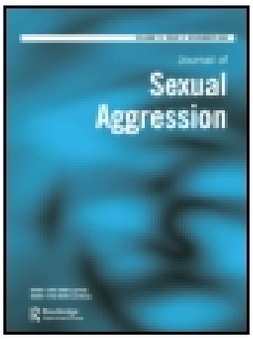

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Sexual Aggression

An international, interdisciplinary forum for research, theory and practice

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tjsa20

Tensions between police training and practice for the risk assessment of registered sex offenders in England and Wales

Leona Mydlowski & Rhys Turner-Moore

To cite this article: Leona Mydlowski & Rhys Turner-Moore (2023): Tensions between police training and practice for the risk assessment of registered sex offenders in England and Wales, Journal of Sexual Aggression, DOI: 10.1080/13552600.2023.2190752

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2023.2190752

Published online: 28 Mar 2023.

JOURNAL OF SEXUAL AGGRESSION
https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2023.2190752

Tensions between police training and practice for the risk assessment of registered sex offenders in England and Wales

Leona Mydlowski and Rhys Turner-Moore

Law, Leeds Beckett University (now at University of Central Lancashire), Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

In UK, police officers are specially trained to become Management of Sexual or Violent Offenders (MOSOVO) officers. MOSOVO officers risk assess Registered Sex Offenders during home visits. We aimed to examine the MOSOVO training and home visits, and determine whether there is an alignment between training and practice. Three police forces in UK participated. Firstly, the MOSOVO training course was observed at each force. Secondly, MOSOVO officers in each force recorded home visits over a two-week period; the authors randomly selected 12 recordings for analysis. Field notes and transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Four themes were developed: unspecialised trainers lead to distrust and disengagement; the training does not prepare officers for all types of home visit; tensions between standard police policies and MOSOVO role; police suspicion of RSOs influences home visit implementation. We provide recommendations to improve MOSOVO training and the home visit process.

PRACTICE IMPACT STATEMENT

This paper focuses on police policies and practices relating to Management of Sexual or Violent Offenders (MOSOVO) officers and Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs), in particular, what training is provided for MOSOVO officers to undertake the risk assessment and home visits of RSOs, and how these are conducted in practice. The findings indicate that there are tensions between police policies and practices and we set out a series of recommendations for improving the MOSOVO training and raise wider questions about the role in offender management.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 24 February 2022
Revised 4 January 2023
Accepted 9 March 2023

KEYWORDS
Sex offenders; risk assessment; risk management; offender management; police

Introduction

Currently, there are around 62,435 Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs) in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Registration was brought in with the Sex Offender Act 1997, which produced a lawful obligation on certain individuals post-conviction with a specific type of sexual offence to register with the police in England and Wales. The Criminal Justice Act, 2003 strengthened the registration requirements and imposed a statutory duty upon the police service to actively risk assess and manage RSOs that reside in the community.

Risk assessing and managing RSOs has become known as offender management (OM) (Offender Management Act, 2007), and for the police carrying out this OM role, 'Management of Sexual or

CONTACT Leona Mydlowski L.mydlowski@uclan.ac.uk Law, Leeds Beckett University (now at University of Central Lancashire), Leeds, UK

Violent Offenders' (MOSOVO) (Kewley, 2017). OM describes a situation where several community-based agencies work together, either co-located or as an integrated team, on specific offender groups (Millie, 2013). As part of this OM, MOSOVO officers undertake an unannounced home visit at the RSO's place of residence to carry out the necessary risk assessment. The risk assessment is designed to identify those persons to be targeted for risk reduction services, to inform case planning and community supervision, and to prevent new acts of sexual violence (Bonta & Wormith, 2014; Nicholaichuk et al., 2014). OM during the home visit requires the development of a professional relationship to be formed in the intimate setting of the RSO's home (Nash, 2016), whilst also developing a good rapport with the RSO, to enable MOSOVO officers to carry out the risk assessment to ascertain what level of risk, if any, the RSO poses to society. The frequency of the home visit differs according to the RSO's risk level (ACPO NPIA, 2010): visits should be monthly for very high risk, three-monthly for high risk, six-monthly for medium risk and annually for those assessed as low risk. Risk assessing and managing RSOs represents a cultural shift from the traditional investigative role of policing (Thomas, 2008; Nash, 2016). MOSOVO officers do not investigate a crime previously committed by the RSO, but instead, they assess the ongoing risk of the offender committing a new crime. Thus, the home visit occupies a peculiar place in police working practices, as there is no suspicion or investigation of a new crime being committed.

The PEACE model of interviewing is the traditional method of interviewing that the UK police use to interview a "suspect" (College of Policing, 2017), which follows guidance set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984. The PEACE acronym stands for planning and preparation, engage and explain, account, closure and evaluation (College of Policing, 2019). Officers plan and prepare for the interview by collating all the evidence required; engage the suspect in the interview, for example, by using active listening to establish rapport, and explain expectations of the process (e.g. recording of the interview); hold the suspect to account during the interview using appropriate questions and challenge the suspect if required; summarise the suspect's account of events and ensure any queries that the suspect has are clarified; and finally, assess how the suspect's account fits with the investigation and determine the outcome or next steps from the interview. However, despite the RSO not being a "suspect", the PEACE model of interviewing is also used by MOSOVO officers when conducting the home visit (Home Office, 2002).

