Circles South East's programme for non-offending partners of child sex offenders: A preliminary outcome evaluation

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Abstract
This report presents the protocol and preliminary findings from an outcome evaluation study of the Circle South East's Non-Offending Partner Programme 'Breaking the Cycle'. The aims of the programme are to inform, empower and support the non-offending partner of a person who has been convicted of a sexual offence against a child, and to assess the risk posed to, and the non-offending partner's ability to protect, his/her child(ren). The data presented here relates the findings from the 14 partners who both completed the programme and the psychometric measures related to the evaluation for the period between February 2012 and August 2014.

Keywords
child protection services, child sex offenders, non-offending mothers, non-offending partners

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Background

When someone is convicted of sexual offending, this has serious and long term implications not only for him/her but also for his/her former, current and future partner(s) and any children who are involved in these relationships. Where dependent children are involved this will inevitably mean that the non-offending partners are thrust into the worlds of child protection and criminal justice. For the non-offending partner this may mean that they are judged by others in the context of two of their social identities and roles. First, Child Protection Services will focus almost exclusively on the non-offending partner's ability to protect his/her children (Bolen, 2002). Secondly, the criminal justice agents will be more interested in him/her as a resource for the offender's rehabilitation, which includes taking considerable responsibility for the amelioration of any risk he or she poses. Whilst this latter aspect has been seen as controversial in that it is considered to be exploitative, particularly in the context of female non-offending partners (Halsey and Deegan, 2014; Jamieson, 1999), in practice, evidence suggests that when offenders remain in, or establish supportive intimate relationships they are less likely to recidivate (Mann et al., 2010). Thirdly, the general public will question him or her both as a partner in an intimate relationship and as an adequate parent (Smith and Saunders, 1995). Importantly, professionals from Child Protection Services share the views and concerns of the general public (Morris, 2003), which leads to a number of accusations being made. Such accusations might include the failure of the non-offending partner to satisfy the sexual and intimacy needs of the offending partner (Herman, 2000; Maisch, 1973), or his or her collusion with the offending partner (Lustig et al., 1966) and the inability to put his/her children's needs over and above that of his/her partner. Thus, implying (albeit erroneously) that the non-offending partner is to blame for the offender's behaviour (Philpot, 2009) or that they are will inevitably be ineffective protectors of children.

All of this compounds the distress and turmoil which the non-offending partner is already likely to be experiencing following the revelation of their partner's offending behaviour (Cahalane et al., 2013). Qualitative studies of partners' experiences in the aftermath of a discovery of their partners' offending indicate that they are typically subjected to multiple ongoing losses, which include financial security, home, familial and friendship support, trust and respect in their relationship with the offender and their own image as a good parent (e.g. Humphreys. 1992).

The majority of the literature examining the needs and experiences of partners has tended to focus on non-offending parents of children who have been abused in an intra-familial context (Cahalane et al., 2013). In contrast, the experiences of non-offending partners outside of this context have been somewhat neglected (Tamaraz, 1996). It is possible that some of these needs and experiences might differ to some degree for non-offending partners of people convicted of extra-familial (that is outside the non-offending partner's own family) or non-contact offences. Experiences that have been found to be common to both non-offending partners and non-offending parents have included feeling stigmatized and isolated, being subject to community responses to the offences, sensing that both they and their children are

also subjected to the punishment meted out to the offender (Leberg, 1997; McLaren, 2012; Thomas and Viar, 2001).

With regards to issues that are specific to non-offending partners, Cahalane et al. (2013) conducted a study with nine non-offending female partners of men who had been convicted of child sexual offending. They analysed letters that were written to the offending partners (without the intention of the letters ever being sent) at the beginning of an intervention programme. They found four main themes within the letters, two of which are possibly more pertinent to non-offending partners than to non-offending parents. The first is the discovery of offending is far more likely to come as a shock to the partner as it tends not to be preceded by a period of suspicion. This appears to be further exacerbated as extra-familial and non-contact offending is possibly less likely to co-occur in the context of intimate partner violence as is intra-familial childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Thus, the offending behaviour is viewed by the partners as being completely out of character. Consequently, the offender's denials, minimizations and rationalizations are seen as more plausible. Thus an understanding of the extent and implications of the offenders' actions can take several years to be fully realized. The second was the absence of articulation about two issues: 1) consideration of the impact on the child victims; and 2) the absence of the acknowledgement of potential risk to their own children. The implications with regards to their own children were more likely to be expressed using the concept of loss (e.g. loss of a resident father, restrictions on 'normal' childhood activities like having friends to sleep over). Since the risks to their own children are not spontaneously considered, it may mean that the involvement of CPS is seen as less necessary and therefore more intrusive.

