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**Briefing paper on police
management of registered sex
offenders:**

The Active Risk Management System risk assessment process on the home visit

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- Forensic Psychology: New Directions in Sex Offender Practice (2021) - 'Risk assessment and the home visit process using the Active Risk Management System (ARMS): Room for improvement?' (online)
- Socio Legal Studies Association (2019) 'Police officers views of the home visit process using the Active Risk Management System (ARMS) risk assessment tool' - University of Leeds, April 2019
- Socio-Legal Studies Association (2018) "Offender Management of Registered Sexual Offenders following the Criminal Justice Act 2003 - University of Bristol, May 2019

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1. Abstract

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 imposes a statutory duty upon the police service to actively risk assess and manage individuals known as Registered Sexual Offenders (RSOs), that reside in the community.

The risk assessment employed by the police service in England and Wales is known as the Active Risk Management System (ARMS). Unannounced home visits are required for all RSOs on the sex offenders register, and ARMS is undertaken during these home visits. At present there is a gap in the literature regarding the risk assessment during the home visit process.

This research comprised three studies. The first study was an observation of police training in three police forces in the United Kingdom and then reviewing a sample recordings of home visits in these forces that were made over a two-week period. The findings showed that the training at each force is broadly similar, although there are differences in parts, resulting in inconsistencies in police practice. Further, officers who are subject to the training have a sense of distrust towards the police trainers, which means they are sometimes disengaged during the training and are not focused on the protective factors in the ARMS assessment.

The second study was a focus group study with new, experienced and management level police officers across the three forces, who carry out the home visit and ARMS assessment. It was found that the police officers thought that the training is informative but unrealistic in practice; the training is not suited to more experienced officers; there are revisits with RSOs;

there is a lack of training on how to undertake initial visits; officers consider ARMS to be too lengthy and detailed to complete and their case load is too large to effectively manage and risk assess this type of offender, and; there are many challenges to the home visit which are not accounted for in the training for this specialist role.

The final study was an interview study with low, medium and high risk RSOs across the three forces, to gain an insight and understanding into the views of the home visit and ARMS assessment from the RSOs viewpoint. The findings from this study were that the training for the home visit and risk assessment does require improvement, there are many challenges to conducting the risk assessment during the home visit and RSOs, particularly high risk RSOs feel the home visit process could be improved.

2. Introduction

On September 1, 1997, the Sex Offenders Register (SOR) was established in the United Kingdom, requiring anyone convicted or warned for a sexual offence to register specific details, commonly known as the "register". According to Sections 80-92 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, people convicted or cautioned of a sexual offence must comply with specific notification obligations while formally placed on the register. This is stated to be a form of community protection, allowing for preventative action as well as risk assessment, management, and planning (Thomas, 2010) and is embodied into S.327 (2) of The Criminal Justice Act 2000.

Given the probation and prison services' limited legislative responsibilities for 'managing' RSOs over the long term, the majority of RSOs will be controlled by the police as a single agency (personal communication with the College of Policing, February 2019).

Risk assessment is an important function and tool for properly managing RSOs. Various risk assessment tools have been used throughout the criminal justice system to properly risk evaluate and manage this sort of offender. The main tool used by the police in England and Wales to risk assess registered sexual offenders was Risk Matrix 2000 (RM2K) (Hanson & Thornton, 2000), which is a static risk assessment tool with a high level of predictive accuracy (Thornton et al., 2003; Craig et al., 2006; Grubin, 2008; Kingston et al., 2008; Barnet et al., 2010; Grubin, 2011; Wakeling et al., 2011; Helmus et al., 2013) and allowed police personnel to score offenders based on a low-high score range.

Police officers disliked this instrument since it left little room for police input or judgement (McNaughten & Webster, 2014). As a result, this instrument reduced police officers' perception of control while also increasing their susceptibility if the offender reoffended while under their supervision (McCartan et al., 2019).

Academics therefore advocated for the addition of a dynamic risk assessment tool (Wakeling et al., 2011; Helmus et al., 2013; Tully & Brown, 2015), which would allow police to assign the offender to the appropriate risk category and develop the necessary risk management plan, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Active Risk Management System (ARMS), which is now implemented across all 43 police forces.

