

Déjà vu: from Furby to Långström and the evaluation of sex offender treatment effectiveness

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Abstract The notion that sex offender treatment does not work fuels public outrage and demands for protective legislation. This paper will respond to a recent meta-analysis reporting major weaknesses in research designs that preclude drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of sex offender treatment. Methodological and ethical challenges exist in the investigation of counselling interventions in general and sex offender treatment specifically, and we argue that the medicalization of psychotherapy research may have inherent flaws. Alternatives to dichotomous recidivism outcomes are proposed, including harm reduction measures and reduction of maladaptive behaviours. Future clinical directions for sex offender treatment are explored, including application of risk-needs-responsivity models, a focus on process as well as content and incorporation of principles of trauma-informed care.