



# Research at a glance

## Within-Treatment Change on Dynamic Predictors of Sexual Offence Recidivism

**KEY WORDS:** *Sexual Offender, assessment*

### Why we did this study

There is a lack of consensus regarding the best measure of treatment success for offender populations. Studies that use recidivism as the outcome variable have been recommended by some; however, others have recommended the use of more proximate measures of outcome such as changes between pre-treatment and post-treatment on paper and pencil tests of theoretical relevance to the population of interest.

### What we did

A group of 75 Sexual offenders attending the Regional Treatment Centre Sex Offender Treatment Program (RTCSOTP) were tested both pre and post-treatment on six paper and pencil tests related to three domains of relevance to this population: attitudes tolerant of sexual offending, intimacy deficits and self-management skills. A measure of social desirable responding, the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding, was used to assess whether participants were intentionally or unintentionally trying to present themselves in an overly positive light. The RTCSOTP has been found in other research to result in significantly lower than expected sexual offence recidivism rates.

### What we found

With reference to attitudes tolerant of sexual offending two measures were administered (the Cognitive Distortions-Molest Scale and the Cognitive Distortions-Rape Scale). Results indicated significant changes from pre-treatment to post-treatment with offenders demonstrating significantly fewer distorted cognitions on both measures at post-treatment. With reference to intimacy deficits, the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Miller Intimacy Scale were administered. Results indicated that there were no significant changes on either of these measures from pre-treatment to post-treatment. Given that both of these measures were associated with the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding at post-treatment it is difficult to interpret the results of these findings however. With reference to self-management skills two measures were administered: the Relapse Prevention Test and the High Risk Situation Test. With reference to both of

these measures offenders evidenced significantly higher scores at post-treatment than at pre-treatment. The results indicate that participants understood more about the principles and application of relapse prevention at the end of treatment and that they were more effectively able to recognize situations that would place them at high risk of sexual offending. These results are in keeping with the goals of the treatment program.

### What it means

These results are in keeping with literature that suggests that contemporary treatment programs for sexual offenders can result in meaningful changes on measures of theoretical relevance to sexual offending. The results of the present research indicate that treated sexual offenders evidence fewer cognitive distortions specific to sexual offending at the end of treatment and internalize important cognitive-behavioural concepts that have been related to decreased rates of sexual offence recidivism. These data add to the existing research that has demonstrated decreased rates of sexual offending among treated sexual offenders when compared to either established norms or untreated comparison samples.

### For more information

Harkins, S., Abracen, J., Looman, J., & Maillet, G. (2011) *Within-Treatment Change on Dynamic Predictors of Sexual Offense Recidivism*. Research Report R-240. Ottawa, Correctional Service of Canada.

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