Not only does ARMS allow for a dynamic risk assessment, but it also allows officers to enhance or lower the offender's risk level, as well as employ more judgement and flexibility when completing the ARMS evaluation (College of Policing, 2014).

ARMS was first introduced in 2013 and is said to provide a new form of policing and risk assessment (College of Policing, 2014). All police officers who utilise ARMS are now known as 'Management of Sexual or Violent Offenders' (MOSOVO) and have had to complete the requisite training to do the ARMS evaluation. The ARMS factors for MOSOVO to question on the home visit to then place the RSO into the appropriate risk and protective category can be found in Fig. 1. ARMS Factors.

ARMS factors

	Factor	Details	Evidence Examples
1	Opportunity to offend – risk factor	Offender having access to his preferred victim type	Offender making decisions/engaging in behaviour to increase access to victims
2	Sexual preoccupation – risk factor	Sex is the offender's sole interest or carries a disproportionate significance in his life	Intense interest in sex: sex is used as a means of coping with negative mood; excessive use of pornography
3	Offence related sexual interests – risk factor	Risk involves sexual interests that are more easily gratified through offending than through legal consensual sexual activities	A sexual interest in children; forced sex; pleasure from causing pain or humiliation
4	Emotional congruence with children – risk factor	Emotional intimacy and romance with children	Feeling in love with a child; desire to spend large amounts of time with a child; pursuing child orientated employment or hobbies
5	Hostile orientation – risk factor	Negative orientation to others or rules	Negativity or hostility to others; oppositional reaction to law, rules and supervision
6	Poor self-management – risk factor	Chaotic and impulsive lifestyle resulting in stress, boredom or reckless choices	Random lifestyle; always in crisis; misuse of drugs or alcohol; financial difficulty; associates and support network
7	Social influences – protective factor	Pro-social support network in individuals' life that could influence him in positive way	Positive individuals whom he values/ respects; his support network encourages him to change
8	Commitments to desist – protective factor	Identifies a non-offending sense of who he is or becoming	Accounts of his offending past; can explain why he is different now; seeks out change opportunities
9	Intimate relationships – protective factor	Having close relationship with a pro-social other person	Current positive relationships with others
10	Employment or positive routine – protective factor	Employment that brings him into contact with non-offenders	Current employment or any meaningful activity that provides a sense of purpose
11	Social investment – protective factor	'Giving something back'	Showing empathy and concern to victims; contribute to future generations and more likely to desist

Fig. 1. ARMS Factors

There have been studies into the development of ARMS; McNaughten & Webster (2014); Kewley (2017 & Blandford, 2017), Officers views of using ARMS (Kewley, 2017), the completion of ARMS assessments by MOSOVO (Kewley et al, 2019) and more recently a national evaluation of MOSOVOs views of ARMS (Mann & Lundrigan, 2020). However, there is no empirical research regarding the risk assessment during the home visit. This research therefore explores how MOSOVO are trained to carry out the home visit; whether the training is satisfactory to enable MOSOVO to carry out the home visit; MOSOVO's views of the home visit process and the RSOs views of the home visit process.

Research aims

1. To examine what training is provided for police officers to conduct risk
2. Assessments and home visits of RSOs and to ascertain the differences between such training.
3. To examine whether there is an alignment between training (as per police policy) and practice in conducting risk assessments and home visits of RSOs.
4. To examine police officers' views on the effectiveness or otherwise of training processes and procedures for risk assessments and home visits.
5. To explore RSOs' experiences of the home visit process.



