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AN INTER-SYSTEMIC MODEL FOR PREVENTING REOFFENDING  
BY PERPETRATORS GUILTY OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## THE SEX OFFENDER TREATMENT AND THE RISK OF DENIAL

Lawyer Matteo SANTINI

National Centre for Studies and Research on Family and Child Law

### CONSCIOUS project

CONSCIOUS project may introduce a new treatment and support model devoted to perpetrators, both in intramural and extramural correctional context, by the goal of constructing a new intersystemic and cooperative network by the end of reducing recidivism. The project approach integrates treatment activities, paths of rehabilitation and social re-inserting in favour of detained people who are selected at the Casa Circondariale of Cassino and Frosinone involved in treatment activities. An external service has been activated at the ASL of Frosinone addressed to the former detained perpetrators or subdued to equivalent measures signalled to the ASL by the Tribunal of Surveillance or to the Anti-violence desk present at the Power of Attorney of Frosinone. Directors, deputy directors, Prison Officers, educators, UEPE operators, ASL health care personnel, representatives of the associated institutions took part to training activities and capacity building, of reciprocal learning and implementation of protocols and working methods. The project produced the realization of a financial and economic impact assessment which derives from the application of a model to a national and European context, as it verified the replicability in the operational programs financed by national and European funds. A specific Toolkit has been implemented in the prison context, a mapping of European systems of reference, a feasibility study. It is a sort of an awareness-raising activity on the effectiveness of the treatment and the sustainability of the model towards the Magistrates of the Tribunal of Surveillance, the lawyers, the managers of other Italian and European

correctional facilities and of the regional and national authorities, where it occurs. A group of experts has guaranteed an assessment upon the impact of the interventions provided.

The offenders have acquired concrete tools to better manage their behaviour and their violent impulses, thanks to a specialised treatment programme. The support relations, the choice of experimenting new ways of correctional justice. The project makes that the health social system would take charge of a relevant number of detained people, guilty of sexual crimes as well as people subdued to alternative programs or under judgement who are signalled by the cooperation net which has been created. Given the successful rate of the methodology applied to the treatment of project it contributes to the reduction of the recidivism of the perpetrators. The pattern, replied in other contexts, via the guidelines of the project followed by a dissemination campaign, is able to multiply their own positive impact in a consistent way.

### **Working in the penitentiary institution**

The first phase of the project foresaw:

- a case selection of the offenders detained;
- The distinction between the convicted persons according to the victims of the infringements done:
- the realization of cognitive interviews in order that the convicted may be acquainted on the new activity and to endeavour the possibility of the same to be included into the project;
- the identification of a methodology oriented to hearing, the self-awareness, the recognition of their own feelings,
- the individuation of operational tools;
- the selection of detained people that, on the basis of the personal characteristics, of the psychological maturity and of the awareness level, have been classified as fitted for an effective development of group-oriented activities.

Among the indicators of a well-carried process there are the trustfulness to the project activities, the expression of the empathy towards the victim and the suffering she has to subdue, the acceptance of the risk circumstances and the way of avoiding them (internet web sites, analogous contexts to the scenery of crimes, specialised magazines, etc.) Among the other indicators there is the availability of the guilty person to introspect himself about the roots underlying the crime, overall when it is

contoured by the compulsivity; the availability to keep on being treated at the services of the territory also after the end of the punishment; the arisen suffering which shows out the way hoe the engagement happens not just from the intellectual perspective, but it lies on deeper emotions and unsaid feelings.

From the operators' point of view a need to be preserved has arisen as being exposed to the emotional facts of the guilty of sexual abuse must provide all of a series of action which may preserve the operator. Working into an equip and letting information be circulated among its components are the guarantee as anyone could feel alone and it also attains to the personal difficulties. But also getting the operators free of choice if work or not with sex offenders, rescuing from the institutions the adequate support in the direction of building up a robust territorial net constitutes a way to give the work a continuity in respect of live-out detained. At the end, thanks to the constant work supervision with the "leadership" task as well as being able to reverse the route according the learning and the experience, it in the complex allows to learn from errors by the end of correcting them. At the same time, monitoring fosters a higher level of professionalism, by safeguarding the mental health of the operators, as well as avoiding the burn out risk.

### **The denial risk**

The denial is, in fact, one of the most recurring aspects of the sex offenders, as it nourishes social reactions of punishment as it makes pressure on the legal system insisting that more strict and severe rules may be at the end established.

The perpetrators of sexual abuses who deny or minimize have been perceived as poorly collaborative, more subject to criminal perpetrations and clinically more problematic.

The denial doesn't belong to the perpetrators of sexual abuse only, as all human beings tend to minimize and to deny. It is a sort of self-protective mechanism put in place when it is impossible for a person comprehend and accept some aspects of his own experience lived as particularly dangerous, humiliating, unacceptable, disturbing.

However, all sex offenders usually deny, at least in a certain part their own responsibility or the consequences which are linked to their behaviour, being this a further element of danger, as the certainty of perpetration of the same crimes arises, being these people incapable to take upon themselves the responsibility about what happened.

