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Reviews

Book Review

The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Legal and Ethical Aspects of Sex Offender Treatment and Management

Edited by Karen Harrison and Bernadette Rainey
Wiley-Blackwell (2013)
ISBN: 978-1-1199-4555-0
(hardback)
Price: £120 (hardback)

The ethical dimension of assessing, treating and managing sex offenders has gained greater prominence over recent years, although concerns in relation to an overly and inappropriately confrontative approach to this work and concerns that it is effectively 'legitimised nonce bashing'¹ can be tracked back to the early 1990s. However, more recently the work of Marshall, Ward, Gannon and others has really sharpened the focus on the way in which we treat and work with sex offenders and the fact that treating the offender with respect and offering him hope of a 'Good Life'² does seem to correlate well to improved outcomes and importantly, reduced risk.

This comprehensive collection of chapters from a stellar cast of contributors clearly fills a gap in the literature and brings together some genuinely international thinking.

The legal and ethical core focus of the book weaves well through three sections; Treating and Managing Sexual Offender Risk in Context, Offender Treatment and finally Risk Management.

In the first section important issues of offenders' rights, dignity,

consent to treatment, culturally appropriate treatment and mandatory reporting are dealt with in an accessible manner that mixes fact and law well with discussions of morality and ethics.

The second section poses some important questions about the state of evidence in relation to treatment efficacy and the importance of high quality outcome research. The crucial importance of the quality of the therapist/client relationship is discussed as is the extent to which offender treatment is punishment (and) or rehabilitation and potential resolutions of this dichotomy. Welcome inclusions in this section are chapters on the place of drug treatment for certain sex offenders and what we know and still need to know in relation to the assessment and treatment of female offenders.

Part three covers an impressive sweep of risk management approaches with sex offenders, something which has moved centre stage in many nations and jurisdictions. It is helpful to be reminded how far the field has come over the last two decades or so in relation to risk assessment and how rapidly sex offender registration has developed, particularly in the UK and the USA. Circles of Support and Accountability presents such an important and optimistic, community based approach to risk management and containment and it, rightly has its own chapter in this collection.

Other areas that could have usefully had a greater emphasis in what is an impressive contribution to the field include the legal and

ethical aspects of working with young people with harmful sexual behaviour, primary prevention and community engagement, the assessment and treatment of those who view and distribute online child abuse imagery and of the impact of societal sexualisation and legal hard core adult pornography (a particular concern for the UK government).

Finally, this book is of course explicitly about sex offenders. The voice of the child and adult victim/survivor must inform the way we construe the legal and ethical aspects of their assessment, treatment and management in the same way that offender behaviour and cognitions should inform our work with those who suffer the impacts of their actions.

Jon Brown is Head of Strategy and Development (Disabled Children, Sexual Abuse) at NSPCC.

Book Review

Offender rehabilitation and therapeutic communities: Enabling change the TC way

By Alisa Stevens
Publisher: Routledge (2012)
Price: £80.00 (hardback) £24.99 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-0-415-67018-0 (hardback) 978-0-415-63527-1 (paperback)

Forensic therapeutic communities have often faced a charge of having a limited evidence base. However, in the 50 years since their first appearing to the now well established place

1. Sheath, M. 'Confrontative' Work with Sex Offenders: Legitimised Nonce Bashing? *Probation Journal* December 1990 37: 159-162,
2. Ward, T and Gannon, T.A. (2006) *The Comprehensive Good Lives Model of Treatment for Sexual Offenders' Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 11, 77-94.

they occupy within offender rehabilitation, they have attracted a vast amount of academic and research interest. Given their roots in social psychiatry, and the social and political influences which have often formed the backdrop to their being established, it is probably not surprising that the attention they have attracted has been from unusually diverse backgrounds. Interests ranging from ethnography, prison security, forensic psychology, outcome research, personal narrative and psychotherapy have seen an unrivalled number of texts devoted to trying to define, understand and evaluate forensic therapeutic communities. Perhaps what has been neglected however have been sociological and criminological perspectives and Alisa Stevens' book provides a welcome and thought provoking contribution to the role which therapeutic communities have in offender rehabilitation. Based on observations and in-depth interviews the author conducted across a number of prison-based democratic therapeutic communities, Stevens provides an analysis, not only of relevance to therapeutic communities, but which also contributes to a wider understanding of rehabilitation and offender desistance.

For those wishing to gain an understanding of the development and origins of therapeutic communities, and an overview of their treatment model and efficacy, Stevens begins by providing a succinct summary of the moral, social and 'anti' psychiatry beliefs and principles on which the therapeutic community treatment model was based. The comprehensive account of the evidence base should also go some way to disavow the belief that prison-based therapeutic communities have survived despite an ill-informed evidence and lack of research interest. An area which

Stevens then goes on to approach with a significance degree of candour is the challenges faced by researchers when attempting to undertake their research in prisons. Questions of particular importance for researchers conducting field work in prisons, such as researcher/participant boundaries, organisational dynamics, emotional impact and ethical dilemmas are all addressed with a refreshing sense of openness and reflection. Stevens eloquently articulates the precarious place researchers can find themselves using the metaphor of the 'tight-rope walk' this frequently entails.