3. Methodology

The study provides three separate data sets from the following studies:

Study 1. Observation of Police Training and Recordings of Home Visits

The rationale behind this study was to understand what training takes place at each police force and observe and record similarities and differences at each training programme. Additionally, to observe how each officer responds to the training whilst the training is being conducted. Observation of the training took place at the force where national training for MOSOVO takes place and each of the force's headquarters or designated training centres. Each force was provided with a participant information sheet, consent form and debrief to be provided to participants prior to the researcher attending the training. Once the researcher had attended the training at each force, the researcher was provided with audio recordings of home visits to RSO's from each force. This study was to ascertain any similarities and differences from audio recordings of home visits to determine if parts or all the training received was being implemented by officers during their visits. Also, to identify type of questions asked by officers to determine which risk category they place RSOs and how this is conducted in practice. The rationale behind this, is that the researcher felt this was a necessary element to broaden knowledge and understanding of the process of training and how that is implemented in practice. Each force agreed to provide recordings of visits over the same two-week period and the researcher randomly selected recordings based on each level of risk.

The researcher examined the recordings for similarities and differences of how they were conducted. Both the training and the recordings of visits were analysed using thematic analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2006) to allow for themes to be identified.

Study 2. MOSOVOS Views of the Effectiveness of Training for the Purpose of Risk Assessment and Home Visit Process

The second study was a focus group study. Focus groups were chosen rather than interviews as 'it is a group function is to promote and encourage collaborative replies (Sullivan, Gibson, Riley, 2012, p.23) to allow MOSOVO to be able to discuss their experiences together rather than individually. The focus groups were taken place in a familiar environment to the participants to allow them to discuss freely and to allow the researcher to extract their opinions and perceptions in a more permissive environment (Fern, 2001) and were taken place at each force's headquarters. Planned questions were prepared in advance by the researcher by using the findings from the previous study. This was done to ensure that the participants attending were of similar experience and rank to the previous study. Participants were provided with participant information sheet, consent form and debrief. The focus groups consisted of three parts: Participant views of MOSOVO training; Participant views on completing the ARMS risk assessment tool; Recommendations for improvement. Each focus group was recorded via a Dictaphone which the researcher then transcribed verbatim to allow further analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2006) and for the themes in this study to be identified.

Study 3. RSOs' Experiences of the Home Visit Process

The third study was an interview study to gain RSO's views of the home visit and risk assessment process and to allow the researcher to have a structure whilst also allowing for some free speech. Each question was carefully designed using findings from the previous studies. The schedule of the interview was done in three parts. The first with a focus on participants views of the home visit and their expectations of those visits including the first home visit. The second was exploring if the participant knew prior to expecting a visit i.e., Notified beforehand. Finally, questions around the terminology of risk assessment and whether the participants understood risk assessment, risk category and priority rating. The initial aim was to conduct 12 interviews, with four being done at each force, within each of the different categories: low, medium, high, very high. However, only 10 took place due to there being only one force that had an RSO in the very high-risk category. Therefore, it was decided to continue with each force with Force 1 and 2 with three interviews and Force 3 with four. As with study 2, participants were provided with a participant information sheet, consent form and debrief prior to the interview taking place. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim and further analysed using thematic analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher received complete ethical clearance from Leeds Beckett University's Research and Ethics Committee in order to conduct each study.



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These are looking for a positive finding... how are we going to be able to do that with this type of offender?

4. Study 1

Observation of Police Training and Recordings of Home Visits

Findings

Participants responses to the training and police trainers

The training at each force varied in content: force 1 focused on criminological theory and how to conduct the home visit via the use of case studies and role play; force 2 focused on the risk assessment and home visit via role play and force 3 followed force 1 and relied heavily on theory and the use of case studies and role play. This showed that the training delivered to the three forces taking part in this research was inconsistent which could allow for different practical approaches in offender management.

- Further the trainers had different experience in sex offender risk assessment and management, which led to a sense of distrust from participants: *“So, you have never done this job before then.....how can you train us.”* This lack of trust among participants led most participants to switch off during the training, particularly around issues that are not familiar to them, such as the protective factors on the ARMS assessment and could not understand why these sort of factors are used in a sexual offending risk assessment: *“These are looking for a positive finding... how are we going to be able to do that with this type of offender?”*

- The recordings of visits showed more risk questions were asked during home visit rather than protective factors. Questioning was done in a general chat format but would be linked to factors such as opportunity to offend or to gain information on what the RSO is doing with their day: *“See you have a scooter, you like scooters then...which model is it...do you go out on it?”*
- Questions regarding the offence the offender had committed would be asked on each visit: *“Do you have any desire to commit that offence now?”*
- Factors such as employment were questioned with opportunity to offend: *“How long have you been at Tesco then...have you told them about your offence? You need to - it’s part of your requirements and we won’t leave this.”*

MOSOVO appeared to revert to risk factors as this was familiar to them and showed that MOSOVO do see RSO as a risk and are unduly suspicious of the RSO. However, the purpose of ARMS is to ask more protective factors and these types of questions were profoundly absent.