Assessing RSOs' risk of recidivism on the home visits

The current risk assessment tool used by UK police forces to assess a RSO's risk of sexual reoffending is known as the Active Risk Management System (ARMS; Kewley & Blandford, 2017). It was introduced in 2014 and draws on the offending literature, such as the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), desistance and protective factors (De Vires et al., 2015; Maruna, 2001) and the Good Lives Model (GLM; Ward & Stewart, 2003). In ARMS, six risk factors (i.e. factors that would indicate the RSO is likely to offend) and five protective factors (i.e. factors that indicate the RSO is likely to desist from offending) are assessed (College of Policing, 2017) – see Table 1.

As the MOSOVO role is a specialist one (Nash 2016; Kewley & Blandford, 2017), MOSOVO officers undertake training to prepare them to carry out the ARMS risk assessment on the home visit. Nicholls and Webster (2014) conducted a pilot study with three police forces to inform the development of ARMS and make recommendations about staff training and support. MOSOVO officers used the ARMS tool as part of their routine supervision of 37 RSOs and the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with nine officers across the three forces. The study found the MOSOVO training to be relevant and engaging, with a good balance between theory and practice. However, in contrast to this, Kewley's (2017) subsequent focus group study with 28 MOSOVO officers across four police forces found that they reported the training and supervision to be insufficient to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed, and the DVD-based training did not equip them for the real-life practicalities of the home visit.

Table 1. ARMS factors (College of Policing, 2017).

	Category	Factor	Details
1.	Risk	Opportunity to offend	Offender having access to preferred victim type
2.		Sexual preoccupation	Sex is the offender's sole interest or carries a disproportionate significance in his life
3.		Offence-related sexual interests	Sexual interests that are more easily gratified through offending than through legal consensual sexual activities
4.		Emotional congruence with children	Emotional intimacy and romance with children
5.		Hostile orientation	Negative orientation to others or rules
6.		Poor self-management	Chaotic and impulsive lifestyle resulting in stress, boredom or reckless choices
7.	Protective	Social influences	Pro-social support network in the individual's life that could influence him in a positive way
8.		Commitment to desist	Identifies a non-offending sense of who he is or becoming
9.		Intimate relationships	Having a close relationship with a pro-social other person
10.		Employment or positive routine	Employment that brings him into contact with non-offenders
11.		Social investment	"Giving something back"

Mann and Lundringham (2020) conducted a national evaluation of ARMS across all 43 police forces. This involved three work packages: firstly, an up-to-date comprehensive understanding of ARMS delivery by conducting a telephone interview with the MOSOVO Lead at each police force and then telephone interviews with 74 police and probation practitioners; secondly, an investigation into the reliability and process of ARMS, where 14 MOSOVO teams and 5 probation teams were purposively selected to take part in a research day, completing a full ARMS assessment and a case study; and finally, gathering practitioners' views of ARMS via interviews with 11 police leads and 7 probation leads. The study found that, because the training involved differing formats and content across police forces, the use of the ARMS tool varied significantly across forces, which did little to standardise OM.

As can be seen above, whilst a few studies have been conducted into the MOSOVO training and conducting an ARMS assessment, these have largely relied on retrospective individual or group interviews, and practise exercises or reviewing previously completed assessments. No research to date has: (a) observed how the MOSOVO training is delivered by the trainers and MOSOVO officers' responses during the training; (b) observed or recorded MOSOVO officers carrying out home visits; or (c) compared these to determine whether the training is implemented (or not) in practice. This study therefore addressed these gaps in the literature. Specifically, our research aimed to explore MOSOVO training and the home visit process, and whether there is an alignment between MOSOVO training and practice in conducting the ARMS risk assessment and the home visit of RSOs.

Method

The research was carried out across three police forces. The forces were selected to include one urban, one rural and one semi-rural force in England and Wales to allow for a diverse sample. Data were collected in two phases: 1) observations of MOSOVO training events in each force to determine how the training is carried out and attendees' responses to it, and 2) listening to recordings of MOSOVO home visits in each force to determine how MOSOVO officers carry out the ARMS risk assessment and home visits in practice. The research adhered to the British Society of Criminology's (2015) Statement of Ethics and ethical approval for the study was granted by [Leeds Becket University]. The first author made contact with the MOSOVO Lead at each force to provisionally discuss the research with them and determine whether the force would be interested in taking part in the study and this was subsequently approved by the College of Policing.

Phase 1: observation of MOSOVO training

Participants

Within a given police force, the MOSOVO training sessions are the same and are repeated as and when the need requires. Therefore, the first author attended the next available training at each force. At Force 1 there was two male trainers, both of whom were senior detectives and had considerable experience in OM of RSOs but who had been inactive in conducting home visits for some time; the Force 2 training was led by one male trainer who had experience in OM of RSOs and who had been inactive in conducting home visits for some time, and in Force 3, there were two female trainers, neither of whom had experience in OM of RSOs but were experienced police trainers. A total of 39 police officers (Force 1 = 13, Force 2 = 12, Force 3 = 14) attended the training sessions that were observed and each training session took place in a classroom at the force headquarters - See Table 2 for attendee demographics.

Data collection

The training sessions ranged from 5 to 10 days at each police force (Force 1 = 8 days; Force 2 = 5 days; Force 3 = 10 days) and were observed from January to July 2017. All training participants and trainers were provided with a participant information sheet, consent form and debrief for the study. The first author sat at the back of the room in the training sessions, observed what occurred and took field notes regarding what was delivered, how it was delivered, and the questions and conversations between the training participants and trainers. Each training session was also audio-recorded so that the first author could listen back to the recordings later to supplement her field notes and obtain supporting quotations.

