behaviours (Breckler, 1984). Although attitudes are not always predictive of behaviour due to a multitude of psychological factors at play, Maio and Haddock (2010) have highlighted that those attitudes which serve a value-expressive function — that is, one that demonstrates an individual's core values and self-concept to others — are more likely to be a strong predictor of behaviour. Attitudes towards offending behaviour are therefore likely to have a meaningful impact on the criminal justice process and on the subsequent repercussions at a number of different levels. This could include the attitudes of police, judge, and jury impacting on investigation and sentencing processes, those of treatment providers influencing behaviour during intervention and rehabilitation approaches, or even the individual's initial commission of the index offence due to their own offence supportive attitudes. Within the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) programme, the nature of the attitudes towards individuals convicted of a sexual offence (ICSOs) held by a volunteer might influence the level of support which they are able to provide. For example, somebody who is distrusting of ICSOs and feels socially detached from them might struggle to form a supportive and non-judgemental relationship with their Core Member (CM).

Moreover, public attitudes towards criminality can influence national policy, particularly when these become elevated in response to high profile cases. Hohl et al. (2013), for example, identified that the public attitudes of those living in London became more authoritarian and punitive towards people convicted of criminal offences during the 2011 England riots. The attitudes held by members of the public can also impact on the delivery and effectiveness of rehabilitative initiatives, such as when members of the public protest against community intervention programmes operating within their area. A number of treatment programmes for ICSOs within the United States of America, for example, were closed during the 1990s in response to complaints from the public about their location within their own communities (McPherson et al., 1994). Given the profound influence of attitudes regarding offending behaviour, it is therefore important to ensure that these are measured well.

A number of attitudinal measures have been developed with the intention of accurately assessing the nature of attitudes held towards ICSOs. However, these often lack empirical validation as they have not been widely used. Some of the more widely used tools are discussed within this chapter, as well as the limitations of such attitudinal measures. For example, Olver and Barlow (2010) developed the Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders Survey in order to assess the attitudes held by a student sample. They proposed that the measure had two components: attitudes regarding how ICSOs are managed systemically, and attitudes regarding the ICSO's ability to change. However, they did not report on the scale's overall reliability, and reported relatively low levels of internal consistency for the rehabilitative component of the measure. Moreover, the scale appears to conflate both attitudes and perceptions regarding ICSOs.

Another alternative measure is the Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders scale (CATSO; Church et al., 2008) which has been found to have a relatively high level of internal consistency (Willis et al., 2013), as well as concurrent validity (Church et al., 2011). However, the CATSO is tailored specifically for use with the public, and so it is not necessarily appropriate to apply this scale to professionals (Tewksbury et al., 2012), and therefore cannot be used as a measure to compare these groups. Furthermore, Harper et al. (2017) have argued that the factor structure identified within the CATSO reflects that it is actually a measure of attributions based on respondents' knowledge, as opposed to a true measure of attitudes. As such, the CATSO has since been revised to an explicit measure of perceptions titled the Perceptions of Sex Offenders scale (PSO; Harper & Hogue, 2015b).

Similarly, Rogers et al. (2011) created the Public Attitudes Towards Sex Offender Rehabilitation (PATSOR) scale in an attempt to better understand the views held specifically by lay people. This is a 12-item measure which assesses respondents' attitudes regarding rehabilitation and an ICSO's place of residence. However, this second factor was found to have a particularly low level of internal consistency within the original study ( $\alpha = .39$ , increasing to  $\alpha = .60$  following item deletion). The PATSOR measure has also not been used widely elsewhere, and as such there is little in the way of validation data.

Additionally, the Attitudes towards the Treatment of Sex Offenders (ATTSO) scale is a measure which was developed specifically to consider the general public's attitudes regarding the treatment of ICSOs (Wnuk et al., 2006). The ATTSO is comprised of the 15 best performing items which were selected from an initial pool of 35. However, the ATTSO has been used improperly within research, for example,

through studies which used all of the originally proposed 35 items as opposed to the final 15-item scale (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). The ATTSO has also not yet been appropriately validated due to a lack of its comprehensive and accurate use (Harper et al., 2017). There is a clear need, therefore, for a straightforward, well-validated, and reliable measure to accurately assess the attitudes towards ICSOs which are held across different populations.

## **Scale Development**

### **A Precursory Measure: The Attitudes Towards Prisoners Scale**

The present critique will primarily focus on the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993). However, a brief overview of its predecessor is valuable in understanding the scale's initial formation. The ATS measure evolved from an earlier assessment known as the Attitudes Towards Prisoners (ATP) scale (Melvin et al., 1985). This is a 36-item scale in which respondents are asked to read short statements about individuals residing within prison, and to indicate their agreement to these using a five-point Likert scale. For example, the scale includes items on the subject of whether prisoners' values are believed to align with the wider public's, and whether or not they ought to be granted parole under particular circumstances.

Preliminary items within the ATP were initially gathered from both anecdotal evidence regarding the attitudes which are typically held within prisons, and modified items from other psychometric measures of attitudes. Melvin et al. (1985) administered this preliminary scale to student and community samples, and conducted a principal axis factor analysis on the data in order to determine the final ATP items. They found their final scale to have moderate to high levels of test-retest reliability ( $r = .82$ ) with

participants scoring similarly at retest 2 weeks afterwards. They also found that the scale had high levels of split-half reliability in samples of students ( $r = .90$ ) and correctional officers ( $r = .84$ ) when they compared respondents' performance on odd and even numbered items.

Melvin et al. (1985) also suggested that they had demonstrated the measure's validity by identifying that a number of distinct and contrasting groups, who would be expected to differ in these attitudes, did indeed differ significantly on their overall ATP scores; this included undergraduate students, members of the general public, and employees working within a prison reform project, as well as prisoners themselves. Finally, Grambling (1979, as cited in Melvin et al., 1985) compared a small number of prison officers who had been rated as being either 'good' or 'bad' by their colleagues and managers. They concluded that the mean ATP score of 'good' officers was significantly higher than that of 'bad' officers. However, it should be emphasised that this process is not akin to more typical comprehensive and standardised measures of validity which are discussed later in this chapter, and as such this finding is not necessarily conclusive evidence of the scale's validity.

### **The Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scale**

The ATS scale was devised in 1993 by Hogue, a researcher with practical experience of working within the prison environment. The measure was developed in order to further explore the variation in attitudes held towards prisoners. Hogue recognised that within the prison system, individuals who had previously been convicted of a sexual offence were typically seen as outcasts when compared to those who had received convictions for other types of crimes. He therefore acknowledged that

previous psychometric measures, which explored a person's attitudes towards prisoners overall, might not necessarily correspond to their attitudes towards the subgroup of these individuals who have committed a sexual offence. Consequently, the ATS was created by taking all of the items from the ATP and replacing each occurrence of the word 'prisoner' with the term 'sex offender'. The scale therefore also contains 36 items to which respondents are asked to rate their agreement on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. This includes items regarding whether ICSOs need affection and praise, and whether they are perceived to be a victim of circumstance.

Hogue (1993) then administered both the ATP and ATS scales to five discrete groups: ICSOs, probation officers and psychologists, police officers, prison officers who had volunteered to facilitate some form of sexual offending intervention programme, and prison officers who had not elected to do so. Whilst mean ATP scores did not differ between the group of psychology and probation workers, and the group of ICSOs, scores in both groups were significantly higher than for the other three groups. However, it was found that mean ATS scores differed significantly between all five groups. ICSOs generally demonstrated more positive attitudes towards the concept of 'sex offender' than probation workers and psychologists did, who in turn scored more highly than the prison officers involved in treatment, followed by those prison officers not involved in treatment, and finally by police officers. Hogue found that these group differences in ATS scores remained present even when their ATP scores had been controlled for. This suggests that the nature of attitudes held by a professional towards ICSOs appears to be related to the amount of contact that they typically have with such



individuals, and their level of involvement in the intervention process, above what would be expected with prisoners more generally.

There are a number of possible practical uses of the ATS. Firstly, it has been suggested that the use of both the ATP and ATS scales could demonstrate attitudinal change over time following intervention and instruction on these topics, such as training in working professionally with these groups (Melvin et al., 1985; Hogue, 1993). Moreover, Blagden et al. (2014) has identified that higher ATS scores in forensic staff members were associated with a stronger belief that people with prior convictions were capable of desisting from their offending behaviour. The ATS might therefore be an important tool in allowing professionals who work closely with ICSOs to consider the nature of their own attitudes towards this client group, and to reflect on how this might impact their day-to-day practice, and ultimately the rehabilitation of the person with whom they are working. For example, practitioners who hold particularly negative views towards ICSOs might lack the belief that these individuals can change their behaviour, and thus struggle to be an active member of the rehabilitative culture within their establishment. However, professionals with exceptionally positive attitudes towards these individuals might be at risk of becoming unboundaried in their practice, or potentially of underestimating the level of risk which is posed by their client.

Finally, the use of a standardised and appropriate measure of attitudes regarding ICSOs could also provide additional insight into the social climate of a local area or community within which an individual intends to reintegrate. Feelings of ostracism and isolation have been associated with an increased risk of sexual recidivism (Marshall, 2010). Being able to predict the reception that an ICSO might be likely to receive upon release from prison, for example, could therefore be a promising use of a measure such

as the ATS. This information might be useful in determining appropriate accommodation, or to support additional risk management plans and procedures.

The current review examines the ATS and considers whether it is an appropriate measure for the construct that it purports to assess: attitudes towards ICSOs. Its validity and reliability are examined, in addition to the original researcher's attempts to address these caveats through a revision of the scale. Concerns regarding improper scoring are also discussed, as well as a number of potential alternative or additional measures of attitudes towards ICSOs.

## **Reliability**

### **Data Scale Type**

One important aspect in the development of a reliable psychometric measure is its choice of data scale type. Whilst a psychometric measure involving nominal or ordinal level data can be more challenging to quantify and analyse, the use of interval or ratio level scale data can be useful in increasing the reliability — effectively, the consistency — of a measure (Bruton et al., 2000). Interval or ratio level data also allow appropriate norms for different populations to be developed, and subsequently new data can be compared against these, which Crawford and Howell (1998) have suggested is fundamental in the process of assessment.

The ATS facilitates the collection of interval level data. That is, whilst the distance between each two items on the measurement scale is equal, the measure has no true zero point. While it is possible for a respondent to score a total of 0 on the ATS, this does not reflect a complete absence of attitudes towards ICSOs. It is therefore difficult to make additional differential comparisons between sets of scores. For

example, whilst one group's mean total ATS score of 60 might be significantly higher than another group's score of 30, it is not possible to meaningfully conclude that the attitudes held by the first group are therefore 'twice as positive' as those held by the second group.

Although ratio level data might be desirable in order to make additional inferences when comparing scores, it is useful to highlight the difficulty in utilising ratio level scales within psychometric measures of attitudes. It would be unrealistic to suggest that any attitudinal measure could ever truly have an absolute zero point, as this would reflect a nonsensical lack of attitudes. For this reason, it appears that the use of interval level data in the ATS is most appropriate in order to maximise the reliability of the scale without compromising its validity.

### **Internal Reliability**

Internal reliability refers to the coherence of a scale's individual components. This can be explored by considering whether an individual's performance on some items of the scale correlate with their responses on the rest of these items (McCrae et al., 2011). One such measure of this is Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), which indicates the extent to which scale items are correlated with each other. The alpha value can fall between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 representing a high level of correlation between items, thus indicating that a large proportion of the scale items are measuring the same concept. An acceptable level of internal reliability for a measure is often considered to be demonstrated by an alpha value of .7 or above (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The ATS has been shown to have a high level of internal consistency, with Craig (2005) calculating an alpha value of .86 when the scale was used with a group of hostel

and probation workers who supervised ICSOs. Additionally, Kleban and Jeclig (2012) calculated Cronbach's alpha to be .81 in a study of undergraduate students. The internal reliability of the ATS has also been identified as high when used with samples of forensic professionals, prison employees, and members of the public ( $\alpha = .96$ ; Higgins & Ireland, 2009); with prison staff ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and college students ( $\alpha = .94$ ; Kjeslberg & Loos, 2008); and with students of a justice studies course ( $\alpha = .85$ ; Proeve & Howells, 2006). Ware et al. (2012) also found a particularly high alpha value of .93 when using the ATS with a sample of employees working within correctional services.

The studies presented above each indicate a level of internal reliability which is higher than the acceptable alpha level of .7 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). This well-replicated finding of strong internal reliability indicates that a high proportion of items on the ATS appear to be measuring the same concept. However, while the research indicates that the items on the ATS scale are generally coherent, this does not necessarily reflect any validity of the scale. That is, whilst ATS items do generally appear to tap into one unified factor, these high alpha coefficients cannot definitively indicate whether or not the factor captured is best encapsulated by the description of 'attitudes towards sexual offenders.'

### **Test-Retest Reliability**

Test-retest reliability concerns whether an individual's score on a measure remains the same when they are retested at a later date. This reliability can be determined by calculating a correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores. The coefficient falls between -1 and +1, with a larger magnitude representing a stronger correlation, and the mathematical operator indicating the direction of this correlation.

This can be calculated in a number of different ways including Pearson's  $r$  coefficient, the intraclass correlation coefficient, or the coefficient of repeatability (Vaz et al., 2013). Crocker and Algina (1986) suggest that there is not one ideal coefficient figure which discriminates between good and bad test-retest reliability, as the acceptable level is dependent on the individual situation and available sample.