Different types of visit

- All visits at each force were unannounced and appeared to be two officers at each visit: *“Hi, it’s Dan and Mike from the police, can we come in please to speak to you?”*

Training used DVD focusing on a 'standard' home visit, but findings show there is no such 'standardised visit' and there are three different types of home visit:

1. Initial visit – initial paperwork & rapport building: *“So, these are called notification requirements, I’m going to go over these really slowly and simply and if you don’t understand you must say.”*
2. ARMS Visit – discussion around ARMS factors for risk category: *“So, what are you doing with your day? Are you meeting up with your mate from Prison?”* Observations were conducted: *“So, you like horseracing then?”*
3. Subsequent visit – anything new or any change: *“So, last time you were masturbating three times a day now you are saying 20 times.... okay what is going on here?”*

Different kinds of visits yet training only covers ARMS visit; the data set showed that there is no standard visit.

Tensions between police policies and MOSOVO role

- Force Policy during home visit PEACE interview style but also to use a 'general chat' which MOSOVO did not like: *“This is completely different from PEACE though....PEACE isn’t a chat is it?”*
- Recordings show that MOSOVO used general chat but also PEACE at different points: *“So, you still in a good place like last time...you been up to anything different?”* *“Look you are on these websites you are trying to meet up with these girls.... you are committing offences so I’m taking your phone.”*

Two different styles of interviewing which MOSOVO adapted based on level of risk or what they faced during the visit.

Police Suspicion influences Home visit

- Police were suspicious of RSO. This is enforced at training; they are told that the RSO does not think in a normal way, and they have wonky thinking and that the RSO would manipulate the interview and RSO is a risk: *“These guys will try to manipulate you and they are very deceitful.”*

Ward & Hudson Self Regulation Model (1998) used at force 1 and force 3 – offender will either be Approach or Avoid (i.e., they will actively look for victims or they will attempt to actively avoid contact with potential victims) – recordings show MOSOVO view RSO as approach active as they tend to only ask risk based or static questions based on their previous offending history.

- At training advised that notification requirements to be discussed on initial visit but recordings show discussed on every visit: *“Right lets just talk about your offence again.”*
- All factors should be discussed but focus on risk factors and the way questions were put to RSO: *“So are you still thinking of your offence then?”*

MOSOVO view RSO as a risk often as ‘suspects’ or ‘suspects in waiting’.



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The training gives you the tools to do the ARMS, but you don't have time to write them up in that amount of detail

5. Study 2

MOSOVOS Views of the Effectiveness of Training for the Purpose of Risk Assessment and Home Visit Process

Findings

Training is Informative but unrealistic in Practice

- New officers found training informative: *“I thought the ARMS training was brilliant, it showed you exactly how to complete the assessment, I can’t fault it.”*
- But unrealistic compared to practice: *“Them case studies (laughs) they were the worst-case scenarios and it’s not always like that, it was too staged and not like the real world.”*
- Unrealistic for officers to complete to ‘gold standard’: *“The training gives you the tools to do the ARMS, but you don’t have time to write them up in that amount of detail.”*

Training is Incomplete

- Lack of Training on initial/revisit: *“The training only covers the ARMS visits but most of the time it’s revisits and we don’t get told how to do those.”*
- Lack of Training on observations, especially for new MOSOVO: *“We don’t know how far to go on the search and when we are looking at devices.”*

- Lack of Training on Interview style: *“We know how to interview a suspect, but this is different, they tell us they are not suspects but that is what we are trained to do.” “Some will just say no or not be truthful, so we have nothing to go on, so you can’t manage them.” “you have to go on what they say, some of them give the buzz words if they have been on treatment, but you have to go on what they say, we could and probably do get the risk level all wrong.”*
- Rapport is crucial: *“Rapport is crucial, they will only talk if they think you are there to help them... we spend a lot of time on this, sometimes up to 3 visits just on breaking down barriers with them.”*