Phase 2: recordings of home visits

Sampling and participants

Each force agreed to record all home visits with RSOs in their force over the same two-week period from 8th - 19th May 2018. This comprised a total of 574 home visits (Force 1 = 183; Force 2 = 167; Force 3 = 224). From these, the first author randomly selected one recording for each level of risk (low, medium, high, very high) for each of the three police forces, producing a final sample of 12 recordings. The home visits varied in length according to level of risk: for low risk, these ranged from 31–46 mins across the three forces; for medium risk, from 42–63 mins; for high risk, from 1 h 34 min - 1 h 57 min; and for very high risk, from 1 h 48 min to 2 h 23 min. Two MOSOVO officers attended each visit - see Table 3 for participant demographics.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the police officers attending the training.

Characteristic	Total N = 39	Force 1 N = 13	Force 2 N = 12	Force 3 N = 14
Gender				
Man	19	8	4	7
Woman	20	5	8	7
Age				
18–25	1	1	0	0
26–35	9	2	4	3
36–45	14	3	5	6
46–55	14	7	3	4
55+	1	0	0	1
Ethnicity				
White British	38	13	11	14
Black British Caribbean	1	0	1	0
Level of Officer				
New: Less than 3 years' experience of MOSOVO	21	5	6	10
Experienced: 3–5 years' experience of MOSOVO	13	6	4	3
Management: 5 + years' experience of MOSOVO	5	2	2	1

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the police officers who undertook the home visits.

Characteristic	Total N = 24	Force 1 N = 8	Force 2 N = 8	Force 3 N = 8
Gender				
Man	12	6	2	4
Woman	12	2	6	4
Age				
18–25	6	2	2	1
26–35	3	1	0	2
36–45	6	2	3	2
46–55	7	2	2	3
55+	2	1	1	0
Ethnicity				
White British	18	8	3	6
Black British	4	0	3	2
Mixed ethnicity	2	0	2	0
Level of Officer				
New: Less than 3 years' experience of MOSOVO	6	1	2	2
Experienced: 3–5 years' experience of MOSOVO	14	5	6	3
Management: 5 + years' experience of MOSOVO	4	2	0	3
Average number of years in the police	M = 9.70 SD = 4.39	M = 11 SD = 6.41	M = 9.75 SD = 2.12	M = 8.37 SD = 3.73
Average number of years as a MOSOVO officer	M = 2.99 SD = 1.38	M = 3.37 SD = 1.40	M = 2.63 SD = 1.36	M = 2.96 SD = 1.47
Average number of home visits previously undertaken	M = 18.08 SD = 6.87	M = 20.75 SD = 4.80	M = 16.25 SD = 6.08	M = 17.25 SD = 9.08

Data collection

All police officers and RSOs that took part in the home visits were provided with a participant information sheet, consent form and written debrief. These were forwarded via email to the supervising manager of each MOSOVO unit who asked the police officers to read the information sheet and sign a consent form prior to carrying out their first visit during the data collection period. Each RSO was provided with an information sheet and consent form in advance via post from each police force and then signed the consent form at the beginning of the home visit. Each MOSOVO officer recorded each home visit that they attended via a bodycam on their uniform and the audio of the bodycam recordings was made available to the researchers to access at each force's headquarters. The first author attended the police headquarters, undertook the sample selection, listened to the selected recordings and completed an initial form summarising the risk category, length of visit and questions that were asked by the MOSOVO officers on the visit. The selected recordings were then transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data analysis

The data from Phases 1 and 2 were analysed together using an inductive, semantic thematic analysis, grounded in a realist perspective, and following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first author immersed herself in the dataset to become highly familiar with it and to record initial impressions and notes. Next, she coded the entire dataset and then organised these codes into an initial set of candidate themes. These initial themes were then discussed with the second author and refined. Lastly, these themes were then further refined by checking them back against the codes included in the theme and then against the raw data (i.e. re-reading the dataset to check that the themes were a good "fit" for the data) and through additional discussion with the second author.

Results

Four themes were developed, showing that: unspecialised trainers could lead to training participants' distrust and disengagement; the MOSOVO training does not cover all types of home visit

that MOSOVO officers face in practice; there are tensions between standard police policies and the MOSOVO role; and police suspicion of RSOs influences how they implement the home visit. Each theme is discussed below.

Theme 1: unspecialised trainers can lead to distrust and disengagement

As noted in the Method, the trainers at each force had differing levels of experience in sex offender risk assessment. The lack of experience by the trainers at Force 3 led to concerns from some training participants, who challenged the legitimacy of the trainers and their ability to educate them. For example, "*so you have never done this job before then* [*pause] so how can you train us?"* (participant 5, female, force 3). This could lead to a sense of distrust towards the trainers, in which one participant mockingly asked, *"How can we trust what you are saying works if you ain't done it yourself? (laughs)"* (participant 9, female, force 3).

This distrust might explain why some participants appeared to "switch off" during the training in Force 3, where they appeared to be looking at their phones and not engaging with questions on the training (field notes, force 3). This meant that, when matters were introduced in the training that were not familiar to participants, any sense of uncertainty and lack of understanding in relation to the new material was exacerbated by the participants' low engagement. This was particularly evident for the ARMS protective factors, which were new to the participants, as shown in this extract: "*these factors are looking for a positive finding? I'm just too confused why we ask these things"* (participant 5, female, force 3). It's possible that this uncertainty around the protective factors, coupled with the low levels of engagement, could impact on subsequent police practice. Across all the forces, the recordings of the home visits showed that MOSOVO officers asked RSOs more questions relating to the risk factors than the protective factors on the ARMS assessment; however, this was more pronounced in Force 3, where distrust of the trainers had led to greater disengagement during the training.