Stevens continues, providing an interesting account of what leads prisoners to invest considerable time and emotional energy into their experiences within a therapeutic community. Whilst she identifies the multi-faceted motivational drives which offenders possess, she also identifies the considerable hope and genuine desire for change which participants carry with them into and throughout their time in treatment. After reading this chapter, it would seem hard to maintain a view that what drives offenders' participation is a predominantly cynical and self-serving motive. The book also offers some interesting observations into often neglected areas such as how prisoners are able to form supportive, non-exploitative and genuine relationships amongst themselves. It also comments very usefully on how powerful and significant relationships can be formed with members of staff and how a culture can develop and survive typified by mutual concern and respect. The book also provides some interesting observations into how the salient factors behind a 'decent' regime can be fostered within the culture of a therapeutic community. This theme is expanded in an important chapter

addressing themes of responsibility, accountability and safety; Stevens charts how a social environment can be created where prisoners have a genuine sense of pride, develop a healthy attachment to and ownership of their community and how, within the culture of high expectations, prisons respond with integrity.

Stevens devotes one section of her book into an analysis of one of the enduring aspects of the therapeutic community treatment culture; the collective belief held by prisoners that a feature central to both their offending and the personal flaws often exposed in their history of failed relationships, is their hiding behind a 'mask' of masculinity; or as Stevens put it, a hyper-masculinity which needs to be unmasked. This perspective is not regularly found in textbooks in forensic psychology but interestingly is an enduring feature of prisoner self-narratives. She offers a valuable perspective on how aggressivity and hyper-masculine values are unnecessary and counter-productive within the therapeutic community culture. She also identifies how this provides offenders with one of the first steps towards a change in self-identity and this introduces one of the most important contributions of the book: providing an account of therapeutic communities which is firmly placed within the framework of offender desistance.

Stevens argues how therapeutic communities provide a catalyst for a change in self-concept and a more adaptive 'self-narrative' which allows offenders to see themselves as having an identity less aligned to crime and more towards pro-social goals and values. From a forensic psychological perspective I find this to be an interesting take on how therapeutic communities impact upon change which has theoretical overlaps with the concept of 'treatment readiness'; this suggests

that to be in position to engage in and benefit from treatment, having values and an identity which are linked into the goals of treatment is a prerequisite. Stevens offers a useful sociological perspective on how therapeutic communities provide an environment rich with the conditions necessary for personal change.

Stevens offers some original, thought-provoking perspectives on the role of therapeutic communities in rehabilitation and has developed some unique observations aligned with contemporary thinking about the importance of desistance. Whilst some of the quotes from participants can at times reflect a rather insular view, which can appear to over-idealise their experiences as the expense of being dismissive of other therapeutic approaches and this may not help to engage a wider audience, this is noted by the author, and Stevens' book provides a very important and valuable contribution into the role therapeutic communities have in creating and fostering the conditions for offender change.

Richard Shuker is Head of Psychology at HMP Grendon.

Book Review:

Prison violence: Causes, consequences and solutions

By Kristine Levan

Publisher: Ashgate (2012)

ISBN: 978-1-4094-3390-3

(hardback)

Price: £35.00 (hardback)

Maintaining safety and order are amongst the most fundamental requirements of prisons and the responsibilities of those who operate them. Not only are they reflections of good

organisation, they are also a mark of the moral climate and underpin the prospects for rehabilitation. Without order and safety, the prison experience is a debilitating battle for survival.

This book, written by Kristine Levan of Plymouth State University in USA, attempts to provide a 'comprehensive look at prison violence'. It focuses on individual, interpersonal violence and gang conflict rather than institutional disorder such as riots. The book attempts to draw upon international evidence and reflects debates and practices relevant across a wide range of countries and jurisdictions. It is part of a series concerned with 'Solving social problems', which 'provides a forum for the description and measurement of social problems, with a keen focus on the concrete remedies proposed for their solution'.

The book is admirably concise at a little over 100 pages and in that short space manages to cover a good range of topics. This includes a chapter providing an overview of different theories of prison violence including the assertion that violence is imported by criminal populations or alternatively the theory that violence is a response to the institutional situation and its failures. This importation versus deprivation debate will be familiar to many, but this is supplemented by a range of other general criminological theories applied to the issue at hand. The book also offers a chapter surveying the effects of prison violence on individuals, prisoners' families, the prison community and wider society. A further chapter discusses the problems of understanding prison violence due to the reluctance to report incidents. The most interesting chapter for most practitioners will be that focusing on 'What is being done?', which briefly summarises a wide range of

approaches to reducing prison violence including: classification, gang interventions, weapons reduction, CCTV, activities, restorative justice and, staff training.

This book will be of limited interest to most academics as it summarises current work rather than offering innovative new research or theoretical perspective. However, for practitioners, this could be a very helpful resource; it is a concise and accessible summary of the issues surrounding prison violence and an introduction to how to reduce this. For those working in the field this could be a useful source of reflection, review, and further reading.

Dr Jamie Bennett is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.