

**What Can We Learn From Sex Offenders?
Data from a Series of Consumer Surveys**

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Recent research suggests that treatment can be effective in reducing sexual recidivism. However, few studies have examined sex offenders' perceptions about the therapy they receive. Surveying these clients can help ensure that treatment is relevant and reflects their needs. We believe that sex offenders themselves have an important perspective to share.

This workshop will present data from a series of consumer surveys completed by a total of 470 sex offenders in Florida, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Connecticut. The subjects completed surveys about their perceptions of treatment as well as an instrument measuring engagement in group therapy. We examined several areas how sex offenders view their treatment experiences: 1) Which components do sex offenders find particularly helpful or useful? 2) What relationship might exist between the importance of these components to clients and their satisfaction with the help they receive? 3) How engaged are the offenders in treatment? And 4) What relationship might exist between treatment satisfaction and engagement in treatment?

First, we will present research findings gathered over the past two years. Sex offenders in outpatient group treatment in Florida and Minnesota were generally satisfied with treatment services and had positive perceptions of treatment effectiveness. In addition, there was a positive correlation between engagement and treatment satisfaction. Civilly committed sex offenders in Wisconsin expressed surprisingly positive sentiments about their treatment experiences, though specific concerns were noted. There was a positive overall correlation between importance of and satisfaction with treatment, but these offenders gave higher ratings to the importance of treatment than their satisfaction within it. Ratings were fairly positive in Connecticut, with a strong correlation between perceived importance of content and satisfaction with services. A strong correlation was also found between engagement and satisfaction.

Clients rated accountability and victim empathy as the most important components in treatment. Other popular components were thinking errors, relapse prevention concepts, uncovering motivations to offend, and deviant arousal control. Most sex offenders valued sharing with others, as well as the peer support and challenges offered by group therapy. The majority believed that learning how to meet

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their needs in more adaptive ways, and creating more satisfying lives for themselves, were very important. These last items have implications for professionals considering the *good lives* model. This model has gained popularity in clinical circles with its focus on a strengths-based curriculum that helps clients to seek and obtain emotional resources which lead to increased self esteem and lifestyle stability.

The second half of this workshop will focus on practical application of the research with an emphasis on strategies for clinical engagement and motivational interviewing, as well as the application of pro-social behavioral rehearsals. Clients who experience the treatment process as supportive are likely to be more motivated to incorporate changes into their lifestyle over the long term. Though reduced recidivism is clearly the crucial measure of treatment success, clients who develop healthy interpersonal skills may be less likely to engage in abusive behavior. Research suggests that group cohesion and directive but compassionate and nonconfrontational therapeutic style can result in a reduction of pro-offending attitudes. Specifically, attendees will learn steps towards facilitating a group process by which clients can develop and practice communication, intimacy and specific behavioral skills in a positive and supportive environment that emphasizes the development of better and more satisfying lives. Although not a comprehensive training in therapeutic engagement, participants will receive resources for professional development in this area.