Theme 2: the training does not cover all types of home visit that MOSOVO face in practice

The training at each force incorporated a full day showing the training participants a case study DVD of a "standard" home visit being acted out, with activities from the DVD for participants to complete throughout the day. Training participants practised this "standard" home visit via a role-play exercise, whereby they were placed into pairs, given a short brief of a RSO's background and then asked to act out a home visit with the RSO (who was an undercover officer), asking what they felt were the appropriate ARMS questions. However, the findings from the recordings of the home visits showed that there is no single "standardised" or "structured" visit, but rather, three different types of home visits and MOSOVO officers are not trained in all of these. Among the 12 recordings, two visits were initial visits, four were ARMS visits and six were subsequent visits. These are discussed further below.

When a RSO comes into the system for the first time, they are subject to what is known as an "initial visit". The recordings of the home visits showed that these tended to cover three main areas. Firstly, initial paperwork, known as the "descriptor" was completed; this included personal information, details of their passport, bank statements and any physical features; for example, "*okay, we need to complete all this paperwork because of the offence"* (participant 4, male, force 3). Second, MOSOVO officers set the ground rules for future visits and tried to build rapport with the RSO. For example, "*There will be lots of questions, some personal, some not so, but it's important that you answer as honestly as possible and not just say what you think you should say; we are here to help you okay?"* (participant 5, female, force 2). Third, MOSOVO ensured that the RSO was fully aware of the notification requirements:

> *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 … right now I need you to sign them so we are clear you understand them and you know what you're allowed to do* (participant 2, male, force 1).

> *So, are you sure you understand these? Right, now I need you to sign them so you know what you can't do* (participant 4, male, force 3)

Once the initial visit has taken place, the next visit is the "ARMS visit", which is where MOSOVO officers attempt to have a discussion with the RSO around the ARMS factors, to conduct the ARMS risk assessment and determine the RSO's level of risk. The recordings of the home visits showed that, sometimes, this assessment was undertaken without the RSO realising that the ARMS factors were being asked about, that is, some of the ARMS factors were discussed as a form of "small talk" at the start of the visit, but the officers were (also) assessing the ARMS factors. For example, in this extract, the MOSOVO officer is also assessing the RSO's opportunity to offend: "*So what are you doing with your day? So where do you go when you go for a walk? Are you meeting up with anyone?*" (participant 7, male, force 1).

The following visits are referred to as "subsequent" visits and these make up most of the visits that are carried out by MOSOVO officers. The recordings of the home visits showed that the officers asked the same or similar questions as the ARMS visit but they appeared to be trying to determine anything new of concern or if anything had changed. MOSOVO officers appeared to feel uncomfortable in asking some of these questions. Sometimes, they posed these questions in a jovial manner in order to build up rapport with the RSO. For example, "*so there is no easy way to ask this so I'm just going to ask it (laughs) how often are you masturbating at the minute?*" (participant 4, male, force 1). However, in other instances, these more sensitive questions were asked in an assertive manner, as can be seen from this extract: "*Look you must be masturbating more than that … what is it? All day still? Come on, just tell me so we can move on with this – okay?*" (participant 5, female, force 3). Thus, from the recordings of the home visits, it is evident that MOSOVO officers undertake different kinds of home visit - initial, ARMS and subsequent - yet the MOSOVO training only covers the ARMS visit, i.e. the first ARMS assessment made with the RSO.

Theme 3: tensions between standard police policies and the MOSOVO role

At the training with each force, training participants were advised, in line with force policy, that they should employ the PEACE model of interviewing on home visits. Further, participants were also instructed on the importance of taking a more "general chat" approach to the home visit. These seemingly conflicting instructions caused tensions for the training participants:

> *This [interview style] is completely different from PEACE. […] You're telling us that this [the MOSOVO role] isn't investigation, but we all in this room know that PEACE follows an investigation style* (participant 5, male, force 1).

> *A chat? We don't chat [laughs].* (participant 4, male, force 3)

The recordings of the home visits showed that MOSOVO officers drew on the training, incorporating a "general chat" approach and PEACE at different points. When MOSOVO officers were gaining access to the property and engaging in initial conversations, a "general chat" approach was used. As noted in the previous theme, this was partly to build rapport and partly to assess the ARMS factors. Despite caution by some training participants of this approach, the general chat approach typically continued throughout the visit, providing that no difficulties or issues arose.

However, MOSOVO officers reverted to using methods that they were more familiar with and trained in, such as PEACE, in three kinds of situations. Firstly, if the RSO's responses to the questions required challenging, as illustrated in this exchange where the RSO appears to be deceiving the MOSOVO officers:

MOSOVO 1: O*k so can I have a look at your phone? [pause] Where is your phone? It is part of this visit that you show me the devices, you know this [pause].*

RSO: *I don't know where it is [pause].*

MOSOVO 2: *[Presumably comes in from conducting observations] Here it is in the drawer.*

MOSOVO 1: *[Presumably looks at phone] Who are all these people you are talking to? They look like girls [pause]. You are on these websites you are not allowed to be on [pause]. You have been speaking to underage girls.*

RSO: *No, I have not, you're making it up, you're just trying to get me back inside.*

MOSOVO 1: *Look it's here on your phone; you have been speaking to girls and on websites you are not allowed [pause]. This message here: you are trying to meet up with a 15-year-old girl [pause]. You're in breach - I'm taking your phone* (participant 3, female, force 2).