Modified versions of the ATS have previously been considered for their test-retest reliability. In one study, which explored attitudes towards treatment for people with convictions for sexual offences against children, a modified version of the full-length ATS was calculated to have a test-retest reliability coefficient of .60 (Wurtele, 2018). Walker (2011) found the test-retest reliability coefficient for their modified ATS regarding offenders with a learning disability to be .85. However, such modifications of the ATS are not in line with Hogue's (1993) guidance regarding the appropriate use of this measure. The test-retest reliability for these modified measures regarding subtypes of individuals who have convictions for sexual offences does therefore not necessarily reflect that of the ATS itself.

There is little information available regarding the test-retest reliability of the ATS in its exact format. The coefficients provided by modified scales range from .60 to .85, with the initial test-retest reliability coefficient for the original ATP being reported as .82 (Melvin et al., 1985). The lack of available data regarding test-retest reliability of the full ATS is problematic, as Hogue (2015) has highlighted that the ATS is a measure of stable attitudes which are typically not malleable, and should therefore not be used as an outcome measure following experimental manipulation for this reason. Whilst the absence of this data cannot be used to conclude that the ATS has low test-retest reliability, this appears to be a gap in the literature which ought to be addressed in order

to draw additional conclusions regarding the stability of such attitudes. Any future research exploring the test-retest reliability of the ATS ought also to be mindful of the time window which elapses between these two data points. Too brief a time interval might allow a person to remember their initial responses and simply repeat these. However, too long a time interval might capture the shift in an individual's attitudes towards this group, for example, in response to an increase in exposure to media stories regarding this client group or due to increased contact with members of this group.

Additionally, research has demonstrated that test-retest reliability is typically higher for measures which use a Likert scale where each individual response option is qualitatively labelled (Weng, 2004). Whilst response labels are used within the original author's version of the ATS (Hogue, 1993), this level of test-retest reliability is assumed only to be maintained in studies where researchers also utilise this response format. Using the ATS where only the extreme responses have been labelled (i.e. 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'), whether this is an oversight or an intentional decision made by the researcher, could therefore reduce the test-retest reliability of the measure within the given sample.

## **Validity**

### **Face Validity**

Face validity concerns whether a psychometric measure appears to test what it purports to do so (Holden, 2010). At a subjective level, the ATS does appear to offer some degree of face validity in that it asks respondents to rate their agreement with a number of attitudinal statements regarding people with convictions for sexual offences.

It should be noted that some of the items use gendered language, specifically referring to an ICSO as 'he'. Convictions for sexual offences are over twenty times more common for males than for females (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005), and so it might be expected that respondents would rate items with only male offenders in mind, regardless of this specification. Nevertheless, the wording of the measure appears to ensure that respondents consider only their attitudes towards male ICSOs, rather than people with convictions for sexual offences more generally. This could be considered to be a useful clarification as the scale might otherwise be conflating respondents' attitudes towards both male and female ICSOs which may differ in a number of ways, although this does bring about limits to the generalisability of any findings developed through using the ATS.

As this is a relatively brief measure with 36 items, there is also a possibility that respondents will hold additional attitudes towards this group which are not captured within the scale, and which they are not invited to elaborate on. It might therefore be that whilst the ATS provides some insight into the attitudes which are held by respondents, this might not necessarily reflect the whole scope of these views. For example, the measure does not appear to explore attitudes towards intervention and treatment to the same degree that the Attitudes Toward the Treatment of Sex Offenders scale (ATTSO; Wnuk et al., 2006) does.

A final factor which could influence the measure's face validity is the effect of impression management. If respondents are aware that the societal norm is generally to hold negative attitudes towards this group (Willis et al., 2013), then they might be hesitant to report any positive attitudes that they do hold, and as such may not be inclined to respond truthfully. However, this criticism is not reserved solely for the ATS

but rather exists more broadly across a number of different explicit measures of attitude. One way to reduce this impact is by considering the information which has been provided to respondents prior to completion. For example, research participants who are aware that their responses will remain anonymous have been found to report less socially desirable attitudes (Booth-Kewley et al., 1992), and as such might be more likely to accurately indicate their own true attitudes.

### **Content Validity**

Content validity is a measure of the extent to which the components of an assessment genuinely do represent that area of interest (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2010). This is a more specialised type of validity than face validity, and as such is typically determined by experts within that research area. Raykov and Marcoulides (2010) highlighted that content validity cannot be calculated from scale scores, but rather could be assessed by inviting a panel of experts to review whether a psychometric assessment does appear to appropriately measure the relevant domain. There does not appear to have been any such review of the ATS, and as such it is difficult to conclude whether or not the scale has an acceptable level of content validity at present.

### **Criterion Validity**

The concept of criterion validity considers whether the measurement instrument in question is related to some other kind of performance or behaviour (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2010). One example of this is predictive validity which explores whether performance on the scale can predict some other future outcome. Hogue and Peebles (1997) found that performance on the ATS was predictive of opinions regarding sentencing in both professionals and survivors of sexual abuse, with more positive



attitudes corresponding to the belief that ICSOs should receive less punitive sentences. This therefore suggests that the ATS does demonstrate some level of predictive validity.

Another type of criterion validity is known as concurrent validity, which considers whether performance on one instrument corresponds to that of other instruments which are administered at a similar time point. Hogue and Harper (2019) found that ATS performance is strongly correlated with its short form version, the ATS-21, although this is to be expected as the two questionnaires have a large overlap of items. Aside from this, research into the concurrent validity of the ATS currently remains scarce. Although there is a lack of evidence regarding the scale's concurrent validity, this might also suggest that the ATS has filled a previous gap in the literature with few alternatives to which it could be compared.

### **Construct Validity**

Construct validity has been defined by Cronbach and Meehl (1955) as a measure of how well any variance in psychometric assessment performance can be attributed to a construct, potentially one which was previously undefined. Cronbach and Meehl also described how an analysis of factors is an important part of a test's construct validation process. In developing the original ATP, Melvin et al. (1985) conducted a principal axis factor analysis on pilot data from a wider pool of items and selected the 36 items which best loaded onto one central factor. Whilst the ATP therefore demonstrates some level of construct validity, it cannot be assumed that this validity necessarily translates to the ATS scale. Altering the target group of the measure is likely to influence item responses, and thus the factor loading that might be identified for a given scale. Given a pilot study containing a wider range of questions regarding attitudes specifically

towards people with convictions for sexual offences, different items may have emerged from a factor analysis than those identified by Melvin et al. (1985) for the ATP.

Schwarz and Oyserman (2001) have highlighted that attitudinal measures can be profoundly influenced by even slight changes in the presentation of a question or statement, and as such it is noted that the change in terminology from the ATP to ATS may have had a notable impact on the construct validity of the scale. In fact, Hogue and Harper (2019) acknowledged that when initially developing the ATS, no additional validation process took place.

Hogue and Harper (2019) set out to revalidate the ATS measure by analysing its factor structure. The researchers used a sample of 188 participants drawn from the general population. Using principal components analysis, the researchers found three distinct factors which comprised the ATS. These were identified as being trust, intent, and social distance. Firstly, trust encapsulates those items referring to whether or not an individual with convictions for sexual offences can be trusted. Secondly, intent considers these individuals' motivations for their actions and decisions. Finally, social distance explores how respondents are able to relate and connect to these people. These findings indicate that the structure of the ATS allows the measurement of three distinct constructs. Hogue and Harper (2019) identified that this factor analysis could be used to explain 45.65% of the variance in total ATS scores. Whilst some proportion of the variance can be accounted for by these three factors, it has been suggested that an ideal percentage of variance explained by principal components analysis ought to be 70%-80%, but that within social research 50%-60% might be considered acceptable (Pett et al., 2003). As over half of the variance in ATS scores remains unexplained, the measure appears to lack a degree of construct validity. That is, the majority of the variance is not

explained by the identified factors, and as such it is unclear what additional factors might be able to account for this. A lack of construct validity in this situation could indicate that the ATS is also measuring auxiliary information outside of its intended construct of attitudes towards individuals with convictions for sexual offences, although it is unclear from the analyses available what this might be.

### **Use of the Scale within Research and Practice**

#### **Normative Data**

Once a measure has undergone a process of standardisation, normative data can be identified based on the average scores of different subgroups (Coaley, 2010). This means that any new performance on the measure can be compared to this normative data in order to determine whether this individual differs from what would be expected of a typical person who shares the same demographic qualities.

Normed data for the ATS has been provided by Hogue and Harper (2019). Total ATS scores have been given for the following groups: people with convictions for sexual offences, forensic psychologists, probation workers, prison officers involved in facilitating treatment, prison officers who are not involved in treatment, and police officers. Researchers or practitioners utilising the ATS are therefore able to compare new scores to those of these groups. However, normed data is only available for these particular groups who are already engaged, to some degree, with the criminal justice system. No normed data appears to be available for wider groups, such as the general public or legislators, which becomes problematic for research studies focused in this area. Furthermore, this data is based on a relatively small sample pool of 170 respondents overall. The norms for probation officers, for example, are based on a

group of only 11 people. This could mean that researchers comparing their own data against these norms might find that their own scores differ significantly and assume that their participants must hold wildly abnormal views, whereas it may simply be the case that the normed data itself has not been able to account for the wide scope in the variety of attitudes held.

### **Standardisation**

Use of the ATS does not require specific training, and its administration is relatively straightforward. Hogue (1993) has provided a clear method of scoring the measure, however, this has not been followed universally within the field. In fact, Hogue (2015) has suggested that around a third of studies using the ATS scale appear to use incorrectly scored data. Hogue (1993) has indicated that responses should be scored on a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4, where 0 represents ‘strongly disagree’ and 4 represents ‘strongly agree’. However, Hogue and Harper (2019) highlighted that some researchers appear to have instead used a scale of 1 to 5. If this process is followed for the entirety of the project, this ought not to affect any between group comparisons made within the study. However, the difference in scoring technique prevents data from different studies being compared, as it is not always clear which scoring system has been used. It can therefore sometimes appear that one subgroup holds particularly positive attitudes towards ICSOs, whereas in reality these scores have been inflated by incorrect scoring techniques.

## **Alternative Approaches**

### **Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders: The Short Form**

In 2019, Hogue and Harper published a shortened 21-item version of the ATS, the ATS-21. This was derived directly from the factor analysis of the ATS-36, with the seven highest loading items on each factor selected for inclusion. The researchers reported that the overall ATS-21 scale had a good level of test-retest reliability, and excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Each of the three factors was also found to have a high level of internal consistency, with alpha values of .79 for social distance, .83 for trust, and .84 for intent. These studies also provide normative data for each of the factors, although once again these are based on relatively small samples of 170, and 59 respondents respectively. The scale has also been used by Harper and Bartels (2017) who found it to have a high level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Despite the positive results to date, the ATS-21 is still relatively novel, and as such more data regarding its validity and reliability could be collected, potentially by researchers who have not been involved in the tool's development, to provide further support for this attitudinal measure. However, as this scale is comprised of items from the full ATS-36, and the two measures are highly correlated, the short form of the measure is likely to share high levels of validity and reliability.

### **Alternative Measures**

Implicit tools can also be used to assess attitudes as these can reduce the impact of impression management and socially desirable responding. This can be conducted through the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). In the IAT, stimuli are presented and participants are instructed to indicate the paired positive

or negative attribution for that block. For example, in a congruent trial, a participant might be instructed to respond to positive words, such as ‘sunshine’, with the response ‘pleasant’, and to negative words, such as ‘rain’, with the response ‘unpleasant’. In an incongruent trial, however, one should respond to the word ‘sunshine’ with ‘unpleasant’, and to ‘rain’ with ‘pleasant’. Response times in the incongruent category are typically longer as the respondent is required to inhibit the response guided by their implicit associations, and instead must make a cognitive choice in order to respond incongruently. This tool can therefore be used to explore implicit attitudes which respondents might not be willing to report, or are even aware that they hold.

One such study using the IAT approach (Malinen et al., 2014) included words relating to sexual offending as their stimuli, such as ‘rapist’. Participants were asked to pair these with either positive words such as ‘happy’ or negative words such as ‘evil’. They found that the nature of the implicit attitudes held towards ICSSOs were only moderately correlated with participants’ scores on an explicit attitudinal measure. This indicates that the use of implicit attitudinal tools in addition to an explicit assessment scale such as the ATS in future research might provide a richer insight into the true attitudes held by different groups that cannot be measured by explicit self-report measures alone.

## **Discussion**

The ATS is a measure with which attitudes towards ICSSOs can be assessed. Initially developed from the ATP, it has also recently been translated into a shorter form (the ATS-21). The ATS scale utilises interval level data which allows for a direct comparison of different groups’ performances. It has repeatedly been found to have a

high level of internal consistency when used across a variety of different demographic groups. Modified versions of the scale have also demonstrated a high level of test-retest consistency, although future studies could seek to explore this to further determine the ATS's reliability. The scale has standardised administration and scoring instructions, however, in a number of studies, these do not appear to have been followed appropriately. Whilst Hogue and Harper (2019) have published normative data, this is based on a relatively small sample pool.