The non-offending partner's relative reticence to consider the impact on the child victims is understandable when one considers theoretical models of empathy. Empathy typically emerges in the context of a two-person dyad. Where one person is seen to be in a state of distress or need and the other person, through perspective taking, is able to imagine how he/she is likely to be thinking and feeling and to sympathize with them. However, in the context of interpersonal offending such as CSA, a three person scenario (Breithaupt, 2012) is normally created in which there is an alleged offender (alleged in the eyes of the bystander who may currently be ambivalent as to whether this label is accurate), an alleged victim and the bystander (in this instance the non-offending partner). With three person scenarios the bystander typically takes the side of one of the other parties which serves as a barrier for feeling empathy for the other. The process of side-taking is both fairly instantaneous and resistant to change (Porter and ten Brinke, 2009). Factors which have been found to influence the side-taking decision include the degree of connectedness between the bystander and each of the actors, self-interest on the part of the bystander (what do they risk losing by taking the different sides), and a history of previous positive experiences with each of the actors (Breithaupt, 2012). When the victims are unknown to the non-offending partner and they feel uncertain as to the veracity of the allegations, it is unsurprising that the well-being of the victims is absent from their thoughts. Their empathy resides with the person who is closest to them, with whom they possibly have children, share a house and finances and have

had numerous positive experiences. Essentially, it is the lack of connectedness, shared lives and past experiences with the victims which means that they are unlikely to spontaneously consider the issue from the victims' perspectives. It might be argued that the lack of understanding of the victim perspective then further fuels a poor understanding of the potential risks posed to their own children. However, according to Breithaupt's formulation of empathy where the victim is connected to the non-offending parent, the parent's potential for taking the side of the child should be considerably greater than that when the child is not personally known to them.

It is deemed to be in the interests of all family members that the non-offending partner is aware of the offending cycle, grooming techniques and the strategies used to target and silence a child in order that they may develop and refine his/her protective capacity. Such knowledge could help non-offending partners to be better able to recognize and assist in the management of risk that the (ex)partner poses to his/her own children. An additional benefit might be that where non-offending partners suspect or discover that their own children are being abused (the perpetrator need not be the offending partner), they would be better equipped to provide an appropriately supportive and protective response to the child.

The research and practice literature indicates that the support of a non-offending parent is crucial to the well-being of children both in the immediate aftermath of a disclosure or discovery of sexual abuse, and with regard to their long-term well-being. Indeed, parental support has been identified as one of the best predictors of the child's adjustment following childhood sexual abuse (Spaccarelli and Kim, 1995; Tremblay et al., 1999). Non-offending mothers have been found to be the best protectors of their children once their child's victim status has been recognized (Bacon, 2008; Palmer et al., 1999). Even mothers, who report that initially they did not fully believe their child's disclosure, still appear to take action to protect their child from further predations (Pintello and Zuravin, 2001). Furthermore, support from the non-offending mother is believed to increase the likelihood of a child moving from denial to disclosure in cases of suspected CSA (Bacon, 2008), which has obvious implication for efforts in child protection, criminal prosecution and therapeutic intervention. For children undergoing therapeutic interventions, the treatment effect has been found to be greatest where they are supported by the non-offending parent (Cohen and Mannarino, 2000; Cohen et al., 2004).

In the longer term, the support from the non-offending parent has not only been found to reduce the pernicious sequelae of childhood sexual assault (Barker-Collo and Read, 2003; Elliot and Carnes, 2001; Everson et al., 1989; Spaccarelli, 1994; Tyler, 2002; Whiffen and MacIntosh, 2005), but there are also research findings suggesting that this is exacerbated where support is not forthcoming from this parent (Adams-Tucker, 1982; Beitchman et al., 1992; Guelzow et al., 2002; Morrison and Clavenna-Valleroy, 1998). Finally, where the case leads to a prosecution and the child is required to stand as a witness, the support of the non-offending parent appears to ameliorate the damaging effects of giving testimony (e.g. Goodman et al., 1992).