Training insufficient for experienced officers

- Training does not show Sergeant’s how to manage or approve the assessment: *“We approve the risk management plan and any breaches stuff like that, but we don’t go on the visits, the guys do that.” “There is not training on the RMP and that’s what we are meant to do, you just got to trust your team and hope they get the risk levels right.”*

Challenges to undertaking home visits and ARMS

- Preparation for visit is lengthy: *“You do the checks, VISOR, PNC, any breaches, check the notes from last visit, see if any of they guys have info on him.”*
- Unannounced visits not always possible: *“We have loads of people whose first language is not English, so we need to book an interpreter so to do an ARMS is virtually impossible, especially to do it unannounced as you need to book the interpreter, so you have to let him know when you are coming.”*
- Officers own welfare is paramount: *“If the house is in a right state, you just don’t go in, you take them to the station to do the questions, so we don’t get to see what is going on at home.”*

More police power and resources are needed to carry out effective risk management: *“The legislation needs to change to say they have to let us in and answer our questions, if you have someone that knows they system they know they don’t have to let us in.” “The notification requirements can be a bit grey; we need a standard order for different offenders.” “We need to be able to take DIU with us, that’s the only way we will find out if they are hiding anything.”*

6. Study 3

RSOs’ Experiences of the Home Visit Process

Findings

Offenders’ experience and perceptions of the home visit

RSO felt very anxious at first: *“I just didn’t know what to expect... you know after what I had done, last person I wanted to see was the cops.”* Visits are unannounced *“Nah, they don’t tell you they just turn up when the feel like it.”*

Police Explain purpose of visit when they first attend: *“They talked about the offence I was convicted of, the requirement things and asked me to sign it and made sure I understood everything.”*

Subsequent visits ask the same questions: *“Same questions really, how are you doing, any changes since last time, check me phone. They do ask a lot about the offence I done that’s the only bit I don’t like.”*



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I don't like it; they only come to try and catch me out to see what they can find.. all these questions they ask I hate it.

- Visits are to check up on RSO: *"Its to check I'm not doing anything bad and to make sure I'm sticking to my requirements."*
- Visits are familiar and unintrusive: *"I know what to expect now, it's okay, they not like when you get arrested its ok actually, I just wished they would not go over the offence, they don't always but sometimes they do."*

Differences in views of the home visit and police by experience and level of risk

- Offenders who are new to home visits and who are lower risk, are encouraging towards the visits and the police: *"I don't mind, I've nothing against them now, they are really good with me. They get you thinking about your triggers and warning signs, it's not like when you get arrested."*
- Experienced or higher risk offenders are often hostile and suspicious of home visits and police: *"I don't like it; they only come to try and catch me out to see what they can find... all these questions they ask I hate it."*

7. Conclusions

Observation of police training

- Although national training is available, observations of the training was different at each force
- Participants responded differently to the trainers due to the difference in experience of the officer delivering the training
- Officers not confident in delivery of protective factors, when this should be a focal point of ARMS, this leads participants to appear confused which leads to reverting to methods familiar to them such as risk factors
- Officers not having the necessary skills or experience to deliver MOSOVO training
- Although each force understood the implementation of the PEACE model, further training would be required across constabularies to include a more appropriate interviewing model such as the motivational model (Sobell & Sobell, 2008), due to the need to build up rapport with RSOs from the outset
- Notification requirements were discussed briefly at all forces involved in the research, even though notification requirements can play a significant role to home visit interviewing. MOSOVO may be forced to utilise tough interviewing and difficult approaches because of this

Relationship Between Policy and Practice

- Unannounced visits with two different officers present at each visit
- Preparation prior to home visit vital – this varied between officers