Second, traditional interviewing techniques were used if the RSO gave a monosyllabic "yes' or "no" answer, which would be followed-up by the officer, often with a negative or challenging tone. For example:

MOSOVO: *Are you in a relationship at the minute?*

RSO: [snorts] *No way.*

[long pause]

RSO: *I'm not interested, women got me in this trouble.*

MOSOVO: *Why are you not interested [in a relationship]? Is this because your offence was against a female? Because you did offend against a female. You are a registered sex offender on the Sex Offenders' Register because of your act* (participant 5, male, force 1).

Third, a more challenging style was more frequently used when conducting home visits with medium and high risk RSOs. This was probably because RSOs with these levels of risk tended to be comparatively more hostile and defensive than low risk RSOs, for example: "*Nobody will have me, I don't want a job, I can't be around adults. I've told you that"* (participant 3, force 2, medium risk, 3rd visit).

Thus, the findings from the home visits show that, despite the training participants raising concerns regarding the "general chat" style of interview to be used by MOSOVO officers and the tension between that style of interviewing and the PEACE model, in practice, MOSOVO officers were able to carry out a "general chat" with the RSO and use their judgement as to when a more challenging interview style might be warranted.

Theme 4: police suspicion of RSOs influences the implementation of the home visit

There were many instances across the dataset that suggested that the police were suspicious of RSOs and that this influenced how the home visits were conducted. This was suggested by: the trainers' advice about RSOs and the MOSOVO officers' use of the PEACE model; MOSOVO officers assuming that RSOs have "approach goals'; reiterating the notification requirements to RSOs; asking about or linking to the RSO's prior offence; focusing on risk factors over protective factors; and employing lines of questioning that were suspicious of the RSO's motives and actions. These are discussed further below.

At the training in each force, the trainers advised MOSOVO officers that RSOs do not think in the "*normal way*" (trainer 1, male, force 1) and that they have "*wonky thinking*" (trainer 1, female, force 3). It was suggested that this would lead the RSO to attempt to manipulate the home visit, and thus, MOSOVO officers should be always aware that the RSO is a continuous risk. For example, "*look these guys will try to manipulate you and they are very deceitful*" (trainer 1, male, force 1) and: "*they don't think like you or I do; you need to always be on the hop with them"* (trainer 2, female, force 3).

This suspicion of RSOs might have reinforced MOSOVOs' use of the PEACE suspect model of interviewing, which, as illustrated in the previous theme, was employed by MOSOVO officers in several situations on the home visits.

The training also introduced criminological and forensic psychological theories, such as Ward et al.'s (1998) Self-Regulation Model, which argues that people who commit sexual crimes might have "approach" or "avoidant" goals; that is, they might be intending to reoffend or be actively avoiding it. The trainers did not emphasise that RSOs were more likely to have approach goals, but rather, stressed that the RSO would be one or the other. However, the training participants appeared to feel daunted by the new theoretical concepts and ways of thinking that needed to be translated into practice: "*Why are we being told this theory? We don't use this out there do we*?" (participant 4, male, force 1). Further, the recordings of the home visits suggested that MOSOVO officers tended to assume that RSOs had approach goals and saw the RSO as an ongoing risk. For example, in this extract, the MOSOVO officer appears to imply that the RSO's intention in accessing the internet was to access child sexual abuse material: "*You are meant to disclose all devices. You have been looking at the internet when you are not meant to. Your offence was for internet offences*" (participant 5, female, force 2). Similarly, in this extract, the MOSOVO officer seems to imply that the RSO went to the park to be near children: "*your offence is on a child; you like girls so why are you going near the park?*" (Participant 1, male, force 3).

In the training, MOSOVO officers were instructed to discuss the notification requirements only at the start of the first visit, or as a reminder, if there was intelligence that the RSO may not fully understand the requirements or be in breach of them. However, the recordings of the home visits showed that MOSOVO officers frequently covered the notification requirements on every home visit, which could suggest that the officers perceived RSOs to be "risky" and likely to offend. Further, the trainers advised MOSOVO officers not to ask the RSO about their initial offence on each visit, yet MOSOVO officers often asked the RSO to talk about their prior offence or linked their questioning to the prior offence; for example, "*Why are you not interested [in an intimate relationship]? Is this because your offence was against a female?*" (participant 5, male, force 1) and "*So, do you think of your offence every time you masturbate? How do you satisfy that urge then?*" (participant 6, male, force 3). In these extracts, the MOSOVO officers appear to be reinforcing the offence that the RSO had previously committed, possibly suggesting that they do not anticipate that the RSO would or could change. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there were instances in the recordings of the home visits where the focus was more squarely on the RSO's likelihood of future offending instead. For example, "*Look we are here to help; we can help you with this [bills mounting up]. Is this giving you any triggers to think about offending?*" (participant 3, female, force 1). Further, there were instances where MOSOVO officers referred to the notification requirements or the RSO's prior offence in ways that did seem appropriate; however, nevertheless, the overall effect for the RSO may well have been quite demoralising. For example:

> MOSOVO: *Are you seeing anyone at the minute?*
>
> RSO: *Yeah I am. [name removed], she's well nice - been seeing her five months now.*
>
> *MOSOVO: Does she know about your offence? You need to tell her about your offence as it's part of your notification requirements.*
>
> *RSO: No, I don't want her knowing; you're ruining my life, and I'll just finish with her.*
>
> MOSOVO: Y*ou need to tell her; you committed an offence and are on the Sex Offender Register. We need to make sure she knows and she understands it.* (participants 4 and 7, both male, force 2)

At the training in each force, participants were also informed that all ARMS factors should be discussed on the home visit, as each factor was equally as important. However, the recordings of the home visits showed that this was not the case. The factors discussed by MOSOVO officers on the home visits depended on the type of visit, whether the MOSOVO officer had dealt with the RSO

previously and any findings from the current visit. However, the factors that were discussed or assessed indirectly on the home visits were mostly the more static risk factors (i.e. sexual preoccupation, offence-related sexual interests, emotional congruence with children, hostile orientation and poor self-management), rather than the protective factors, as can be seen in this extract: "so your offence was on a pre-pubescent girl; do you still think about that when you are masturbating?" (participant 5, female, force 3). Protective factors were often overlooked, in particular, commitment to desist and social investment, and MOSOVO officers rarely set any meaningful goals in line with the GLM or focused on the RSO's needs. This, again, could suggest that MOSOVO officers perceived RSOs as "risky" and likely to offend.

Lastly, MOSOVOs' suspicion towards RSOs could also be conveyed in how the questions were posed by the officer during the home visit, as illustrated by the final question in this extract: "*So, last time, it [masturbation] was three times a day; now all day long. Okay, what has changed? Has something happened that you are not telling us?"* (participant 4, male, force 3). The training participants expressed that they felt unsure and uncomfortable discussing intimate questions and that they struggled with a non-judgemental approach: "*How do we word the questions around sex?"* (participant 1, male, force 1) and "*How can we not judge someone who is masturbating all day?"* (participant 3, female, force 2), and this is likely to have contributed to a more abrupt and suspicious style of questioning. Nevertheless, MOSOVO officers could also demonstrate a broadly supportive approach, particularly with non-sexual topics. For example, *"you need to start and think positive; you can't get a job you want as you can't work with children because of your offence, but there are other jobs we can look at. You need to start and move on" (*participant 6, male, force 3*)* and *"When did you get this diagnosis? Are you feeling anxious about it then? Are you coping with it?"* (participant 6, male, force 3).

Overall, these findings suggest that MOSOVO officers see the RSO as a "risk" and are suspicious towards them, often seeing them as "suspects' or "suspects-in-waiting", rather than focusing on how the RSO ought to be "managed" and the "here and now" in the RSO's life.

Discussion

This study examined the training of MOSOVO officers, and how home visits are conducted with RSOs, at three different police forces, to explore the extent to which MOSOVO training on ARMS and the home visit is applied in practice. Overall, the findings suggested that the degree of trainer expertise varied across the three police forces and the training promulgated a narrow idea of what the home visit constituted (themes one and two), with traditional police policies and culture being in tension with the MOSOVO role (themes three and four).

The trainers at each force had different levels of experience in managing and risk assessing RSOs and differing levels of police training experience. This finding is echoed in the recent national evaluation of ARMS (Mann & Lundringham, 2020), where inconsistencies in practice were reported due to the different levels of experience of the trainers and differing nature of the training at each force. Our observations of the MOSOVO training, however, additionally showed that this lack of experience in trainers led to a sense of distrust and disengagement among training participants, which exacerbated them finding certain parts of the training confusing, particularly the protective, strength-based ARMS factors. Based on these findings, it is evident that trainers at each force ought to be experienced in, and actively engaged in, MOSOVO roles to maximise training participants' engagement with the training and increase their own feelings of competence in carrying out the MOSOVO role at the end of the training. However, the MOSOVO role is a specialist role and staff are lacking for this role and current MOSOVO officers are overworked (Kewley, 2017); therefore, it may be difficult to find experienced MOSOVO officers to become trainers in this area.

In our study, we found that the trainers focused on a "standard" visit, i.e. the first ARMS visit. Further, in the national evaluation of ARMS (Mann & Lundringham, 2020), MOSOVO officers

described ARMS as a "standardised" way of managing RSOs. We found that, in practice, however, home visits were not standardised, but rather, varied depending on the type of visit being carried out and the findings and observations on the visit. The MOSOVO training did not cover the other types of home visit that the officers faced, that is, initial and subsequent visits. This could be problematic as the initial visit is crucial for developing rapport with the RSO and the "general chat" approach that MOSOVO officers are advised to take, while the subsequent visits are important for identifying changes in the ARMS factors over time. Thus, incorporating all three types of home visit into the MOSOVO training may further strengthen the training programme and the effectiveness of the home visit process.

Our study also showed that training participants identified a tension between, and felt confused about, the PEACE model vs. the "general chat" approach that is advocated for in the MOSOVO role. A previous small-scale evaluation of MOSOVOs' views of the ARMS tool, collected via focus groups in four UK forces (Kewley, 2017), similarly found that MOSOVO officers perceived the principles and practices of the ARMS tool to be incongruent with the routine investigative role of traditional policing. In particular, they reported that, not only was this a new style of policing, but that the training was insufficient to equip MOSOVO officers with the skills and knowledge required to carry out the role - a finding that was subsequently echoed by Mann and Lundringham (2020) in their national evaluation, when they conducted telephone interviews with MOSOVO leads and MOSOVO officers. However, our study additionally demonstrated that, in practice, MOSOVO officers can discern when it might be most appropriate to use a "general chat" approach or the PEACE model. Home visits often included the use of a "general chat", but MOSOVO officers would draw on the PEACE model with medium risk offenders, and particularly with high risk offenders, as well as in cases where the RSO's response was monosyllabic or appeared to require challenging. Thus, MOSOVO officers will employ the use of a "general chat" approach in line with the MOSOVO role, but revert to the PEACE model of interviewing when circumstances require it. However, to avoid any confusion at the MOSOVO training, it might be instructive in future MOSOVO training to explain and illustrate this hybrid model to training participants.