Ultimately, where support is forthcoming from the non-offending parent there is a reduced need for services, beyond the initial crisis intervention, for the child (Grosz

et al., 1999) and the possibility for retaining the child in the home is increased, which is believed to be beneficial for positive adaptation (Hill, 2005).

The non-offending parents have potential to serve as this 'natural resource' (Heflin et al., 2000: 170) to mitigate against the possible negative effects and/or to facilitate healing when child sexual abuse does occur in their family. However, the needs of the non-offending parents are often seen as secondary to those of both the child and the perpetrator (Pretorius et al., 2011). This might be due to oversight or it may be partly attributed to Bacon's (2008) proposition that the parents are erroneously conceived of as a unit and thus the non-abusing parent is seen as complicit in the abuse, and not naturally as a resource for protection.

Recently, a number of organizations have begun to deliver psycho-educational programmes which aim to support the non-offending partners (essentially mothers, but not necessarily the mothers of the children who have been abused). These include Circles South East, Barnardos (Partners for Protection) and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. Hernandez et al.'s (2009) preliminary findings from a small evaluation study of a similar psycho-educational programme in the US are optimistic. They report that a comparison of pre and post intervention scores on a range of psychometric measures indicate that parents' post-traumatic stress responses appeared to decrease, family functioning improved, and there was a reduction in hyperactivity in children and delinquency in adolescents.

The Circles South East Non-Offending Partners programme, known as 'Breaking the Cycle', is designed to enhance the protective abilities of non-offending partners and to both assess and address areas of need. It consists of two parts; a 20-hour therapeutic element, which was originally designed to be delivered in small-group setting – which has subsequently been delivered in a variety of different formats to suit the needs of the clients – and a longer-term volunteer mentoring scheme, which is delivered on a one-on-one basis. The mentoring scheme is unique to Circles South East. The programme consists of 10 two-hour sessions and topics include sessions such as understanding the causes and consequences of denial, victim awareness and the good lives model of offender rehabilitation, etc. It is anticipated that greater protection of the dependent child(ren) is achieved through: a) increasing participants' attentiveness and ability to recognize the symptoms of abuse in children; b) teaching participants about how sexual abusers operate, including their motivations, justifications and grooming techniques, etc.; c) helping partners to develop their own appropriate social support network outside the family, and d) reducing social isolation by offering fully-trained volunteer support where necessary.

Outcome evaluations typically seek to assess whether there is a quantifiable change which can be attributed to the intervention. In this instance, the 'outcome' component assessed the efficacy of the programme in terms of its ability to promote a positive change in attitudes of the participants in a direction which is associated with being capable and willing to protect children from the potential advances from their partner and other possible offenders. In order to achieve this, it would be necessary for the participants to demonstrate a lack of adherence to myths around childhood sexual abuse and a greater willingness to engage with child protection

services. The evaluation protocol will eventually permit analysis which will ascertain whether the programme is equally effective for a variety of different people, including those who might be considered more enmeshed in their relationship with the offending partner. Thus, in this instance the battery of psychometric measures used in the evaluation include a number of personality and dispositional measures, some of which will be employed in future analysis to see if they impact on the effectiveness of the intervention. These variables, referred to as control measures, include dispositional empathy, generalized self-efficacy and attachment insecurity (specifically dependency/proximity seeking).

The rationale for the inclusion of each of the outcome and control measures is offered here. First, the Child Sexual Assault Supportive Beliefs Scale (Marshall, unpublished), which assesses two different sets of myths or rationalizations (harmless sex with children and children are sexually provocative) was employed since the statements in the scales are often endorsed by offenders. Since Child Protection Services fear that non-offending partners/parents will be groomed by the offender and thus share his/her rationalizations for his/her behaviour it is wise to include such a measure to ascertain: a) whether this view is justified; and b) if it is justified at pre-intervention, can engagement in the programme reverse this tendency?