- Building up rapport with the RSO from the outset is crucial to gain trust of the RSO to disclose personal details and honest answers to enable officers to select the correct risk category for the RSO
- Initial offence always discussed regardless of how many visits had already been conducted, which give officers an understanding of how the RSO feels about it – e.g., have they accepted responsibility? But did not allow the offender to move away from the initial offence and acted as a constant reminder or trigger as to their offending
- Each force discussed notification requirements during each visit, though inconsistent at what time to discuss this or for how long
- Not all ARMS factors were discussed at each visit as recommended in previous study (Nicholls et al, 2012). This seemed to have been led by previous visits and only discussed if there were changes identified through questioning. Additionally, the risk factors were led by previous intelligence available to officers prior to the visit and previous notes from other visits. From analysis of this research, more focus was on the static factors than the dynamic factors, and the very premise of ARMS is that there ought to be focus on dynamic factors. General observations did not seem too invasive, though RSO's were asked to provide their mobile phones and laptops and any other similar device to be checked
- Self-Assessment Diary – Although previous research from the pilot study in 2012 (McNaughten and Webster, 2014), requested RSO's to complete a daily diary, this was not part of the training and only shown in one case study. Officers stated that this should be used only when it is apparent the RSO is not coping or was showing signs of being triggered but this was not used on any visits

Police Officers' Views on the Effectiveness of Training and Procedures for Risk Assessment During Home Visits

- Participants more receptive to trainers with more experience
- New MOSOVO officer more engaged in training
- Not always possible to conduct unannounced visits and officers' welfare is paramount
- Training should reflect the different types of visits that MOSOVO carry out in practice
- Police find RSO's deceitful and dishonest – participants felt RSO's would not answer ARMS questions honestly. This culture of suspicion does not assist in offender management and work needs to be done to remove this culture when managing this type of offender
- MOSOVO to challenge RSO's responses during home visits. This challenging technique should be incorporated further into training.
- MOSOVO struggled with the general chat approach of interviewing and further training on interview style should be introduced to the training

RSO's Experience of Home Visits and ARMS

- Visits are usually unannounced, and officers explain why they are attending
- Questions around daily routine are discussed including who their associates are and if they participate in any drug and alcohol consumptions (static factors)
- Initial visit longer than any other due to paperwork and photography of distinct features such as tattoos
- Initial offence is discussed on every visit
- RSO's suspicious of MOSOVO's and feel both nervous and anxious about the visits – particularly the 1st visit

- Questions tend to focus on static factors, having disregard to the dynamic questions in the ARMS assessment
- On subsequent visits participants stated these are shorter though paid more attention to changes and observations of devices. Additionally, more personal questions about sexual interests and intimate relations were asked. The questions tended to stay the same with a focus on static factors, again with disregard to dynamic factors
- Majority of participants felt the visits were to keep a check on them, particularly high-risk offenders. Participants felt nervous especially if they had previously been known to police. For low to medium risk offenders, they felt more at ease and with more visits continued to relax further and felt they received a non-judgmental approach from the MOSOVO officers, whereas high risk offenders were continuously hostile and cautious of MOSOVO

8. Recommendations

1. All future training to be consistent across the 43 constabularies
2. All training to be implemented by an officer with recent experience of home visits
3. Understanding the effects of notifications requirements and how to incorporate these into the home visit. Particular focus on if the requirements appear to be breached
4. The initial offence should only be discussed on the initial visit and should not be discussed on the subsequent visits as this is triggering to the RSO
5. MOSOVO ought to focus on dynamic factors as this is the very premise of the ARMS assessment and not spend as much time on the dynamic factors
6. Consistent interviewing styles and techniques require improvement to enable officers to build rapport with the RSOs, rather than using the PEACE model. Training is required around rapport and general chat approach
7. Clarification is required as to whether this is a PEACE approach or if the general chat is a motivational model approach. Rapport is crucial on the home visit and training should focus further on this.
8. Preparation time remains lengthy, officers unable to carry out vital checks – this needs improvement and more MOSOVO ought to be employed onto units
9. Encourage RSO to complete a self assessment diary to help identify triggers
10. Research into the welfare and stress of MOSOVO officers carrying out this role

11. Move away from suspicious culture to allow more effective management of RSO
12. Legislation requires amending to make management more effective



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