Validation of the scale has taken place although it should be noted that the original author of the ATS has been involved in a proportion of these validation attempts. Further validation by additional researchers could be helpful in adding merit to this area. The scale has demonstrated promising face and construct validity. It also appears to have some degree of criterion validity. However, there was little evidence available to support its content validity, and so it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the ATS truly represents these attitudes towards ICSOs.

Whilst the ATS is widely used within the field, few researchers have considered additional measures of validity or reliability beyond calculating the scale's internal consistency. This is concerning as the current evidence for the tool's validity and reliability is generally positive, but is far from extensive. Furthermore, it is essential that additional normative data is collected in order to maximise its potential use outside of those groups who are engaged in the criminal justice system, such as the general population.

This review has demonstrated the utility of this scale within both research and practice, as well as highlighting potential areas of interest in order to further determine

the measure's reliability and validity. The ATS preliminarily appears to be an appropriate attitudinal measure, and future research could also benefit from combining its use with a secondary measure of attitudes.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS OF VOLUNTEERS WITHIN CIRCLES OF SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

#### Abstract

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) are designed to assist individuals who have been convicted of a sexual offence (ICSOs) and have been released from prison back into the community. The present study investigates the attitudes towards ICSOs held by those individuals who volunteer within CoSA ( $n = 33$ ), and compares these with undergraduate student ( $n = 126$ ) and general public samples ( $n = 122$ ). The effect of exposure to descriptions of different types of sexual offences was also considered, in terms of how this impacted on participants' perceptions towards ICSOs. It was hypothesised that volunteers would hold the most positive baseline attitudes towards ICSOs, with the general public expected to express more negative attitudes. Both group membership and exposure to different offence type vignettes were expected to impact participants' reported perceptions towards ICSOs. Volunteers' motivations for engaging in CoSA were also explored through Thematic Analysis. Volunteers were found to hold significantly more positive attitudes and less harsh perceptions than both the student and general public samples. Motivations for volunteering were grouped into four main themes: individual development, societal responses, individual experiences, and CM benefits. These findings provide additional insight into the characteristics of CoSA volunteers which will be useful in improving the delivery of CoSA and future volunteer recruitment.

## **Introduction**

### **Volunteering within Circles of Support and Accountability**

A great deal of the research into CoSA has understandably focused on the experiences of Core Members (CMs; Duwe, 2018; Kitson-Boyce et al., 2018; Thompson, 2015), including the systematic review reported in chapter two of the present thesis. However, CoSA could not function without the input and work of their volunteers. These individuals choose to give up their time for free in order to carry out a role which others might be more reluctant to engage in. Developing a better understanding of the mindset, attitudes, and motivations of CoSA volunteers can allow these projects to continue to develop and grow. Research into the experiences of volunteers is therefore vital in supporting their recruitment and retention.

CMs have described receiving a dual nature of support from the volunteers who form their inner circle. Northcutt Bohmert et al. (2018) found that CMs reported experiencing instrumental support, such as assistance in gaining employment and acquiring accommodation, in addition to more traditional social support, including friendship and moral support. These findings suggest that whilst ICsOs might typically feel ostracised from many members of their community, involvement with this intervention exposes them to local CoSA volunteers, an extension of their local community, who are willing to support and assist them in a number of ways.

There is an overrepresentation of women who volunteer within the CoSA programme; for example, Circles South East (2012) have reported that 74% of their volunteers were female. After initially being interviewed and screened for their suitability for a CoSA project, volunteers within the United Kingdom typically

participate in a two-day training course before then undertaking another month of training (McCartan, 2014). These are completed before attending the first meeting with the CM, and volunteers are supported throughout the process by their CoSA's co-ordinator (Wilson et al., 2010).

Volunteers appear to offer a particular set of strengths and weaknesses within the programme (Thomas et al., 2014). CoSA co-ordinators have highlighted that volunteers are often enthusiastic about their role, and can offer a prompt and accessible support network to the CM. They also take a unique outlook on the project as they have not typically been impacted by any prior professional training. However, this can also mean that they may sometimes fail to pick up on particular pieces of information relating to risk, which might otherwise be identified by more experienced professionals. A further downside to the role is that as volunteers are not employed within the programme, they are able to leave a CoSA without giving any prior notice if they so choose.

At a general level, volunteering has been associated with greater life satisfaction as well as improved health (Willigen, 2000). More specifically, volunteering with people who have an offence history has been found to contribute to individual spiritual growth, self-growth, feelings of fulfilment, and improved interpersonal relationships with others (Duncan & Balbar, 2008). Those volunteers who work within CoSA have reported experiencing an increase in self-esteem, self-awareness, and connectedness to others, but also in stress, unease, and rumination (Höing et al., 2016). Snatersen (2011, as cited in Höing, Bogaerts, & Vogelvang, 2017) found that volunteers within Dutch CoSA also disclosed having increased levels of anxiety with regards to potentially becoming the victim of a sexual offence in the future.

Höing, Bogaerts, and Vogelvang (2017) conducted additional research into the experiences of volunteers within CoSA in an attempt to better understand the impact that this role has. They distributed a questionnaire to 40 volunteers which consisted of a number of outcome scales. They found that participants generally reported being satisfied with their role within CoSA, and many were determined to continue with the programme. Volunteers' mental wellbeing was typically high, with participants reporting relatively low levels of burnout and of secondary traumatic stress. They also reported that they had been able to obtain appropriate work experience through the programme, and expressed an increase in their level of social awareness. This suggests that aside from the benefits for the CM and for society more widely, CoSA can also be a rewarding experience for the volunteers engaged in the programme. However, Höing, Bogaerts, and Vogelvang (2017) acknowledged that the applicability of these findings is relatively limited due to the explorative approach of the study, owing to the small sample size.

Lowe and Willis (2019a) conducted interviews with volunteers regarding their experiences of operating within CoSA in New Zealand. Volunteers discussed how they felt that their roles of providing support and accountability typically coincided with each other, and that both were ultimately based on building mutual relationships with the CM as well as with other volunteers in the inner circle. They also reported that the nature of their role had forced them to reflect on their own beliefs regarding ICSOs, and that they were sometimes reluctant to disclose their involvement in the programme to others due to concerns about how they might respond to this. Participants felt that they were truly able to support the CM in their process of reintegration, but also reported having concerns about the future of CoSA in the country due to prevailing issues related

to funding. Those volunteers whose CM had been recalled to prison, or charged with a further offence, described experiencing feelings of stress and guilt due to a perception that they had done something wrong or failed in their role. However, these individuals also appeared to remain committed to supporting the CM moving forward. They generally recognised that a recall did not necessarily reflect a complete failure of the programme, as this decision was typically made in order to prevent the commission of any further offence.

Gilliam et al. (2020) also sought to understand how volunteers had benefitted from their participation in CoSA. A total of 33 volunteers were interviewed, and over half of them reported that they were grateful for the opportunity to learn more about the prison experience and the process of re-entry. A third of participants also described developing a sense of purpose owing to their role in helping the CM. Some also reported valuing the opportunity to socialise with new people, to learn from the training, and to experience personal growth. Despite these benefits, volunteers also described a number of changes which they would like to see, such as more effective communication with criminal justice agencies, better outcomes for some CMs, and an improved training syllabus.

Throughout the training process, volunteers learn about issues relating to sexual offending and reintegration, and develop skills to assist them in building the CoSA and meeting the CM's individual needs. Lowe and Willis (2019b) reported a wide range of perceptions regarding the efficacy of this training. Approximately one in three volunteers felt that the training package had been sufficient in order for them to be able to form and maintain a CoSA effectively. However, some perceived the content of the training to be inadequate and felt underprepared, for example reporting that they did not

truly understand what their role within the CoSA was. Furthermore, other volunteers stated that whilst they had found the initial intensive training session to be appropriate, they also felt that they would benefit from ongoing training provided throughout the duration of the CoSA in order to support their continuing development. However, these experiences are likely to be unique only to those CoSA which share this model of training, and might not apply to other CoSA providers who do offer an ongoing training programme.

A review of volunteers' applications to join the Circles South East programme revealed some insight into their motivations for doing so (Circles South East, 2012). Out of the seven possible options presented to volunteers, the most commonly endorsed reasons related to having a professional interest with regards to either their previous or future employment, supporting the humanist principles underpinning CoSA, and having a desire to help make communities safer. CoSA volunteers have also reported joining through their church or chaplaincy, due to being encouraged by friends who had also volunteered, and because of their involvement with other voluntary community services (Cesaroni, 2001). However, McCartan et al. (2014) asserted that the evidence base regarding CoSA volunteers' motivations was relatively limited at the time.

Subsequently, Lowe et al. (2019) interviewed 18 volunteers within New Zealand CoSA in order to explore what had motivated their decision to join. They identified three overarching themes. The first of these was a restorative motivation: volunteers wanted to reduce the levels of sexual reoffending within their community, and believed that engaging in CoSA would be an effective way of doing so. Secondly, volunteers reported motivations which related to altruism: they wanted to be in a position where they could help others, and perceived themselves to be altruistic individuals. Thirdly,

some volunteers were motivated to volunteer because of their faith, whereas others wanted to actively provide a non-religious alternative to reintegrative support. This study provided further insight into motivating factors; however, these themes were produced from data provided by a small sample size within one geographical area, and as such is not expected to be representative of all CoSA volunteers. For example, participants within the study also made references to the importance of Māori justice, which are unlikely to be reported by those volunteers in CoSA operating outside of New Zealand.

At a wider level, volunteering can serve a number of functions for those who choose to do so. Clary et al. (1998) developed an inventory to assess the factors which motivated people to take on voluntary roles. Factor analyses of the scale identified six main functions of volunteering: an expression of the volunteer's values, seeking an understanding about the world or others, psychological enhancement, gaining career-related experience, developing social relationships, and serving as a protective factor against experiencing negative emotions (Clary & Snyder, 1999). Although these factors differed between individuals, Clary and Snyder (1999) reported that the majority of respondents identified at least two or more significant motivations for volunteering.

### **Attitudes and Perceptions**

As described in Chapter 3, attitudes are relatively complex concepts composed of cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Breckler, 1984). Perceptions, however, are typically restricted to judgements and conclusions that people draw in response to specific stimuli, such as people or events (Freund & Isaacowitz, 2014). Harper et al. (2017) has emphasised the importance of differentiating between attitudes

and perceptions, particularly within the realm of forensic research. They argued that these terms are often used interchangeably by researchers which can lead to confusion and inconsistencies within the domain. Whilst attitudes held by individuals are thought to be relatively stable and resilient to experimental effects, perceptions are typically believed to be more responsive to intervention and influence. Harper and Hogue (2015b) suggested that the two can be compatible within research, proposing that it could be useful to utilise measures of both attitudes and perceptions together in order to explore these characteristics. Harper et al. (2017), for example, proposed that in order to investigate these phenomena, an attitudinal measure could initially be utilised to explore baseline differences, and a measure of perceptions could then be used as an outcome measure following some kind of experimental manipulation or attitudinal intervention.

There is some evidence to suggest that certain demographic characteristics are associated with holding differing attitudes towards ICSOs; for example, non-religious individuals have reported more rehabilitative attitudes than religious individuals (Olver & Barlow, 2010). However, the nature of attitudinal differences between genders appears to be inconclusive. Willis et al. (2013) found that men expressed more positive attitudes towards ICSOs than women did, whereas Higgins and Ireland (2009) found the opposite pattern of results, and Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) found no difference between these genders. Those who have undertaken higher education have been found to report more favourable attitudes towards ICSOs (Willis et al., 2013), although this finding is not necessarily consistent (Olver & Barlow, 2010). There is some indication that holding more conservative beliefs is associated with a more negative view of ICSOs (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017), but also that political affiliation has no significant impact on these attitudes (Olver & Barlow, 2010).



Positive attitudes towards ICSOs do however appear to be associated with a higher rate of contact and additional preparation following training (Nelson et al., 2002). Additionally, forensic professionals have expressed significantly more positive views towards ICSOs than students (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). Hogue (1993) found that professionals' positive attitudes towards ICSOs were generally associated with their level of engagement in the processes of treatment and intervention. For example, probation workers and psychologists reported more positive attitudes than prison officers, who in turn held more positive attitudes than police officers. Jung et al. (2011), however, found that lay people actually reported perceiving ICSOs as having a more favourable character, and posing a lower risk of recidivism than professionals did.

To date, one study has sought to explore CoSA volunteers' attitudes towards ICSOs. Kerr et al. (2018) found that volunteers from CoSA within England reported significantly more positive baseline attitudes regarding ICSOs than the general public. These differences were found on subscales designed to measure attitudes regarding sexual deviance and being capable of making a change. No group differences were found on subscales relating to perceived dangerousness or the level of social isolation experienced by ICSOs. However, the measure used to investigate attitudes in this study was the Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offenders scale (CATSO; Church et al., 2008), which has been found to have significant research limitations, including low levels of reliability and validity (Shelton et al., 2013). Moreover, it has been suggested that the CATSO is in fact a measure of perceptions as opposed to attitudes (Harper et al., 2017).