In fact, notwithstanding the evidence has undoubtedly and painstakingly stressed the manner by which the denial cannot be either reduced to a mere instrumental strategy for avoiding and soothing

the punishment, or directly linked to the risk of recurrence, it nourishes the negative reactions of the community as well as the legal system being firstly suspected as it sorts a negative effect on the penal, punitive and procedural rewards.

Although the potential attitude of denying the responsibility does not preclude by itself the access to prize permits, measures of detention levied, alternative punishments to the detention or other benefits, its occurrence into practice risks to deteriorate their prejudicial and legal position in virtue of the crime committed.

A further aggravating circumstance is given by the fact that it often represents an excluding fact as it deprives the person of a great and important occasion of putting his own behaviour into discussion.

Observes the author, however, that if denying represents a constant to a sex offender, it cannot be conceived as a social risk of perpetrating the crime, so it should not be an aggravation upon the determination of the guilty and its penal proceeding.

The research largely proves that if from one side the denial cannot be considered a reiterative aspect of the crime, to another side admitting his own guilty and fulfilling his own responsibility could not be necessarily correlated to a diminution of the risk.

The link between the denial into sex offenders, risk of re-occurrence of the change is complex, not linear.

In fact, it is important to discern the genesis of the crime, namely the set of needs which constitute the grounds of the deviating behaviour and that influence upon the criminal evolution, the needs of a reciprocity act which play their role into their performance.

The denial is a reciprocal need so, understanding the role of the sex-offenders is crucial, given that the result of the treatment significantly incident on the risk of a criminal recurrence.

The denial often is the result of distorted thoughts, beliefs and attitudes which condone the sexual violence, by fostering justificatory explanations, exculpatory for their own acting. Implicit theories of sex offenders refer to the universe of women, often unknown, to the sexual objectification of women, to the incapacity of control their own impulses, to associate their sexual male rights or to the priority of their sexual rights, to the dangerous of the world, to the childhood sexualization, etc.

Up to now, it is not clear if this information may reflect theories present upstream of the social misconduct, and then they may act as "hall of crime", favouring the passage to the violent act, or regarding to sex offenders, they may represent a strenuous attempt of some justification, as to protect himself and to a reduction of cognitive dissonance arisen from the acted violence.

What has been put into evidence from this work is its multi-facet, dynamic and complex dimension. Its different multi-facets are worthy to be understood as an essential task in virtue of calibrating an effective treatment, on the single person and oriented to a potential rehabilitation.

For many times the treatment programs addressed to the sex offenders could envisage (and many others envisage till now) the exemption of the subject deniers, by considering that the lack of the assumption of the negative prognostic indicator and by difficult traceability. The most recent research has showed out how this is not true; furthermore, this kind of position makes that many perpetrators of sexual abuses can be set at liberty without being treated and this represents a more concrete risk factor.

## **Conclusion**

In the last years Law has recognized the value and the need of enabling specific pathways of recovering and psychological sustain for sex offenders, in the view of a better prevention, as the crime can be read as a multi-facet expression of a global disease, and it has endeavoured in the scientific observation of the personality through the expert' help, the instrument to plan a personalised treatment.

Just through a wide operating treatment broadened to the sex offenders and the mishandling the violence can be prevented.

Moreover, with the exemption from this pathway of the subjects of a high degree of denial, an important occasion of doing prevention can be lost; for how long the punishment can be and the perpetrator of sexual abuse can be re-admitted to the society, without having the chance of reflecting about himself and without having faced the problems at the origin of his own deviant behaviour.

To confirm all of what have emerged from the other surveys, these results indicate how the reduction of the risk does not depend on the intervention in itself, but from what it has been focused on the needs arising from the genesis of crime, we can act upon these in order to decrease the criminal re-occurrence.

An important merit of this inter- systemic action carried by Conscious if that of keeping the attention on the fact that, although the work on denial in the sex offenders pursue a different goal then socially reducing the risk, it is however, an integral part of the treatment and it contributes to its success, as it allows the perpetrators of sexual abuses to be active protagonists, by shifting the sex offenders to the motivation and the interest to change, let himself be the active co-author and, overall, and not to keep unseen, it is an aspect that fosters the social and legal responsivity towards them.

Further elements are worthy to be mentioned as they are extremely important if appropriately related to their reference context.

- the prevention of the re-occurrence of the sex offenders and the perpetrators of domestic violence through a cooperating inter-systemic model among the social health, legal and judicial institutions.
- The increasing of professional competencies (healthcare, penal institution, voluntary) for the subsequent realization of the Treatment Schedule of the perpetrators.
- The development in the local context of the permanent inter-institutional context (standardization of methods and proceedings, evaluation of the financial and economic impact-feasibility study for the transfer of the inter-systemic model).
- Avoiding that the proceeding of exclusion may contribute to favourite the re-occurrences (activation of intervention upon perpetrators live-in or live-out the prison for their social re-addressing).

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