Treatment effectiveness for male adolescent sexual offenders: a meta-analysis and review
Walker D F, McGovern S K, Poey E L, Otis K E

CRD summary
This review examined the effectiveness of treatments, primarily psychological, for adolescent male sexual offenders. The authors concluded that the results of the treatments are encouraging. Poor reporting of the review methods, inadequate information about the included studies, and the lack of a quality assessment make the reliability of the conclusions uncertain.

Authors' objectives
To assess the effectiveness of treatments for male adolescent sexual offenders.

Searching
PsycINFO and Dissertation Abstracts International were searched. An internet search was also carried out and references from two reviews of the literature (see Other Publications of Related Interest nos.1-2) were checked. In addition, experts, organisations and editors of relevant journals were contacted for further studies, including unpublished ones.

Study selection
Study designs of evaluations included in the review
The inclusion criteria for the study designs were not stated. Both controlled and uncontrolled studies were included in the review.

Specific interventions included in the review
Studies of any treatment were eligible for inclusion. The treatments included in the review were multisystemic therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, psychoeducational therapy, satiation therapy, residential therapy and vicarious sensitisation.

Participants included in the review
Studies with male adolescent sexual offenders were eligible for inclusion in the review.

Outcomes assessed in the review
The outcomes eligible for inclusion were recidivism, self-reported measures of deviant sexual attitudes and behaviours, and measures of arousal in relation to deviant sexual stimuli.

How were decisions on the relevance of primary studies made?
The authors did not state how the papers were selected for the review, or how many reviewers performed the selection,

Assessment of study quality
The authors did not state that they assessed validity.

Data extraction
The authors did not state how the data were extracted for the review, or how many reviewers performed the data extraction.

Data on the outcomes reported were extracted. The correlation (r) for the treatment outcome was computed for each study from the various statistics reported (the methods used were described).
Methods of synthesis
How were the studies combined?
The studies were combined in a meta-analysis and an overall weighted average $r$ was calculated; weighting was by the sample size of individual studies. The number of studies with null results required to achieve a $P$-value of less than 0.05 was calculated.

The studies were also combined in a narrative.

How were differences between studies investigated?
A pooled weighted $r$ was calculated separately for three outcome measures. Differences between the studies, in terms of the treatments used and the level of therapist qualification in each study, were discussed in the narrative synthesis.

Results of the review
Ten studies ($n=644$) were included in the review: 2 controlled studies and 8 uncontrolled studies.

The overall weighted average $r$ was 0.37.

The number of studies with null results required to achieve a $P$ value of less than 0.05 was 139.

Three studies used an outcome measure of sexual recidivism; the weighted average $r$ was 0.26.

Four studies used self-report outcome measures; the weighted average $r$ was 0.48.

Three studies used level of arousal in response to deviant sexual stimuli as the measure of outcome; the weighted average $r$ was 0.42.

Three of the four studies with effect sizes above 0.50 employed cognitive-behavioural or multisystemic therapies.

Authors' conclusions
The results of treatments for male adolescent sexual offenders are encouraging.

CRD commentary
The review question was clear, but the inclusion criteria were broad for the intervention and study design. Several relevant sources were searched and extensive efforts were made to locate unpublished studies. However, the dates searched were not reported and it was unclear whether any language limitations had been applied. The authors did not report assessing the studies for validity, nor did they report the methods used or whether measures designed to minimise bias and error were employed in the study selection and data extraction processes. Since the quality of the included studies was not assessed, the results from these studies and any synthesis may not be reliable. In addition, there was no information about the study duration, length of follow-up, drop-outs or characteristics of the participants, and this hampers judgements of the comparability of the studies. The inclusion of both controlled and uncontrolled studies in a meta-analysis without any assessment of statistical heterogeneity may also have implications for the reliability of the results. The above concerns suggest that the review findings should be treated with caution and regarded as a precursor to a more rigorous synthesis.

Implications of the review for practice and research
Practice: The authors did not state any implications for practice.

Research: The authors stated that future studies should compare cognitive-behavioural therapy with multisystemic therapy and assess interventions in different categories of adolescent sexual offenders.

Bibliographic details

PubMedID
15914400

Other publications of related interest

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by NLM

MeSH
Adolescent; Adolescent Behavior /psychology; Cognitive Therapy /standards; Humans; Juvenile Delinquency /prevention & control /psychology /rehabilitation; Male; Psychology, Adolescent; Psychometrics; Risk Assessment /methods; Secondary Prevention; Sex Offenses /prevention & control /psychology; Surveys and Questionnaires; United States

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Record Status
This is a critical abstract of a systematic review that meets the criteria for inclusion on DARE. Each critical abstract contains a brief summary of the review methods, results and conclusions followed by a detailed critical assessment on the reliability of the review and the conclusions drawn.