Previous research into attitudes towards ICSOs have also sometimes incorporated a student sample. The rationale for including this group in addition to a

general public sample is that the two groups have previously been found to hold significantly different attitudes towards ICSOs. Gakhal and Brown (2011), for example, found that whilst professionals reported significantly more positive attitudes to female ICSOs than students and the general public, students' attitudes were significantly more favourable than those reported by the general public. These findings highlight the potential benefit of separating a student sample from a sample of the general public in order to create more distinct groups. However, it is worth noting that Gakhal and Brown (2011) utilised a stable measure of baseline attitudes in order to assess outcomes regarding a subtype of ICSO, namely female ICSOs, which Harper et al. (2017) have advised against. It is unclear whether significant differences between these three groups would still be present had the authors instead used a measure of perception, and also whether these would differ had this subtype of ICSO not been specified.

The study of attitudes and perceptions regarding offenders can ultimately have an influence on the intervention and management procedures that they are subject to. For example, members of the public who hold negative attitudes towards ICSOs are more likely to support policies relating to community notification conditions (Shackley et al., 2014). Harper and Bartels (2017) have argued that the legal conditions imposed on ICSOs following their release from prison are partially driven by the public's desire to see such a punitive approach taken by legislators. Furthermore, politicians and lawmakers are not immune to these experiences, and also hold their own attitudes regarding ICSOs. The nature of these attitudes is therefore important to understand as this appears to have a direct impact on public policy.

Furthermore, Blagden et al. (2014) has found that professionals who held more positive baseline attitudes towards ICSOs were more likely to believe that offending

behaviour is susceptible to change. It therefore follows that holding more positive attitudes of offenders might also influence a professional's expected treatment outcomes for the offenders with whom they are working, and potentially even result in some form of self-fulfilling prophecy. These findings suggest that further understanding the development and malleability of attitudes and perceptions towards offenders could therefore have an impact on intervention and, in turn, desistance.

### **Vignettes**

Finch (1987) highlighted how the use of written vignettes allows researchers to expose participants to potentially sensitive scenarios without making them feel as though they are under any form of threat. Vignettes can allow participants to be exposed to a specific hypothetical context which they would not otherwise be able to face under experimental circumstances (Sleed et al., 2002). The use of this vignette methodology has previously been employed to explore attitudes towards different types of offenders. Rogers and Ferguson (2011) presented participants with vignettes which varied in offence type and in the given age of the perpetrator. They found that respondents expressed more punitive attitudes towards older offenders than younger offenders, and towards ICSOs when compared with individuals who had committed a violent offence. Rogers and Ferguson (2011) suggested that this effect might be explained by participants having experienced a particularly emotive response when their schema regarding sexual violence was activated, and that these visceral feelings could have contributed to their responses due to a sense of 'moral panic'.

Preliminary vignette research into sexual offending found no impact of sexual offence subtype on participants' attitudes towards ICSOs (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006),

however this study used the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993) as an outcome measure, a method which has been criticised by Harper et al. (2017). Similarly, Weiner et al. (2014) found that members of the public's attitudes towards ICSOs were not significantly influenced by exposure to vignettes depicting different types of sexual offences. However, when participants were asked to consider the prospect of an ICSO living in their neighbourhood, Kernsmith et al. (2009) found that higher levels of fear were associated with a person who had sexually abused a child compared with six other types of sexual offence including spousal and statutory rape.

The effect of vignettes on perceptions towards ICSOs has also been explored in order to consider the impact of different offender demographics. Harper and Bartels (2017) composed vignettes depicting a contact sexual offence committed against a nine-year-old child. A total of 252 participants were exposed to a vignette where the offender was described as being either an adult male, an adult female, or a teenaged male, or to no vignette condition at all. No significant effect was found of offender type on participants' reported perceptions towards ICSOs. However, the implicit theories which participants held regarding ICSOs (such as whether they perceived sexual offending to be fixed or malleable in nature) did mediate the relationship between participants' attitudes and perceptions within some conditions. Those who perceived these behaviours as being fixed held more punitive perceptions after being exposed to either no vignette or to a vignette depicting an adult male offender, which Harper and Bartels described as reflecting the most representative case of an ICSO. When participants were presented with a female or teenaged ICSO, these implicit theories did not influence reported perceptions.

Finally, Socia et al. (2019) varied both ICSO and victim demographics within a vignette methodology in order to understand their effect on perceptions of sentencing and support. The gender of the perpetrator was altered in addition to the gender and age of the victim, as well as the relationship between the two. Participants were found to respond less punitively when the ICSO was described as being female, or when the victim was female. Respondents were however more punitive when the victim was a child, as opposed to an adult. There was no significant impact of the relationship between the victim and ICSO on punitive ratings.

### **Theory of Planned Behaviour**

The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) can be used across a wide range of contexts in order to model human behaviour and what drives it. Broadly, behaviours are understood as being driven by one's own behavioural beliefs, beliefs held by others, beliefs about one's level of control, and the impact that each of these has on one's own intentions. Behavioural beliefs support the formation of the attitudes held by an individual, which in turn influences action. Furthermore, an individual's intentions reflect the factors which motivate their behaviour, and stronger intentions typically result in that behaviour being performed (Ajzen, 1991). Both one's attitudes and motivations are therefore likely to influence the execution of specific behaviours. By considering each of these factors, a better understanding of the performed behaviour can therefore be gained.

## **Research Aims and Hypotheses**

The present study aimed to explore CoSA volunteers' attitudes and perceptions towards ICSOs. By exposing participants to different vignettes, it is argued that it was possible to consider the influence of offence type on self-reported perceptions. The study was therefore expected to demonstrate how ongoing contact and conversation with ICSOs in the community might influence the stability of perceptions held within the volunteer group. These perceptions were also explored within a group of undergraduate students and a group consisting of members of the public, which provided comparison data for the volunteer group.

The study primarily sought to investigate the following research questions:

- i. How do CoSA volunteers' baseline attitudes towards ICSOs differ to those of undergraduate students and the general public?
- ii. How do participants' perceptions of ICSOs vary between groups, and following exposure to different types of offences?
- iii. What are volunteers' self-reported motivations for initially engaging with the CoSA programme?

It was hypothesised that CoSA volunteers would generally hold more positive baseline attitudes towards ICSOs than both students and members of the general public. Volunteers were also hypothesised to have more positive perceptions towards ICSOs following exposure to these vignettes. It was anticipated that participants overall would have the most punitive perceptions of ICSOs after being exposed to the vignette depicting a sexual assault against a child, and the least punitive perceptions if they had been exposed to the vignette depicting a non-contact, internet-based sexual offence. Volunteers were

also invited to share their motivations for initially engaging with CoSA. It was hoped that this could provide some insight into key factors within their own experiences, and to understand how additional volunteers might be recruited and supported in future, due to the fact that successful volunteer recruitment has been recognised as a particularly challenging aspect of CoSA (Wilson et al., 2007).

## **Method**

### **Sample**

A total of 281 participants were recruited for the present study. An a priori power analysis calculated that a sample size of 198 participants would be sufficient to capture a medium effect size and reach power of .80 with an alpha value of .05. The study sample was comprised of three groups: individuals who currently are, or previously have been, a volunteer within a CoSA; undergraduate students; and members of the general public.

Volunteers were approached via a number of local regional providers of CoSA across England and Wales. Consenting project managers distributed a recruitment email to individuals volunteering within their project (see Appendix E), which contained information regarding the research and a hyperlink to the consent form, questionnaires, vignette, and debrief form . Undergraduate students were initially recruited via a university research management system in return for course credit, and subsequently through social media, including LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Members of the public were also invited to participate in the study via social media sites (see Appendix F). It was hoped that by using the internet to recruit participants, a large and diverse sample might be reached (Gosling & Mason, 2015). In order to encourage participation,

all participants were also informed that they could choose to be entered into a prize draw to win one of two gift cards for a popular online retailer.

## **Materials**

All study materials, including the information sheet, consent form, and debrief form, were presented to participants with the use of Qualtrics software. These were optimised for viewing on both desktop computers and mobile phones in order to maximise potential avenues for completion.

### ***The Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scale***

The Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993) is a self-report measure of attitudes regarding ICSOs which is comprised of 36 self-report items, some of which require reverse scoring. Participants are required to indicate their agreement with statements regarding ICSOs on a five-point Likert scale. Higher total scores on the ATS reflect more positive baseline attitudes towards ICSOs, with potential scores varying between 0 and 144.

A factor analysis of the measure identified that the scale is made up of three distinct factors, labelled as trust, intent, and social distance (Hogue & Harper, 2019). The measure has also been found to have a good level of internal consistency (Craig, 2005). Additional information regarding the ATS scale is presented in Chapter 3.

### ***The 21-Item Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scale***

The shorter ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019) is a condensed version of the ATS scale (Hogue, 1993). The scale is comprised of 21 items from the original ATS scale, and scores can range from 0 to 84. The short-form scale shares the three-factor structure of trust, intent, and social distance.



### *The Perceptions of Sex Offenders Scale*

The Perceptions of Sex Offenders scale (PSO; Harper & Hogue, 2015b) is a measure of perceptions regarding ICSOs. This scale comprises three underlying sub-factors: sentencing and management, risk perception, and stereotype endorsement. Respondents are asked to use a six-point Likert scale in order to rate their agreement with 20 items referencing ICSOs. A higher total score on the PSO indicates that an individual has harsher and more punitive perceptions of ICSOs. The full scoring range of the PSO is 0 to 100. The scale has been found to have a good level of internal consistency, both overall ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and across each of its sub-factors: sentencing and management ( $\alpha = .93$ ), risk perception ( $\alpha = .80$ ), and stereotype endorsement ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

### *Vignettes*

The use of vignettes in research has been found to enhance experimental realism (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Shorter vignettes avoid unnecessary complexity (Poulou, 2001), and can help to maximise response rates (Azman & Mahadhir, 2017; Lawrie et al., 1998). Participants in the present study were randomly exposed to one of three vignettes:

‘David is a 32-year-old man who has been convicted of a sexual assault committed against a 28-year-old woman’;

‘David is a 32-year-old man who has been convicted of a sexual assault committed against an 8-year-old girl’;

‘David is a 32-year-old man who has been convicted of viewing and being in possession of indecent images of children’.

These vignettes allowed comparisons to be made with regards to the effect of victim type. A vignette depicting an internet offence was also included due to the increasing prevalence of imagery accessed by individuals each year which depicts sexual abuse towards children (Internet Watch Foundation, 2019).

### **Design and Procedure**

Prospective participants who were interested in taking part in the study were invited to follow a hyperlink to the survey. They were initially presented with the information sheet (see Appendix G) and then the consent form (see Appendix H). Participants were unable to progress through to the study itself until they had completed the consent form, indicating that they agreed to all seven components of the form and providing a unique identifying code. Participants first completed a questionnaire designed to measure baseline attitudes towards ICSOs (the ATS). They were then exposed to one of three vignettes allocated on a random basis by the Qualtrics software, and were subsequently asked to complete a measure of their perceptions regarding ICSOs (the PSO).

Participants were asked to provide demographic information including their age, gender, employment status, and whether they had ever been the victim of a sexual assault in the past. They were reminded that they were welcome to provide no response to the latter question if they did not wish to do so, due to its sensitive nature. Finally, CoSA volunteers were asked to provide a qualitative account of their motivations for becoming involved with CoSA. Participants within the student and general public samples, however, were asked to confirm whether they had ever worked or volunteered in a professional capacity with an ICSO. The process of participation took

approximately 15 minutes. Following the completion of the survey, participants were thanked for their time and presented with a debrief form detailing the purpose of the study. They were also provided with contact details for appropriate support networks should they feel that they would benefit from this.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

The quantitative data were first exported from Qualtrics into Microsoft Excel in order to be scored appropriately. For the ATS scale, 19 items were reverse scored and a constant of 36 was removed from each participant's total score. In scoring the PSO, six items were reverse scored. A constant of one was also removed from each item, in line with the scoring guidance. These data were inputted into IBM SPSS software (Version 26) in order to conduct statistical analyses. The ATS-21 was then scored from the ATS responses provided by participants. This was scored directly within IBM SPSS using the open scoring resources recommended by Hogue and Harper (2019).

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

Thematic Analysis was undertaken on the data regarding motivations reported by CoSA volunteers. Thematic Analysis is a flexible method of analysis which can be used across a number of research areas, within which themes can be identified, scrutinised, arranged, and finally communicated (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach was chosen over other forms of thematic analyses (e.g. content analysis) in order to facilitate a more in-depth analysis of meanings presented within the data, aside from those overtly stated. The analysis process was undertaken by hand and closely followed the six-phase framework, as reported by Braun and Clarke (2006). After reading and re-

reading the data in order to become familiar with this, initial codes were produced inductively by the researcher through open coding. Within this stage, the researcher noted sections and phrases which were deemed to be significant, and attached preliminary labels to these, reflecting the issue which appeared to be depicted. This process was carried out across all data provided by each participant. After all of the data had been coded, themes were developed by considering how these codes related to each other, or how potential themes could bring these codes together. This process involved deriving new themes from the data at hand, as opposed to pre-determining any themes which might have been anticipated from the volunteers (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These themes were then reviewed and refined on an ongoing basis as appropriate, and finally named in a way that was thought to communicate the overall point at hand. This method was chosen as it allows a flexible approach to a qualitative data set, and as such can be applied to a variety of research designs. It was therefore deemed to be an appropriate analysis technique for use with written questionnaire data which was expected to be of potentially varying lengths.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### ***Application for Ethical Review***

This study was reviewed by the University of Birmingham's ethics committee and received full ethical approval (reference: ERN\_19-0837). The ethics committee of Circles UK also approved this research project.

