

Managing sex offenders

Examining the effectiveness and utility of the reactive approach to managing sex offenders.

Key details

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Police region	North West
Level of research	Professional/work based
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Research context

In 2017, constabularies began to implement a risk-based approach to managing registered sex offenders. Under this approach, each offender was given a personalised risk management plan, with the frequency of home visits determined as part of this plan. Sex offenders who had consistently been assessed as low risk, and who had not reoffended, for more than three years were considered for reactive management.

Under reactive management, offenders would not receive home visits, but remained subject to annual notification requirements and continued monitoring. The goals of reactive management were to prioritise resources towards the most dangerous sex offenders and reduce the risk posed to the public. However, despite this significant change in sex offender monitoring policy and practice, to date little research has examined how the reactive management approach is being used or evaluated its effectiveness on a national basis.

The following studies at the University of Central Lancashire aim to address this gap in the research.

Study one: use and effectiveness of the reactive approach

This study investigates the use and effectiveness of the reactive management approach. This is achieved through the analysis of pseudonymised data extracted from the Violent and Sexual Offenders Register (VISOR) by police. Five constabularies provided data on the number of registered sex offenders on active and reactive management.

Three of these constabularies also provided data on offenders' demographic characteristics, offence histories, convictions and sentences, previous risk assessments, and current management status. The final sample consisted of 75 actively managed and 75 reactively managed sex offenders from the north-west, north-east, and south-east of England.

Study two: police officers' experience-based opinions of the effectiveness and utility of the reactive approach

This study investigates police staff use and perceptions of the reactive management of sex offenders. This is achieved through an online survey of police officers and support staff who worked with sex offenders in England and Wales. The survey was disseminated through MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) and MOSOVO (Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders) networks. It asked police staff about their experiences with, and thoughts about, reactive management.

Research methodology

Study one: use and effectiveness of the reactive approach

A request to share pseudonymised data extracted from VISOR was sent by email to all 43 constabularies in England and Wales through the police's national MOSOVO working group. Five constabularies agreed to take part in the study and subsequently extracted, pseudonymised, and securely provided their data to the research team. All of these constabularies provided data on the number of registered sex offenders on active and reactive management in the community.

Three constabularies also provided data on 50 offenders' demographic characteristics, offence histories, convictions and sentences, previous risk assessments, and current management status. Half of these offenders were on active management whilst the other half were on reactive management.

All data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the number and proportion of registered sex offenders on active and reactive management in the community. Descriptive statistics were also computed to compare the personal, offending, sentencing, and lifestyle characteristics of offenders on active and reactive management. Fisher Exact Tests and Independent Samples T-Tests were next used to determine whether any observed differences were statistically significant. Finally, rates of breaches and reoffending among reactively managed offenders were examined.

Study two: police officers' experience-based opinions of the effectiveness and utility of the reactive approach

Data were collected through an anonymous online survey of MAPPA and MOSOVO staff members involved in monitoring registered sex offenders in England and Wales. An email containing a link to the survey was provided to the National MAPPA Team, who then distributed it to MAPPA and MOSOVO staff. The survey was available for completion between December 2021 and February 2022, and was hosted on Qualtrics. In that time, 173 police staff from 27 constabularies completed the survey.

The survey was presented in four parts. The first asked police about their employment, including their constabulary, rank or role, and length of service. In the second part, participants were asked whether their constabulary used reactive management: those who answered in the affirmative were then queried about the assessment tools, eligibility criteria, and monitoring practices they used under this approach. The third part of the survey contained questions around the benefits, drawbacks, and risks of reactive management. In the final part, participants provided information regarding if and how they used the National Guidance on Risk Assessment in managing sex offenders. All four parts collected quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative responses were imported into SPSS. The analyses conducted included descriptive statistics (to summarise participant characteristics), the generation of scale scores (to examine

overall perceptions about the effectiveness of reactive management) and independent samples T-tests and one-way analyses of variance (to determine whether perceptions about the effectiveness of reactive management differed based on constabulary size and/or participant rank, role, length of service, and length of time spent using reactive management).

Qualitative responses were imported into NVivo. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report on patterns (themes) within the data that related to the perceived benefits, drawbacks, and risks of using reactive management.

Interim reports or publications

Kingston S, Scollay C and Birdsall N. 2022. Managing sex Offenders: Police officers' experienced-based opinions of the effectiveness and utility of the reactive approach. University of Central Lancashire.

Kingston S, Scollay C and Birdsall N. 2023. Managing sex offenders: Use and effectiveness of the reactive approach. University of Central Lancashire.

For access to these reports, please contact skingston1@uclan.ac.uk