Our findings also demonstrated that MOSOVO officers appeared to be suspicious of RSOs, seeing them as "risky" and "approach active", rather than "avoidant" (cf. Ward et al.'s, 1988, Self-Regulation Model). This seemed to be instilled in them, in part, by the trainers, but this probably also reflected a wider mindset and culture of suspicion among police officers more generally (Cockroft, 2014; Cram, 2020; Manning, 1978; Skolnick, 2010; Smith & Gray, 1985; Smith & Gray, 1985; Waddington, 1999). Previous research has found that police officers in general frequently hold negative attitudes towards sex offenders (Day et al., 2014), and regarding MOSOVO officers specifically, Kewley (2017) found that MOSOVO officers displayed negative attitudes towards RSOs, such as believing that all RSOs are "liars" and finding it difficult to accept the value of what RSOs told them during interviews. Further, McCartan et al. (2021) conducted a study to ascertain police officers' understandings of and attitudes towards the Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS) via 27 semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire survey with 227 police officers. The police officers reported preferring to be in control of the assessment and conducting assessments face-to-face as, "*you never can tell if they will offend again or not*" (McCartan et al., 2021, p. 20) – again, reinforcing negative stereotypes of this group of offenders. Our study focused on MOSOVO training and the home visit process, rather than the CSODS, but supported the view that MOSOVO officers have negative attitudes towards RSOs, whilst further showing that MOSOVO officers typically see RSOs as a risk and approach-active.

This perception of risk, and a need to feel in control of the assessment, could also explain why MOSOVO officers: refer to and overuse the notification requirements on each home visit; focus more on risk factors, rather than protective factors; often ask about the RSO's prior offence or linked their questioning to the prior offence; and engage in more challenging lines of questioning with RSOs. However, whilst asking about the RSO's prior offence or linking questioning to the prior

offence could be seen as reinforcing MOSOVO's perceptions of RSOs as having an enduring static risk and being unable to change, it is also important to recognise that it is perhaps difficult for MOSOVO officers to ask about the "here and now" in the RSO's life, and changes since the previous visit, without also referring to the past as a comparison point, and, in some ways, a discussion around the prior offence is inevitable given the purpose of the home visits. Overall, it may be advisable for future MOSOVO training to try to unpack these negative attitudes towards people who commit sexual crimes and any myths about this group of offenders, and encourage a more positive image of the RSO, as an individual who is attempting to reside crime-free in the community post-conviction and possibly may need support with this, rather than as a "ticking time bomb" for whom re-offending is inevitable.

Lastly, the ARMS assessment is theoretically grounded in the academic literature, such as the RNR model (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) and the GLM (Ward & Stewart, 2003), which include a focus on the individual's needs to prevent future re-offending and strength-based approaches involving meaningful life goals. However, whilst strength-based approaches are incorporated into the ARMS assessment and covered at the training, in practice, these protective factors (in particular, commitment to desist and social investment) were typically overlooked by MOSOVO officers on the home visits. MOSOVO officers did not usually help RSOs to set any "meaningful goals' in line with the GLM, nor focus on the RSO's needs. This is perhaps not surprising given that these actions are particularly at odds with the traditional policing role and given MOSOVOs' suspicion of RSOs. However, covering protective factors, "meaningful goals' and the RSO's needs on the home visit could provide the RSO with a positive, structured approach to an ongoing desistance from offending. Therefore, MOSOVO officers might require further explanation around the protective factors during the MOSOVO training and the utility of these, and the importance of identifying the RSO's needs. In particular, the training ought to explain that identifying and addressing the RSO's "needs' can promote desistance in offending and this should be given careful attention when carrying out the ARMS assessment.

Strengths and limitations

Firstly, a strength of the study was that, for the first time, it entailed direct observations of the MOSOVO training, and recordings of actual home visits in practice. However, since the level of experience of the MOSOVO officers who conducted the home visits varied, some of the officers will have been trained some time ago, and possibly, might have received training that diverged from the training attended by the first author. Secondly, all participants were aware that they were being observed/recorded and this may have affected their behaviour. However, the first author sat at the back of the room for the training, and she was not present on the home visits, which might have encouraged participants to act more naturally. In addition, a strength of the study was that all home visits over the same two-week period in each force were recorded and the researcher selected a stratified random sample from these; this provided a representative sample, and given the large number of home visits that took place during this two-week period, it seems less likely that MOSOVO officers would have managed to have been on their "best behaviour" throughout. Thirdly, since we were not present on the home visits, we were not able to get a feel for the atmosphere in the room or as strong a feel for the rapport between the MOSOVO officer and the RSO, which are likely crucial to the outcome of a home visit. Further, since the recordings that were made available were audio, rather than video, we were not privy to any non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expressions, body posture) or actions (e.g. looking at notes or around the house) which may have provided further insights; this should be borne in mind for any further research in this area, if ethical clearance were granted for in-person attendance at the home visits or observing video data. Lastly, three police forces were included in the study, ranging in geographical location; however, other police forces may deliver the training differently and further research should identify this.