### ***Participant Wellbeing***

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research topic, participants were forewarned at the initial recruitment stage that the study would involve answering

questions with regards to sexual offending. If participants chose to participate in the study, they were first presented with an information sheet further detailing the type of questions that they would be invited to answer. The information sheet also described the voluntary nature of participation, emphasising that participants were welcome to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty, or to skip any questions which they did not wish to provide an answer to. All participants were provided with contact details for support helplines, and advised to call these should they have experienced any discomfort as a result of participation, or feel that they may benefit from further support. These details were provided at both the beginning and the end of the study in order to ensure that all participants had access to them, even if they were not able to complete the study.

### ***Consent and Debrief Processes***

All participants provided informed consent, and were given a debrief form explaining the rationale for the study, hypotheses, and potential implications of the research. Participants were also reminded of the confidentiality of their data and invited to contact the researcher should they have any further questions (see Appendix I).

### ***Confidentiality of the Data***

All data provided by participants was treated as confidential. Once the data was exported from the questionnaire hosting website, it was stored on the secure university IT system where it will be retained for a total of 10 years. Only the researcher had access to this data set. Prior to participation, participants were required to provide a four digit identifying code. They were informed that should they wish to withdraw from the study following participation, they could contact the researcher quoting this identifier

and their data would be destroyed at the earliest convenience. No participant chose to withdraw their data.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

A total of 33 CoSA volunteers participated in the research between January 26 2020 and May 20 2020. Of the 29 who provided information regarding their gender, six were male and 23 were female, with ages ranging between 20 and 73 years old ( $M = 41.8$ ,  $SD = 19.8$ ). The length of time which volunteers had spent within CoSA varied greatly, from 1 month to 99 months ( $M = 22.5$ ,  $SD = 24.9$ ). Volunteers also reported having participated in between zero to seven CoSAs ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 1.6$ ). Seven (21.2%) reported that they had previously been the victim of a sexual assault, 22 (66.7%) indicated that they had not, and four (12.1%) chose not to provide a response to this question.

Undergraduate students participated in the study between January 19 2020 and April 10 2020 ( $n = 126$ ). Twenty-eight of the students were male, 96 were female, one indicated that they preferred to self-describe their gender, and one noted that they preferred not to say. Students' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years old ( $M = 21.0$ ,  $SD = 2.0$ ). When asked whether they had previously been the victim of a sexual assault, 42 (33.3%) indicated that they had, 77 (61.1%) reported that they had not, and seven (5.6%) did not provide a response.

Members of the public provided their responses between January 19 2020 and April 6 2020 ( $n = 122$ ). Fifty reported their gender as male, 70 as female, one self-described their gender as non-binary, and one preferred not to say. Ages ranged from 18

to 61 years old ( $M = 29.0$ ,  $SD = 9.2$ ). A total of 39 members of the public (32.0%) indicated that they had been the victim of a sexual assault in the past, 79 (64.8%) had not, and four (3.3%) did not provide a response to this question. The majority of participants within this group were university educated, reporting their highest level of formal education as a foundation degree ( $n = 2$ ), a Bachelor's degree ( $n = 50$ ), a Master's degree ( $n = 41$ ), or a doctorate ( $n = 11$ ); others reported their highest level of formal education as A-Levels or equivalent ( $n = 9$ ), GCSEs or equivalent ( $n = 7$ ), some school education ( $n = 1$ ), or 'other' ( $n = 1$ ).

### **The Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scales**

Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality indicated that ATS-36 responses were normally distributed within each sample: for volunteers,  $W(33) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .075$ ; for students,  $W(126) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .562$ ; for the public,  $W(122) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .428$ . However, a Levene's test indicated that variances were not homogenous across these groups,  $F(2, 278) = 3.91$ ,  $p = .021$ . Although traditional ANOVA is typically fairly robust against this violation alone, this was not considered to be the case in the present analysis due to the additional confound of having unequal sample sizes (Field, 2013). Instead, a Welch's ANOVA was used. This was selected as it has been identified as being an optimal test to compare means when variances are heterogeneous, and is also less susceptible to Type I error than its counterparts (Tomarken & Serlin, 1986). This test also performs well when sample sizes are uneven (Liu, 2015), as is the case in the present study. There was found to be a significant effect of group on ATS score,  $F(2, 103.61) = 54.98$ ,  $p < .001$ . Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using the Games-Howell test due to the presence of unequal variances. These identified that volunteers' ATS scores were significantly higher than both students' ( $p < .001$ ) and the public's ( $p < .001$ ). The

public's ATS scores were significantly higher than students' ( $p < .001$ ). These scores are presented within Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Mean Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scores Across Groups*

Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Volunteers	93.6	13.3
Students	64.5	17.2
Public	72.8	20.2

From this analysis alone, it was not possible to tell whether volunteers had more positive attitudes towards ICSOs because of their experiences within CoSA, or whether these were pre-existing attitudes which played a part in attracting them to the programme. In order to examine the nature of this relationship further, a correlation analysis was conducted. The data reflecting the number of CoSA which volunteers had been involved in was not normally distributed,  $W(29) = 0.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , and so it was not appropriate to use Pearson's correlation. Instead, Spearman's correlation was performed. A moderate positive correlation was found between ATS scores and number of CoSA conducted,  $r_s = 0.56$ ,  $p = .002$ .

The effect of demographic factors on ATS scores across all participants was also considered. First, the impact of gender was explored. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that this data was normally distributed for both male participants,  $W(84) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .808$ , and female participants,  $W(189) = 1.00$ ,  $p = .932$ . Variances were also found to be homogenous,  $F(1, 271) = 0.00$ ,  $p = .984$ , and therefore parametric tests were deemed to be appropriate. Male participants had slightly higher ATS scores ( $M = 73.6$ ,  $SD = 20.4$ )



than female participants ( $M = 70.1$ ,  $SD = 20.1$ ), however this difference was not found to be significant,  $t(271) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .184$ .

In order to explore the effect of age, the sample was divided into two age groups. As the median age was 23, these age groups comprised of younger adults aged 18 to 23 ( $n = 144$ ) and older adults aged 24 to 73 ( $n = 132$ ). The range of ages within the older adult group was much larger than that of those within the younger adult group, as the overall sample was comprised of a high frequency of young participants, particularly due to recruiting in part from a student population. ATS scores were normally distributed for the younger,  $W(144) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .770$ , and older age groups,  $W(132) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .512$ , and variances were homogenous across groups,  $F(1, 274) = 0.35$ ,  $p = .553$ . An independent t-test was used to compare the two groups. Older adults ( $M = 77.1$ ,  $SD = 20.3$ ) reported significantly higher ATS scores than younger adults ( $M = 65.9$ ,  $SD = 18.7$ ),  $t(274) = -4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ .

The impact of one's own previous experiences of sexual assault was also considered. Scores were normally distributed for those who reported that they had been the victim of a sexual assault,  $W(88) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .919$ , and for those who reported that they had not,  $W(178) = 0.99$ ,  $p = .722$ , and both variances were homogeneous,  $F(1, 264) = 0.12$ ,  $p = .733$ . ATS scores were slightly higher for those who had not personally experienced sexual assault ( $M = 72.5$ ,  $SD = 20.4$ ) than for those who had ( $M = 68.6$ ,  $SD = 19.8$ ) but this difference was not found to be statistically significant,  $t(264) = -1.48$ ,  $p = .140$ .

As the ATS-21 is comprised solely of items from the original ATS, it was possible to score this measure using this data. ATS-21 scores across groups are

presented within Table 5. These scores were also normally distributed across all three groups: volunteers,  $W(33) = 0.95, p = .153$ ; students,  $W(126) = 0.99, p = .570$ ; and the public,  $W(122) = 0.99, p = .448$ . Variances across groups were found to be homogenous,  $F(2, 278) = 2.96, p = .054$ . As these assumptions for parametric testing were met, a one-way ANOVA was carried out and a statistically significant difference was found between groups,  $F(2, 278) = 36.86, p < .001$ . Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated that volunteers reported significantly higher ATS-21 scores than students ( $p < .001$ ) and the public ( $p < .001$ ), and that the public's scores were higher than students' ( $p = .024$ ).

**Table 5**

*Mean Scores of the Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS-21) Across Groups*

Group	Total		Factor 1: Trust		Factor 2: Intent		Factor 3: Social Distance	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Volunteers	55.9	8.0	15.3	3.6	22.0	2.5	18.6	3.2
Students	37.5	10.5	8.1	4.1	16.7	3.9	12.8	3.9
Public	41.2	12.0	9.2	4.9	18.0	4.8	14.0	4.1

The reliability of the shortened scale was then considered. Internal consistency for the overall scale was found to be high in the present sample ( $\alpha = .91$ ). This was also the case for each of the three factors: trust ( $\alpha = .82$ ), intent ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and social distance ( $\alpha = .77$ ). It is of note that these alpha values are similar to those originally reported by Hogue and Harper (2019).

A confirmatory factor analysis on Harper and Hogue's (2019) three-factor model was also conducted using the Lavaan package (Version 0.6-6; Rosseel, 2012) in R (Version 3.6.0). This analysis showed some support for the three-factor structure (comparative fit index = 0.89), although this is just short of the value of 0.90 which Kline (2005) has recommended as a cut-off for goodness of fit. However, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was calculated to be 0.067, which is just below the critical value of 0.070 suggested by Steiger (2007), providing support for this structure. Factor loadings are presented within Table 6. Notably, all items loaded significantly onto their expected factor. A diagram of this model is presented within Appendix J.

**Table 6**

*Unstandardised and Standardised Item Loadings for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Short Form of the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS-21)*

Latent Factor	ATS-21 Item Number	Coefficient	SE	z	Standardised Coefficient
Trust	1	1.00			.389
	4	1.29	.216	5.99	.641
	10	1.70	.272	6.25	.738
	13	1.52	.259	5.90	.614
	15	1.87	.309	6.05	.662
	18	1.62	.273	5.93	.624
	19	1.83	.294	6.24	.732
Intent	6	1.00			.590
	8	1.21	.139	8.70	.663
	12	1.38	.153	9.05	.704
	14	0.55	.094	5.82	.399
	16	1.23	.134	9.17	.717
	17	1.12	.125	8.96	.693
	20	0.88	.111	7.90	.581
Social Distance	2	1.00			.479
	3	0.85	.127	6.69	.554
	5	1.24	.175	7.06	.612
	7	1.09	.164	6.65	.549
	9	1.15	.167	6.87	.581
	11	1.37	.186	7.35	.663
	21	1.11	.170	6.66	.550

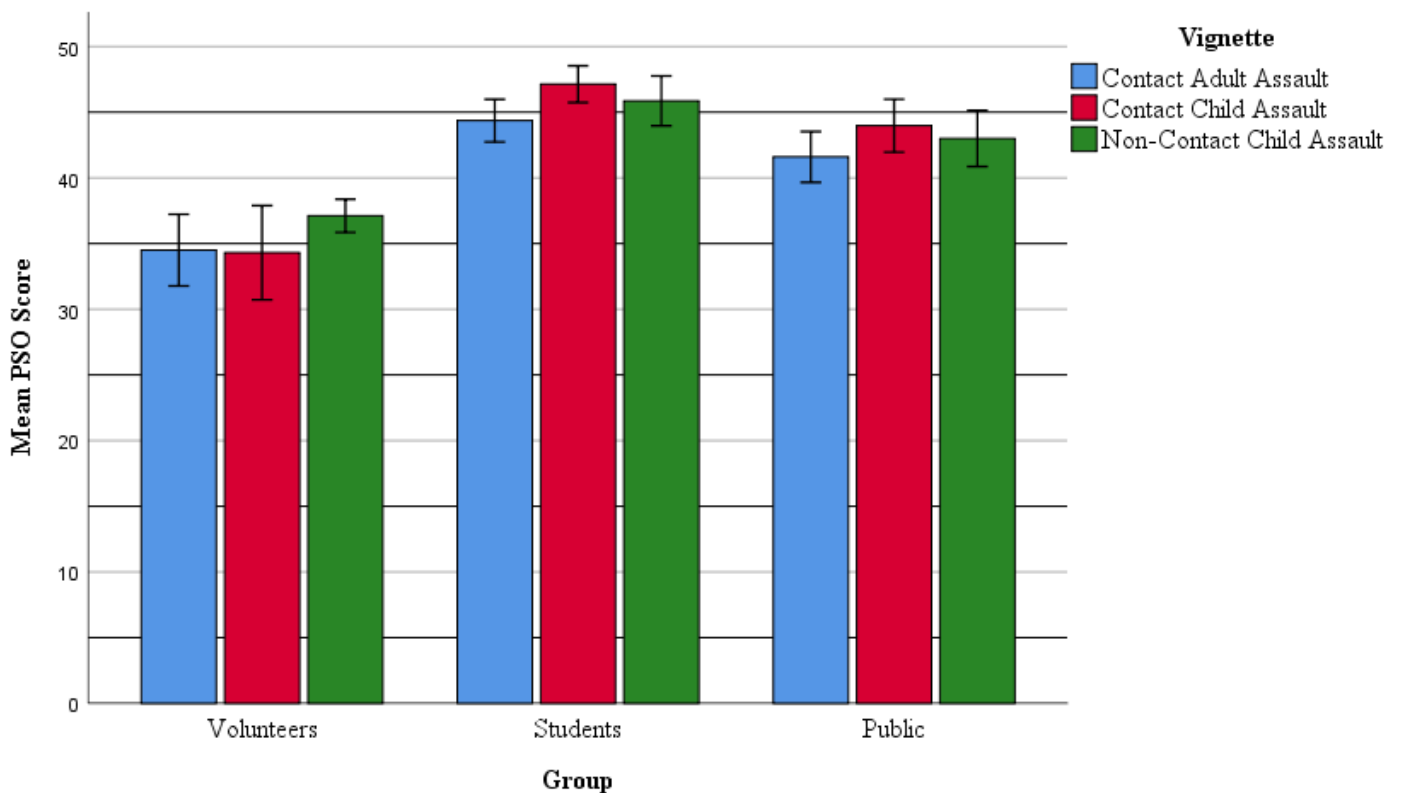
*Note.* The first item of each factor was fixed with a factor loading of 1.00 to in order to scale latent factors. All other loadings are significant at  $p < .001$ .

