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## Bring me the Horizon! (and Kaizen)

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Across the UK, but especially in England and Wales, the response to crime and management of those who break laws (especially those who sexually abuse) is shifting. The Conservative government has recently instituted changes to the management of offenders across the board with its [transforming rehabilitation agenda](#). This agenda shifts the offender management landscape significantly, with one of the most contentious issues being the privatisation in the management of all low and medium risk offenders to [Community Rehabilitation Companies](#) on a payment-by-results model, with all high risk offenders remaining with a downsized, specialized probation service. Interestingly, this approach does not apply to all low and medium risk offenders. Sex offenders – regardless of their risk level – will be managed by a downsized probation service. In other words, all sex offenders are considered high risk regardless of the actual risk they pose.

In addition to these practical changes, there have been significant changes in policy and practice around sex offender treatment programmes. Up until recently, the cornerstone of sex offender treatment in the UK was linked to risk level, required that those entering treatment first admit guilt, and used cognitive-behavioural approaches. While there had always been a degree of scepticism about the impact and utility of sex offender treatment programmes, there was a view that programmes needed to be evidence based ([Mann, 2014](#); [Ministry of Justice, 2010](#)) – or at least based on sound science – and that doing something was better than doing nothing. The Ministry of justice argued that:

- Sex offender treatment models do not have a sufficient evidence base
- They can therefore only be regarded as experimental
- There are engagement issues with offenders participating
- There are methodological limitations to the research and



### SAJRT Bloggers' Profile

Chief Blogger Kieran McCartan, Ph.D. and Associate Bloggers David S. Prescott, LICSW and Jon Brandt, MSW, LICSW are longtime members of ATSA. We are dedicated to furthering the causes of evidenced-based practice, understanding, and prevention in the field of sexual abuse.

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers is an international, multi-disciplinary organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse. Through research, education, and shared learning ATSA promotes evidence based practice, public policy and community strategies that lead to the effective assessment, treatment and management of individuals who have sexually abused or are risk to abuse.

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evaluation processes (especially meta-analysis)

- There is no clear consensus on the right way to treat sex offenders

(Mann, 2014; Ministry of Justice, 2010)

While some may argue with the Ministry of Justice's perspective on sex offender treatment programmes in general, it was nonetheless respectable and defensible. However, this blog's concern is that the demand for a solid evidence base seems to have started to dissolve. The swing from left to right with the conservative government, an increase in ideological (as opposed to science-based) policies, austerity and privatisation has brought about changes, but not necessarily what the Ministry advocated. What we have now is a change in the treatment of sexual offenders that might have its roots in research, but is not evaluated, evidenced based or necessarily coherent. Only time will tell; exit the "Sex Offender Treatment Programme" (SOTP) and enter "Horizon" and "Kaizen".

Earlier this year (in March) the Ministry of Justice rapidly introduced two new sex offender treatment programmes: **Kaizen** (for high risk, high need, high priority offenders) and **Horizon** (for medium risk offenders) to replace existing SOTP programmes. Initially, it came as a surprise to many in the field, although there had long been murmurs of a change of direction, but recently it has emerged that there were issues relating to recent programmes and a related report was apparently suppressed ([Daily Mail, 2017](#)).

At first glance and on paper, the two new programmes look good enough. They appear to be strengths-based, positively orientated and focused on ideas found in the Good Lives Model and related approaches; this is certainly a welcome change from approaches of the past. The idea is that they build on and adapt the recently jettisoned SOTP – they are an update and remodelling of existing practices. As with previous versions of sex offender treatment in the UK neither Horizon or Kaizen are aimed at low risk sex offenders, but unlike previous programmes they have capacity for "Deniers"/"individuals who maintain their innocence" which is a welcome shift. Both programmes are based on the sex offender treatment literature and pull together material from a range of sources.

- Kaizen is based upon Risk, Need and Responsivity; multidimensional views of needs and interventions to be holistic, therefore incorporating biological, psychological and social aspects; strengths based approaches; desistance; and adaptive, appropriate and easy to engage with approaches to learning.
- Horizon is based upon criminogenic needs and the recognition that sex offenders and non-sex offenders are similar and therefore addresses poor problem solving skills, poor self-regulation and relationship problems.

While these two new programmes are purportedly evidence based, it may be better to say they are evidence informed. In the pure research/evaluation/piloting sense they are not evidence based, having not been tested rigorously. This is ironic given the Ministry of Justice's need for rigorous evidence in other areas of sex offender treatment/support (i.e., Circles of Support and Accountability). From our perspective, there are further ironies. New models often attract doubt and even scorn in the professional literature. There can be a paradox of putting down unproven innovation at the same time as there can be nothing proven until there is innovation. While we applaud the development of these new models and hope that they are successful, it is nonetheless

strange to see that the Ministry of Justice's complaints about unproven methods has led to more unproven methods being championed.

Therefore we need to make sure that the treatment, rehabilitation and (re)integration is fit for purpose, publically accountable, transparent and not directed by "political"; especially in the arenas of sex offending given the increased public, media and political visibility the issue has. As Ruth Mann observed in [2014](#), the evil twin of evidence-based policy-making is policy-based evidence-making. It is for exactly this reason that we need more dialog and debate and not less.