Conclusions

MOSOVO training participants may question the credibility of the trainers and disengage from the training if the trainers do not have relevant expertise. Further, MOSOVO officers may benefit from training that additionally incorporates: the requirements and rapport-building of the initial visit and the assessment of changes at the subsequent visits; a recognition of, and explanation of how and when to use, PEACE (Home Office, 2002) as part of a hybrid model with the "general chat" approach advocated for in the MOSOVO role; a critical examination of stereotypes and myths about "sex offenders'; and a more in-depth explanation of protective factors and why and how to assess them. More broadly, however, there are questions about the role of OM and the extent to which policing and police culture may be in tension with the intended "suspicionless' (Harvard Law Review, 2007) MOSOVO role. The MOSOVO role represents a cultural shift from the traditional role of policing (Thomas, 2008; Nash, 2016), and although strengthening the MOSOVO training may help, the MOSOVO training and role will still be working against the much stronger tide of wider police polices, practices and cultures.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the three police forces in England and Wales that assisted in this study and the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs Council for their guidance and assistance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by doctoral funding from [Leeds Beckett University].

ORCID

Rhys Turner-Moore http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0045-9095

References

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). Rehabilitating criminal justice, policy and practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *16*(1), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018362

Association of Chief Police Officers. (2010). *Guidance on protecting the public: Managing sexual offenders and violent offenders*. Author.

Bonta, J., & Wormith, S. (2014). Applying the risk-need-responsivity principles to offender assessment. In L. A. Craig, L. Dixon, & T. Gannon (Eds.), *What works in offender rehabilitation: An evidence based approach to assessment and treatment* (pp. 166). Wiley Blackwell.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Society of Criminology. (2015). *British Society of Criminology statement of ethics for researchers.* www.britsoccrim.org/documents/BSCEthics2015.pdf.

Cockroft, T. (2014). Police culture and transformational leadership: Outlining the contours of a troubled relationship. *Policing (Bradford, England)*, *8*(1), 5–13. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pat040

College of Policing. (2017). *Interviewing Suspects*.

College of Policing. (2017). *Police Manual*.

College of Policing. (2019). *Investigative Interviewing*.

Cram, F. (2020). The 'carrot' and 'stick' of integrated offender management: Implications for police culture. *Policing and Society*, *30*(4), 378–395. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1547719

Criminal Justice Act. (2003). Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/44/contents.

Day, A., Boni, N., Hobbs, G., Carson, E., Whitting, L., & Powell, M. (2014). Professional attitudes to sex offenders: Implications for multiagency and collaborative working. *Sexual Abuse in Australia and New Zealand*, *6*(1), 12–19.
De Vires, R., Mann, R., Maruna, S., & Thornton, D. (2015). An exploration of protective factors supporting desistance from sexual offending. *Sexual Abuse*, *27*(1), 16–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063214547582
Home Office. (2002). *Protecting the public: Strengthening protection against sex offenders and reforming law on sexual offences*. Author.
Kewley, S. (2017). Policing people with sexual convictions using strengths-based approaches. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, *7*(3), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-09-2016-0026
Kewley, S., & Blandford, M. (2017). The development of the active risk management system. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, *7*(3), 155–167. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-10-2016-0034
Mann, N., & Lundringham, S. (2020). *A national evaluation of the active risk management system*. Policing Institute for the Eastern Region.
Manning, P. K. (1978). *Police work: The social organisation of policing*. MIT Press.
Maruna, S. (2001). *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives. American Psychological Association*.
McCartan, K. F., Harris, D. A., & Prescott, D. (2021). Seen and not heard: The service user's experience through the justice system of individuals convicted of sexual offenses. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *65*(12), 1299–1315. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X19851671
Millie, A. (2013). What are the police for? In J. M. Brown (Ed.), *The future of policing* (pp. 52–63.
Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Annual Report 2020/21*.
Nash, M. (2016). 'Scum cuddlers': Police offender managers and the sex offenders' register in England and Wales. *Policing and Society*, *26*(4), 411–427. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2014.942855
Nicholaichuk, P., Oliver, E., Kingston, D. A., & Wong, C. P. (2014). A multisite examination of sexual violence risk and therapeutic change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *82*(2), 312–324. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035340
Nicholls, C. M., & Webster, S. (2014). *Sex offender management and dynamic risk: Pilot evaluation of the active risk management system (ARMS)*. Ministry of Justice.
Offender Management Act. (2007). Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/21/contents.
Sexual Offences Act. (1997). Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/51/enacted.
Skolnick, J. (2010). A sketch of the policeman's working personality. In T. Newburn (Hg), *Policing key readings, collumpton* (pp. 264–279). Willan.
Smith, D., & Gray, J. (1985). *Police & people in London: The police in action*. Routledge.
Thomas, T. (2008). The Sex offender 'register': A case study in function creep. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, *47*(3), 227–237. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2008.00514.x
Waddington, P. A. (1999). Police (canteen) sub-culture. An appreciation. *British Journal of Criminology*, *39*(2), 287–309. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/39.2.287
Ward, T., Hudson, S. M., & Keenan, T. (1998). A self-regulation model of the sexual offense process. *Sexual Abuse*, *10*(2), 141–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/107906329801000206
Ward, T., & Stewart, C. A. (2003). The treatment of sex offenders: Risk management and good lives. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *34*(4), 353. https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.34.4.353