### The Perceptions of Sex Offenders Scale

Mean PSO scores for each condition are presented within Figure 3. Initially, the assumptions for a traditional two-way ANOVA were considered. However, Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that PSO data were not normally distributed within two of the nine conditions. The first of these was members of the public who had been exposed to a vignette depicting adult sexual assault,  $W(42) = 0.92, p = .006$ . The second was members of the public exposed to the vignette of contact sexual assault committed against a child,  $W(39) = 0.94, p = .046$ . A Levene's test indicated that variances were not homogenous,  $F(8, 268) = 1.98, p = .049$ . As both of these assumptions were violated, it was not deemed appropriate to conduct a two-way ANOVA on this data.

**Figure 3**

*Mean Perceptions of Sex Offenders Scores Across Groups Following Vignette Exposure*



*Note.* Error bars show standard errors.

Instead, two Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted due to the robustness of this test and its applicability to this data type. To adjust for conducting two statistical tests in place of one, an alpha value of .025 was adopted prior to running each analysis. There was no significant effect of vignette exposure on PSO score,  $H(2) = 3.39, p = .184$ . However, PSO score was significantly affected by group,  $H(2) = 23.33, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons were conducted with adjusted  $p$ -values which showed that these differences existed between all three groups. Volunteers ( $Mdn = 36.0$ ) had significantly lower PSO scores than both students ( $Mdn = 45.5, p < .001$ ) and the public ( $Mdn = 40.5, p = .010$ ). The public's PSO scores were significantly lower than students' ( $p = .022$ ).

In order to consider any interaction effects between these independent variables, PSO scores were transformed using a log transformation. This allowed a two-way ANOVA to be conducted on the transformed data. A significant main effect of group was found on transformed PSO scores,  $F(2, 268) = 10.26, p < .001$ . Tukey post hoc tests demonstrated that PSO scores differed significantly between volunteers and students ( $p < .001$ ), and between volunteers and the public ( $p = .007$ ), however not between students and the public ( $p = .056$ ). There was no significant main effect of vignette,  $F(2, 268) = 0.43, p = .651$ , nor a significant interaction effect,  $F(4, 268) = 0.42, p = .798$ .

The impact of gender on overall PSO scores was considered. Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality indicated that this data was normally distributed for both male,  $W(84) = 0.99, p = .434$ , and female participants,  $W(189) = 0.99, p = .073$ . Both groups were also found to have homogeneity of variances,  $F(1, 271) = 0.22, p = .637$ , and so an independent t-test was undertaken. No significant difference in PSO score was found between men ( $M = 42.3, SD = 12.2$ ) and women ( $M = 44.0, SD = 11.8$ ),  $t(271) = -1.08, p = .280$ .

Although PSO scores were normally distributed within the group of younger adults,  $W(144) = 0.99, p = .618$ , this was not the case within the older adult group,  $W(132) = 0.97, p = .009$ . However, variances were homogenous,  $F(1, 274) = 0.02, p = .901$ . A Mann-Whitney test was therefore conducted in order to compare groups. PSO scores were significantly higher in younger adults ( $Mdn = 45.0$ ) than in older adults ( $Mdn = 40.0$ ),  $U = 7104.00, z = -3.63, p < .001$ .

The effect of experiencing sexual assault on PSO scores was then considered. Scores were normally distributed for those who had,  $W(88) = 0.97, p = .057$ , and had not previously been the victim of a sexual assault,  $W(178) = 0.99, p = .370$ , and variances were equal,  $F(1, 264) = 0.00, p = .964$ . PSO scores were not found to differ significantly between those with this experience ( $M = 44.4, SD = 12.4$ ) and those without ( $M = 43.2, SD = 11.5$ ),  $t(264) = 0.75, p = .455$ .

Finally, an ANCOVA was carried to consider the influence of attitudes on PSO scores, in order to better understand the effect of ATS scores on the present findings. No statistically significant interaction between group and vignette on PSO scores was found whilst controlling for ATS scores,  $F(4, 267) = 0.70, p = .591, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .010$ .

## **Motivations**

The scope of participants' qualitative responses varied greatly, from three to 19 lines of text. Four overarching themes were identified from the accounts provided by volunteers regarding the factors which had originally motivated them to become involved with CoSA. These themes predominantly relate to the four main motivations which were reported by participants within this group.

### *Individual Development*

Many volunteers expressed motivations with regards to their own individual development, whether this was described at a personal or a professional level.

A number of participants noted that they were motivated to volunteer in order to gain work experience relevant to their career: “Partly due to self serving reasons as I have aspirations to study investigative psychology and I thought this would be a great chance to gain valuable experience whilst simultaneously desensitising myself to serious crime” (Participant 28). Volunteering with CoSA presented an opportunity for volunteers to be able to work with this client group, and for some, this was seen as a stepping stone towards being able to pursue a particular career path or postgraduate programme of study.

Other statements endorsing this theme consisted of factors which related to personal development, such as looking for a challenge, or finding a more meaningful way to spend their time: “Try something new, challenge myself...step out of my comfort zone, develop skills” (Participant 10). Participant 13 also highlighted, “I wanted to address my own implicit biases as well, and Circles is definitely helping with that”. Responses indicated that for many participants, CoSA presented a unique voluntary opportunity which was unlike many others in the way that it helped them to grow.

Finally, a number of responses made reference to a desire to better develop their own understanding of offending behaviour and of the rehabilitation of ICSOs which they felt could be fulfilled through volunteering with CoSA. Participant 26 reported “an interest in trying to understand the motivations and drivers that result in individuals committing crimes of a sexual nature”. This concept was also reflected by Participant 21



who described being motivated by “a lifelong interest in human nature”. Volunteering was therefore expected to provide an opportunity to gain some understanding about the pathways of these behaviours.

### *Societal Responses*

Many volunteers expressed that they did not agree with the response which is generally presented towards ICSOs at a societal level: “society responds to sex offenders in an illogical hysterical way” (Participant 6). “I also feel that society has a ‘lock them up and throw away the key’ mentality when it comes to sex offenders, and this is a view I strongly disagree with” (Participant 27). Participants felt that society typically takes a punitive and exclusionary approach towards ICSOs, which contrasts with the restorative and rehabilitative stance which is offered within CoSA.

Majority of people have an opinion on the punishments that they believe should be given to a sex offender which is absolutely fine however nobody is prepared to do anything about it. I believe in order to save future victims from sex offences we need to help the root of the problem. If you had a burst pipe in your kitchen you wouldn't just keep mopping up the water and hope it fixes itself you'd fix the pipe. (Participant 24)

There was a shared perception across participants that rather than further punishing or shunning ICSOs, volunteering with CoSA would provide an opportunity to genuinely address the root causes of such offending behaviour.

Participants also discussed the importance of the local community to them, and described how they expected that volunteering would allow them to help and support this. They reported being motivated to “give back to society” (Participant 28), and the

importance of “safeguarding the community” (Participant 9). Participant 2 reported, “I believe in voluntary community action and involvement in the fabric of the community” and pointed out that “sex offenders are a part of the community”.

This desire to protect the community was also supported by many by a desire to reduce reoffending and to prevent future harm, which was reported by a large proportion of participants: “I also found motivation in the fact that rehabilitation for sex offenders is a way to decrease reoffending rates and save the lives of further potential victims” (Participant 28). Three participants even made an explicit reference to CoSA’s primary objective: “no more victims” (Participant 4, Participant 6, and Participant 22).

### ***Individual Experiences***

A number of volunteers also explicitly gave examples of their past experiences which had influenced their decision to engage with CoSA. Due to the occurrence of these events, participants reported feeling that they had some kind of desire, or occasionally a sense of duty, to volunteer with CoSA when this opportunity arose.

For some volunteers, these experiences were predominantly professional: “I feel I should, as I have experience and understanding from my precious career” (Participant 5). Two participants discussed specific job roles which they had held within the criminal justice system, where they had come into contact with a high number of ICSO and as such felt prepared to take on the voluntary role. For others, these experiences were far more personal: “Family members (now dead) have committed sexual offences. Volunteering is an opportunity to put personal experience to constructive use” (Participant 3). Participant 22 reported, “I became motivated to become involved with

Circles because I have been a victim of sexual assault and I believe that there should be no more victims.”

Two volunteers also recalled specific experiences of discovering CoSA, and how this in itself had been a motivating factor: “how I found Circles was via a documentary on Radio 4 and it resonated with me” (Participant 23). Similarly, Participant 21 recalled becoming motivated to volunteer due to “hearing Circles advocated with passion”.

### ***CM Benefits***

Finally, many volunteers reported a wide range of anticipated benefits for the CM at an individual level which motivated their application to the CoSA programme. One example of this was the concept of reintegration: “help reintroduce themselves back into society after spending time in prison” (Participant 20). There was an understanding of the potential effect this might have on a CM: “to eradicate social exclusion” (Participant 17).

Another example of such altruistic motivations was being able “to help and provide support to an ex-offender upon release from prison, to develop hope within that person” (Participant 20) and the opportunity to “turn a life around” (Participant 3).

CoSA volunteers anticipated encouraging some level of behavioural change in the CM, and discussed how the support aspect of the CoSA might help to accomplish this:

I realised that Sex Offenders could change their behaviour if they truly wanted to and had the correct support. I strongly believe that no one on the planet would choose to be a SO if they indeed had the choice. (Participant 16)

Participant 26, however, emphasised the important role that accountability played in facilitating such a behavioural change: “an additional factor was the wish to play a part [...] and hold them responsible for managing or changing their behaviour”. Both of these aspects were cited by Participant 23 as a motivating factor: “the idea of supporting people who were willing to change, not forget but move on from their offending [...] felt like something I wanted to be apart of”.

For some volunteers, this theme appeared to be grounded in the belief that “everyone deserves a chance” (Participant 4). Volunteers felt as though by engaging in CoSA, they could provide this chance to CMs which others might not. Participant 21 described feeling motivated by “a firm belief that no one is beyond redemption”.

### **Impact of Motivations on Attitudes and Perceptions**

First, the effect of each motivation on reported attitudes was explored using independent t-tests. Being motivated by one’s own individual development did not significantly impact ATS scores,  $t(31) = 1.78, p = .085$ . There was no impact on ATS scores of motivations relating to societal responses,  $t(31) = 0.43, p = .671$ , nor of motivations encapsulating individual experiences,  $t(31) = -0.50, p = .618$ . Furthermore, reporting motivations reflecting CM benefits did not significantly impact ATS scores,  $t(31) = -1.36, p = .183$ .

Finally, in order to determine the impact of these motivations on volunteers’ perceptions, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. This considered whether PSO scores could be predicted from the endorsed motivations and vignette exposure. These variables did not significantly predict PSO scores,  $F(5, 23) = 0.37, p = .867, R^2 = .074$ . None of the variables added statistically significantly to the prediction.

## Discussion

The present study set out to answer three main research questions. Firstly, CoSA volunteers' attitudes towards ICSOs were found to be significantly more positive than that of both students and of members of the general public. Moreover, the public also reported significantly more favourable attitudes than undergraduate students. Secondly, volunteers held less punitive perceptions of ICSOs than the two other groups, regardless of which vignette they had been exposed to. The public also reported significantly less harsh perceptions than students. The type of offence depicted in each vignette had little impact on these perceptions. Thirdly, volunteers discussed a number of motivating factors which encouraged them to initially choose to join a CoSA. These predominantly consisted of a desire for personal or professional development, concerns with society's current response towards ICSOs, volunteers' own previous lived experiences, and anticipated benefits for the CM at an individual level.

Gender had no significant effect on participants' attitudes towards ICSOs overall, nor on their perceptions. Although some gender differences have previously been found in attitudes towards ICSOs, the direction of this effect has generally been inconsistent (Harper et al., 2017). Additionally, having previously experienced some form of sexual assault did not have a significant impact on either measure.

In the present study, older participants reported significantly more favourable attitudes and less harsh perceptions than the younger half of the sample. These findings support those of both Craig (2005) and Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) who each found that older participants tended to report more positive attitudes towards ICSOs.

Vignette exposure was not found to have any statistically significant effect on perceptions. Research has previously found an effect of vignette exposure when different ICSO demographic characteristics are presented but the nature of the offence remains the same (Harper & Bartels, 2017). In the present study, however, the demographic description of the ICSO remained the same whereas the type of offence was changed between vignettes. This suggests that while public perceptions regarding ICSOs might be influenced by the characteristics of the individual in mind, the effect of the subtype of sexual offence committed is not necessarily as influential in this process.

The pattern of results was similar across both attitudinal measures, suggesting that the shorter ATS-21 scale is indeed measuring a similar construct to the original ATS. A confirmatory factor analysis of the shorter measure also found evidence to support the three-factor model proposed by Hogue and Harper (2019). Finally, the ATS-21 was found to have high levels of internal consistency, both as a unidimensional scale and when each of its three factors were considered separately.

Some of the motivating factors reported by volunteers were noted to be similar in nature to those identified within Lowe et al.'s (2019) study of New Zealand CoSA volunteers. Both studies identified themes relating to a criticism of the current societal response to ICSOs, as well as an altruistic approach to supporting the CM as an individual. Within the present study, participants also reported motivations relating to their desire for pursuing personal or professional development through volunteering. The addition of this more self-interested aspect may be in part due to the anonymity of participation owing to internet-based data collection. However, unlike Lowe et al. (2019), the present study did not identify any explicitly faith-based motivations. It is unclear whether this reflects any true differences in volunteer motivation between the

samples, or whether this was perhaps a result of the differing methodologies used across the two studies. For example, had it been possible to ask follow-up questions within the present study, perhaps such faith-based motivations would also have emerged within this sample.

Themes regarding volunteers' motivations were also considered in relation to Clary and Snyder's (1999) six functions of volunteering. Participants within the present study reported both some form of psychological enhancement and gaining career-related experience as motivating factors for engaging with CoSA. A number of the volunteers also expressed how their values compared to other prevalent values in society. A few made reference to developing their understanding of offending behaviours, although this was not as common. However, participants made little reference to the social aspect of volunteering, nor of any protective function that they expected this would serve. It is possible that these anticipated functions are simply less prevalent in particularly challenging and unique voluntary roles, such as CoSA.

### **Implications for Practice**

Volunteers held more positive attitudes towards ICSOs than individuals in other groups. The fact that ATS scores correlated with the number of CoSA a volunteer had been involved in suggests that their attitudes towards ICSOs may have become more positive as they met and worked with more CMs. These findings reflect early ATS findings, where professionals who were more involved with the treatment of ICSOs also reported higher ATS scores (Hogue, 1993). In fact, the ATS scores reported by CoSA volunteers within the present study ( $M = 93.6$ ) fell between those reported by probation and psychology workers ( $M = 90.7$ ), and by ICSOs themselves ( $M = 99.1$ ) within

Hogue's original study. This phenomenon could be put to good use by other programmes who would be willing to involve volunteers from the local community. By becoming involved in interventions or support groups for example, it is possible that these volunteers' attitudes towards ICSOs could also become more positive which could in turn lead such members of the local community to be more supportive of reintegration processes.

The present study also identified that students generally held more negative attitudes and reported more punitive perceptions regarding ICSOs than the wider public. This would be appropriate to bear in mind when targeting recruitment for such voluntary initiatives. For example, advertisements might be more appropriately placed in public spaces, such as libraries, as opposed to university buildings in order to attract individuals who may express more favourable attitudes towards ICSOs, and are perhaps therefore more likely to choose to pursue the role.

The attitudes and perceptions held regarding ICSOs can influence the development of official policy regarding sentencing and licence conditions in addition to the societal and community responses towards these individuals. A better understanding of these can therefore help in having a more positive impact on outcomes for ICSOs reintegrating into the community. Purvis (2010) highlighted that community and relatedness are two classes of primary goods within the Good Lives Model (Ward, 2002). This suggests that an increase in positive public attitudes towards ICSOs might therefore allow these individuals to better meet these goods in a more prosocial way, should they support reintegration, potentially reducing the likelihood of reoffending.



The present study also identified a wide range of factors which motivated volunteers to join CoSA. It could be beneficial for CoSA providers to also explore these individual motivations with potential volunteers in order to more appropriately match volunteers with a CM. For example, providers could produce a motivation checklist in order to screen volunteers and better understand where these motivating factors lie. There would also be some value in ‘checking in’ with these motivations from time to time with a view to reducing the rates of drop-out, particularly at time points where these have been directly challenged. For example, if a volunteer’s primary motivation is to prevent reoffending and to safeguard their local community, they might be particularly at risk of dropping out of the programme if the CM with whom they were working was to engage in any form of offending behaviour. However, another volunteer who was initially motivated by trying something new and stepping out of their comfort zone might be more likely to consider leaving the programme during their second or third CoSA when this enthusiasm diminishes. Furthermore, individuals who are driven by a motivation to volunteer more generally as opposed to being motivated to volunteer with this specific population might well produce low scores on the ATS, find the volunteering role particularly stressful, and therefore be more likely to drop out of the programme.

Understanding more common motivations for engagement might also aid CoSA projects in being able to attract additional volunteers by appealing to these concepts. Volunteer recruitment is a particularly challenging aspect of the continuation of the programme (van Rensburg, 2012). Having a better understanding of individual and group motivations might therefore be useful in both volunteer recruitment and retention. It is probable that other members of the community, for example, also share concerns

about the way in which society typically responds to ICSOs. Appealing to this belief and presenting CoSA as a contrasting approach to this within recruitment drives might therefore stimulate further interest in the programme. Furthermore, some participants recalled becoming interested in CoSA when they heard positive things about it from peers or within the media. Where possible, volunteers or CMs could potentially be involved in advocating the programme to a wide audience in order to boost recruitment, rather than CoSA co-ordinators relying on flyers, posters, or written adverts.

### **Limitations of the Research**

In the present study, snowball sampling techniques were used in order to recruit student and public participants on social media websites, some of whom are therefore likely to know the researcher either proximally or distally. As such, this sample was found to be not representative of the wider population. For example, 85.2% of the public sample in the study had undertaken some form of university education, in comparison to 42% of the United Kingdom's working age population (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Furthermore, participants may have been more likely to hold and report more positive views purely by virtue of this relationship. Moreover, women were overrepresented across all three groups. Care should therefore be taken when drawing any conclusions from this sample regarding the wider population. Furthermore, the volunteer sample size was particularly small, and as such it was challenging to make additional comparisons across groups.

Research has shown that third year undergraduate students are generally more tolerant and psychologically minded than first year students, although both have previously reported similar attitudes towards ICSOs (Valliant et al., 1994). However,

the present study has considered undergraduate students to be one homogenous group, despite being at different stages of study, of different ages, and undertaking different courses. Had additional demographic data been gathered regarding year of study, for example, further analyses could have been completed in order to assess whether these additional demographic factors had any impact on students' attitudes and perceptions towards ICSOs. Although participants within the student group did not provide information regarding their course subject, the research study was advertised across a number of social media pages relating to psychology, and so the sample may well comprise a large proportion of psychology students. However, Harper (2012) has previously found no significant differences in ATS scores between students on psychology courses and those on non-psychology courses. It is therefore unlikely that the attitudes of a student sample comprised of predominantly psychology students in the present study would be unrepresentative of those undertaking non-psychology courses.

It is also important to recognise that despite the positive correlation between attitudes towards ICSOs and the number of CoSA which a volunteer had participated in, it does not automatically follow that volunteers' attitudes would have necessarily been at the same level as the public group prior to engaging with CoSA. It might be that individuals who already hold more positive baseline attitudes towards ICSOs are more likely than others to engage in a programme such as CoSA, during which these favourable attitudes then develop further.

Furthermore, the type of vignette which participants were exposed to was not found to have any impact on perceptions of ICSOs. The vignettes used within the present study were relatively short in nature in order to facilitate engagement and study completion. However, it is possible that because of their length, they did not hold

enough power to bring about any differences in participants' perceptions towards ICISOs. Had the vignettes contained more detail to further differentiate these situations and offence types, such as a comparison between a violent rape scenario compared to an exposure scenario, it is possible that this could have brought about some observable change in perceptions.

Finally, Thematic Analysis regarding motivations was carried out on written responses provided by volunteers. It was therefore not possible to ask follow-up questions on any statements which were brief or unclear, as would be the case in a verbal interview. The researcher was therefore cautious to appropriately code any statements which could be interpreted in more than one way. Furthermore, some of the responses contained what were presumed to be typographical errors. However, these were not modified by the researcher so as not to affect the intended meaning of the statement. This written approach also somewhat limited the depth of the qualitative data which was provided by participants. Some potential codes or themes might therefore not have been presented within the data despite being a motivational factor in reality, such as those which were not as immediately obvious to volunteers. Respondents may have chosen to provide only their most influential motivating factors, as opposed to all of these. It is important to recognise that the researcher's own beliefs and experiences are also likely to have shaped the way in which this data was interpreted and analysed. Another researcher presented with the same data might have reached different conclusions about these findings.

## **Directions for Future Research**

Although volunteers demonstrated more positive attitudes towards ICSOs than both other groups, it was impossible to tell from this dataset how their attitudes may have compared prior to their initial engagement with CoSA. Should these attitudes be measured at the point of application before even undergoing initial training, it would be possible to explore this further. If those individuals do hold more favourable attitudes even at this time point, it could be useful to understand which factors, whether demographic or situational, feed into this. This information could then be helpful at a wider community level in order to better understand how ICSOs might be supported to reintegrate, particularly in those regions where a CoSA is not available to support them.

An effect of age on attitudes towards ICSOs was identified, with older participants presenting with more favourable attitudes. However, the sample was split at the median age of 23, and so the older group had a particularly varied age range. Future research might collect such data across a larger number of more evenly spread age categories in an attempt to better understand where this difference is particularly marked. Qualitative methods could also be employed in order to explore why this might be the case.

## **Reflections on Research**

In order to maximise the potential participant pool of CoSA volunteers, it was decided that qualitative data within the present study would be collected via written accounts. However, throughout the initial process of coding, it became apparent that some aspects which would have been present within spoken word were 'lost' through making this decision. At times, it was challenging to uncover less overt meanings which

might otherwise be conveyed through aspects such as tone of voice and pauses. It was also considered that participants had more direct control over self-censoring their responses, as they could choose to delete things which they had written before submitting their account, unlike a verbal account which could not be unspoken once provided.

It is recognised that the present themes are reliant on the researcher's interpretation of the accounts provided. These are underpinned by the researcher's own epistemological stance of post-positivism. It is worth considering that had themes been co-produced or co-revised with participants, this could have further bolstered the legitimacy of these outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

The present study explored how attitudes and perceptions towards ICSOs vary between CoSA volunteers, students, and members of the public. Volunteers' more favourable attitudes and less punitive perceptions towards ICSOs are likely to contribute to some of the success of CoSA, and a more extensive understanding of these could help in both the delivery of CoSA and the reintegration of ICSOs at a wider level. Volunteers reported four broad areas which initially motivated them to become involved with CoSA. These were defined as individual development, societal responses, individual experiences, and CM benefits. These are likely to have relevant implications in the development of future individual CoSA, and CoSA programmes more widely.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

There is no doubt that the impact of sexual offending is prolific and profound. Around two thirds of sexual assault victims within England and Wales have suffered with emotional, psychological difficulties and/or mental health problems as a result of their experiences, and a tenth have reported attempting suicide (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Survivors of sexual assault can also experience re-traumatisation through the process of seeking to access medical or legal support (Campbell, 2008). However, effective management of and interventions for ICSOs can and do lead to a reduction in sexual recidivism (Gannon et al., 2019). While there are several interventions which address sexual offending behaviour, one such network is a community-based support programme which facilitates desistance and supports reintegration. Engagement in CoSA has been associated with lower rates of recidivism and reconviction (Clarke et al., 2017; Duwe, 2018).

The present thesis therefore set out to better understand this form of community-based supportive intervention by considering the experiences of those who comprise the inner circle: CMs and volunteers. This was approached by exploring the literature regarding the way in which CMs experienced their CoSA, and by measuring the attitudes held by those who were volunteering within the programme. The validity and reliability of attitudinal scales regarding ICSOs were also considered in order to determine the accuracy of such measurements. The perceptions and attitudes held by CoSA volunteers, students, and members of the public were considered in order to understand whether group membership or demographic factors influenced these.

Additionally, motivational factors for volunteering were explored with a view to improving recruitment and retention rates of future CoSA as well as other community programmes which may elect to take a similar approach. Considering the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of those within the inner circle is integral in understanding how the subsequent behaviours exhibited by those within the CoSA programme.

### **Summary of Findings**

In order to consider what does and does not work for CMs within the CoSA programme, a systematic literature review of their experiences was conducted and presented within Chapter 2. This synthesised the findings of 10 studies which had utilised qualitative methodologies. A number of positive themes were reported, including being able to manage one's own risk factors and experiencing their CoSA as an environment which was free from stigma. CMs also expressed particular changes that they would like to see, such as longer programme lengths and more consistent attendance by volunteers. This review adds breadth to CoSA literature base which has predominantly focused on more quantitative approaches. Clarke et al.'s (2017) review of the programme suggested that CoSA appear to be effective in reducing recidivism and typically show benefits in terms of cost-benefit analyses. The present review has identified factors which appear to support these successes, such as through CMs receiving support, learning to appropriately manage stigma, and remaining accountable for their actions. Those desired changes reported by CMs demonstrate progress yet to be made within the project, which could in part explain those CoSA with less successful outcomes. These findings can assist more widely in understanding the challenges faced by ICSOs at the point of release from prison and during their CoSA, and what helps in managing these.



A critique of the Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders scale (ATS; Hogue, 1993) was presented within Chapter 3 in order to better understand the applicability of this measure to both research and practice. The scale uses interval level data which allows direct comparisons to be drawn between different individuals or groups. Its internal reliability has consistently been calculated to be high, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from between 0.81 (Kleban & Jeclig, 2012) to 0.96 (Higgins & Ireland, 2009). Many studies have also found promising levels of test-retest reliability, although these have typically been identified within modified versions of the ATS, such as the short form ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2019), or when respondents have been specifically instructed to consider only particular ICSOs, such as those with a learning disability (Walker, 2011). There is some evidence to support the scale's criterion and construct validity, although further consideration of its content validity could be beneficial. Some limitations were discussed with regards to how the scale has been used within research, such as concerns regarding improper scoring techniques. Alternative or additional measures for assessing attitudes towards ICSOs were also discussed within this chapter, including the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) and the ATS-21.

Chapter 4 presented a research study which focused on CoSA volunteers, their motivations, and how their attitudes and perceptions compared against those of undergraduate students and members of the public. Volunteers reported significantly more favourable attitudes towards ICSOs than both students and the general public, and ATS scores were found to correlate with the number of CoSA which a volunteer had engaged in. This supports the theory that more positive attitudes towards this group are found within individuals who have personal experience of their treatment and intervention, which is a relevant factor to consider in aiding community reintegration.

This is a similar pattern of results to those reported by Hogue (1993) where prison staff more involved in an ICSO's treatment and management typically reported more positive attitudes towards this group.

However, students were found to report more negative attitudes than members of the public did. This pattern differs from previous research which have found student groups to report more favourable attitudes than the public, including that of Gakhal and Brown (2011) and Higgins and Ireland (2009). It is not immediately clear why this pattern of results was found within the present research. However, it is possible that the nature of this public sample is notably different to those within other studies, given that many had a high level of educational attainment and were known to the researcher. Had this public sample been more representative of the general public in terms of factors such as age, education level, and occupation, less favourable attitudes may have been collected.

Older participants reported more favourable attitudes in the present study. This finding is similar to that of Kjelsberg and Loos (2008) who found that ATS scores correlated positively with age in a sample of prison staff. However, the effect of age on attitudes towards ICSOs is unclear at present, with different studies reaching conflicting results on the matter (Harper et al., 2017). No impact of gender was found on attitudes towards ICSOs. This is indicative of the wider state of the literature, with no clear effect of gender on attitudes having been identified as inconsistent gender differences are reported throughout studies (Harper et al., 2017). Additionally, there was no impact of previous sexual victimisation on attitudes or perceptions. This finding is similar to that of Sahlstrom and Jeglic (2008), where previous victimisation was not found to impact on attitudes regarding juvenile ICSOs. It appears that other factors, over and above

these demographic factors, must therefore play a role in influencing these attitudes. Two such factors appear to be one's agreeableness and openness to experience, which Olver and Barlow (2010) identified as being predictive of more rehabilitative stances. Future research considering individual experiences and personality traits might therefore be able to uncover additional factors explaining the variability in such attitudes.

Being exposed to vignettes depicting different types of sexual offences did not significantly influence perceptions regarding ICSOs. The impact of factors, such as the length and content of the vignettes used within the present study, have been considered within Chapter 4. Previous vignette research has found that perceptions towards ICSOs are more punitive when either the ICSO or victim is described as being male, and when the victim is described as being a child (Socia et al., 2019). However, further research is required to consider if additional variations in the offence subtype significantly impacts perceptions.

Four main themes regarding motivations for deciding to volunteer within CoSA were identified: participants' own personal and professional experiences, a perception of society's typical response towards ICSOs, anticipated personal development, and potential benefits for the CM individually. These motivating factors were similar in part to those which emerged from a study of CoSA volunteers based in New Zealand (Lowe et al., 2019). Participants in both studies raised concerns about the way in which society generally responds to ICSOs, and discussed a desire to address this. Furthermore, being motivated by the potential benefits to the CM at an individual level was also apparent in both studies. However, the present research also highlighted the impact of one's previous experiences as well as anticipated personal benefits, such as gaining career experience, as driving factors for volunteering.

Additional support for the ATS-21, in terms of the scale's reliability and factor structure, was also identified. The ATS-21 therefore does appear to be an appropriate tool for assessing an individual's attitudes towards ICSOs, and can be completed more quickly than the original ATS. This empirical study has particular implications for volunteer recruitment and retention within CoSA, as well as for other local projects who may also be seeking to involve members of their community.

This thesis has therefore represented the experiences of both CMs and of volunteers, both of which are useful in considering what makes an effective CoSA. For example, CMs who feel that they are receiving an appropriate amount of practical and emotional support, and are able to appropriately manage the stigma of the sex offender label with the support of their CoSA, may be in a good position for reintegration, particularly if they are supported by volunteers who have relatively positive attitudes towards ICSOs and are motivated primarily by altruistic factors. However, those CMs who experience dysfunction within their CoSA, struggle to develop prosocial relationships outside of their CoSA, and are somewhat distrustful of the programme might be particularly at risk of unsuccessful outcomes including dropouts and recidivism, especially if they are matched with volunteers who have overly positive or negative attitudes towards ICSOs, or those who are driven to volunteer by more self-serving factors, such as gaining relevant career experience.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The thematic analysis presented within Chapter 4 provided some insight into the factors which might draw other residents within the community towards a voluntary role within CoSA. Should this be a particular area of interest for researchers, it might be

appropriate to conduct a further empirical study where each of these motivations are included as aspects within recruitment advertisements in order to determine whether highlighting any of these would increase uptake in a hypothetical scenario.

Conducting quantitative analyses within the empirical project of Chapter 4 proved challenging due to the comparatively small sample size of CoSA volunteers. Future studies planning on utilising a quantitative approach to research this group might benefit from taking a more unified national, or even international approach, to data collection in order to bolster findings. However, it is also of note that CoSA projects do operate at a regional level, and as such differences are likely to exist in the delivery and management of these. By conflating all of these volunteers into one homogenous group of volunteers, some of the variety which exists across different regions might be lost.

Additionally, the use of a longitudinal research design might be appropriate in order to map the progress of any changes in volunteers' attitudes. Understanding which aspects of the programme, if any, influence the development of volunteers' attitudes towards ICSOs could be useful on a wider scale in order to determine how local communities might be supported to become more receptive to the prospect of ICSOs reintegrating within their area.

Finally, it is important to recognise that CoSA have only been operating within the UK for less than 20 years. Collecting longitudinal data regarding not only volunteer attitudes but also CM experiences and recidivism rates will therefore need to be an ongoing process in order to ultimately determine more well-established outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis sought to explore the experiences of those involved with CoSA, and did so through conducting both a systematic literature review regarding CMs' experiences and an empirical study regarding volunteers' attitudes and motivations. Volunteers were found to hold particularly favourable views towards ICSOs, as measured with the ATS scale which was identified to be a reliable and relatively well-validated tool. CoSA volunteers also reported less harsh perceptions of ICSOs than both undergraduate students and members of the public did. Utilising these findings in order to attract additional volunteers to the CoSA programme will be important in allowing CoSA to grow and prosper both within the United Kingdom and beyond.

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## Appendix A

### Search Syntax Used Within the Electronic Search and Number of Results

EMBASE (1974 to 2020):

- |                                     |                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. (circle* of support or CoS*).af. | 1,443,359 results |
| 2. sex* offen*.af.                  | 4,403 results     |
| 3. 1 and 2                          | 91 results        |

APA PsycInfo (1967 to 2020):

- |                                     |                 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. (circle* of support or CoS*).af. | 448,215 results |
| 2. sex* offen*.af.                  | 26,454 results  |
| 3. 1 and 2                          | 3,693 results   |

Web of Science (all databases; 1900 to 2020):

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. TOPIC: (circle* of support) OR TOPIC: (CoS*) | 5,963,755 results |
| 2. TOPIC: (sex* offen*)                         | 22,528 results    |
| 3. #1 and #2                                    | 463 results       |

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (1743 to 2020)

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. noft(circle* of support) OR noft(CoS*) | 273,669 results |
| 2. noft(sex* offen*)                      | 3,820 results   |
| 3. 1 and 2                                | 102 results     |

## Appendix B

### Inclusion/Exclusion Form

Article Reference:				
Inclusion Criteria	Criteria Met	Criteria Not Met	Unclear	Comments
Participants have been convicted of committing a sexual offence				
Participants are currently, soon to be, or have previously been engaged in Circles of Support and Accountability				
Original data has been collected and reported				
Qualitative methodology used				
Qualitative methodology has been used with the Core Member*				

Articles clearly meeting the above criteria to be included within the review.

\*This criterion was adapted at a later stage

## Appendix C

### Adaptation of the CASP Qualitative Checklist

<b>Article Reference:</b>		
<b>Section A: Are the results of the study valid?</b>		
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:



<b>Section B: What are the results?</b>		
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
<b>Section C: Will the results help locally?</b>		
10. Is the research valuable?	Yes (2) Unclear (1) No (0)	Comments:
<b>Total Score:</b>	<b>/20</b>	
<b>Quality score:</b>	<b>%</b>	

## Appendix D

### Data Extraction Form

Article Reference:	
Location	
Overall aims	
Sample size	
Participant demographics	
Participant recruitment	
Period of data collection	
Obtainment of ethical approval and consent	
Method of data collection	
Method of analysis	
Themes identified	
Conclusions	
Are the findings substantiated by the data?	
Strengths of the study	
Limitations of the study	
Implications for policy, practice, and theory	

What is the role of the researcher? Are there any conflicts of interest?	
Are the researcher's own position and biases outlined?	
Further comments	

## Appendix E

### Volunteer Recruitment Letter

To whom it may concern,

I am currently undertaking a research project as part of the Forensic Psychology Practice Doctorate programme at the University of Birmingham. The project will explore attitudes and motivations held by volunteers involved with Circles of Support and Accountability.

I am looking for participants to complete an online questionnaire. The study involves answering questions regarding sexual offending and takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participants will be entered into a prize draw to win one of two £50 Amazon gift cards.

You can find further information and complete the questionnaire [here](#).

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

## Appendix F

### Questionnaire Recruitment Email/Social Media Post

Hi all,

I am looking for participants to complete an online questionnaire. The study involves answering questions regarding sexual offending and takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participants will be entered into a prize draw to win one of two £50 Amazon gift cards.

You can find further information and complete the questionnaire [here](#).

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

## **Appendix G**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please take a moment to carefully read the information below and feel free to contact the researcher with any questions you may have. The study will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

This study is looking at people's attitudes towards sexual offenders and experiences of sexual assault. If you experience any discomfort during the study, you can choose not to answer questions or to stop participating. If at any time you think that you would benefit from further support, you can call Samaritans on 116 123 or Rape Crisis England & Wales on 0808 802 9999.

Participating in this study is entirely your choice. You do not have to take part and you are free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason. At the beginning of the study, you will be asked to provide a 4-digit memorable code. If you complete this study and then later decide that you do not want your data to be used, you can email the researcher within two weeks of today quoting this code and your data will be destroyed.

Your data will be held confidentially and only the research team will have access to this. Your data will be password protected and held on the secure University of Birmingham IT system.

Should results of this study be presented at a conference or within a research publication, no identifying information will be used that could be traced back to you.

If you wish, you can leave your email address at the end of the study to be entered into a prize draw to win one of two £50 Amazon vouchers.

## Appendix H

### Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this study will involve answering questions about sex offenders and my experience of sexual assault. This study will take approximately fifteen minutes.

*Tick*

I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason. I understand that I am able to skip any question which I do not wish to answer.

I understand that if I wish to withdraw my data from the study, I must inform the researcher of this within two weeks of today by quoting my 4-digit code.

I understand that I am free to ask questions at any point.

I understand that all information provided by me will be held confidentially and only the researcher could trace this information back to me individually.

I understand that I can leave my contact details at the end of this form if I wish to enter a prize draw to win one of two £50 gift vouchers.

I consent to participate in this study.

Please provide a 4-digit code of your choosing. If you wish to withdraw your data at a later date, you can do so by contacting the researcher quoting this code.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Debrief Form**

Thank you for taking part in this study.

The aim of this study was to explore how attitudes towards sexual offenders differ between different groups. We anticipate that people who have volunteered with sexual offenders hold more positive attitudes towards those convicted of sexual offences than those who have not.

We also looked at how exposure to different types of sexual offences influences perceptions of sexual offenders. You were asked to read a vignette regarding an adult sexual assault, child sexual assault, or the accessing of indecent images. We hypothesise that participants who read about contact sexual offences will express more negative perceptions of sexual offenders than those who read about a non-contact offence.

All information which has been collected about you during the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study will be presented within a doctoral thesis, in which you will not be identified. Any subsequent dissemination of these findings will not contain any identifying information that could make it possible for anyone to know that the data is yours.

If you would like to receive support in relation to the issues raised in this study, you can call Samaritans on 116 123 or Rape Crisis England & Wales on 0808 802 9999.

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any further questions or comments.

## Appendix J

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the ATS-21