Secondly, since non-offending partners who happen to be parents of dependent children will be forced to engage with Child Protection Services once it becomes known that their partners are convicted sex offenders, it is important to facilitate a greater willingness to engage with the services. This willingness will not only enhance the quality of their relationships with these services, but in turn a more amicable interaction may lead to a positive change in the Child Protection Services's perception of the partner's protective abilities, which might more adequately reflect the partner's true capabilities. Thus, in this instance the Client Engagement in Child Protection Services measure (Yatchmenoff, 2005) is used to ascertain willingness and the perceived nature or the relationship between the partner and the Child Protection Services. On a practical note, from a referrer's point of view there might be a reluctance to refer a client who has so far demonstrated poor engagement with their own services. However it will be important to note whether participation on the Circles South East programme not only improves the quality of the engagement, but also whether those who demonstrated poor engagement with the Child Protection Services prior to the intervention, still managed to demonstrate a positive treatment effect following the programme.

Thirdly, attachment insecurity was included as one of the control variables. The rationale for this is that it might be anticipated that individuals who demonstrate a high level of dependency on their intimate partner may be more resistant to information which conflicts with the offenders' own rationalizations, denial or minimizations regarding their offending. That is, they might be considered more likely to believe child sexual abuse myths and be less likely to willingly engage with Child Protection Services, particularly at the pre-intervention stage of assessment. However, if this is the case it will be important to determine whether dependency continues to have such a strong effect post-intervention. The value of this is that the analysis might inform the appropriate selection of clients to the programme, or

indicate the desirability of referring the client into counselling or psychotherapy in order to resolve their dependency issues alongside taking the programme.

Fourthly, dispositional empathy is assessed as previously it was discussed how accusations of childhood sexual abuse lead to a three-person empathy scenario. Within the context of extra-familial or internet offending the victim is distanced from or unknown to the non-offending partner and thus his/her empathy is most likely to rest with the offending partner. Whilst dispositional empathy might be seen as beneficial when working with offenders, a strong disposition for feeling empathy coupled with dependency in a relationship may limit the effectiveness of the programme for the non-offending partners. Thus, additional victim work might be warranted in these cases.

Finally, general self-efficacy refers to the individual's predisposition for believing that their own actions can influence a change in their world. Thus, a high score on self-efficacy is unlikely to be associated with a perception of powerlessness. High self-efficacy has been found to be a motivator of learning and a predictor of academic engagement and achievement (Zimmerman, 2000). It is therefore conceivable that those who might gain most from the programme are those who have relatively high self-efficacy. It might mean that an extended programme which simultaneously serves to boost self-efficacy might be necessary for some partners.

Methodology

Design

A pre- and post-test design was employed. Whilst it was anticipated that a wait-list control group would be part of this design, in practice it was found to be difficult to engage people in the process of completing lengthy questionnaires when they were not involved in the programme. Additionally, the design of the study also included a six-month follow-up to assess for sustained or lagged effects of the programme. However, it has been found to be difficult to motivate previous programme participants to remain engaged in the evaluation aspect of the programme when they were no longer using the service. Thus only limited data for the follow-up aspect was available so is not included in this report.

The planned assessment points included:

- Initial interview to discuss the programme (control group) or on the first session of the programme (Pre-programme inventory);
- At the end of the programme (Post-programme inventory);
- Follow-up after six months post-completion (Follow-up inventory) (Control group included).

Psychometric measures used in this evaluation:

- Details of the psychometric measure that were used at the different data collection points are given below and these are separated with regard to their assessment objective.

Partners' general and social problem-solving styles:

- Self-efficacy (pre and six-months follow-up);
- Vulnerable adult attachment (pre-programme only);
- The interpersonal reactivity index (pre and six-months follow-up).

Views on sex with children and child protection services:

- Client engagement in child protection services (pre, post-programme and six-months follow-up);
- Child Sexual Assault Supportive Beliefs (pre, post-programme and six-months follow-up).

Measures

The **General Self-Efficacy Scale** (Sherer et al., 1982) is a Likert format 17-item scale (example of items include: 'When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work', 'I give up easily', 'I am a self-reliant person', 'I avoid facing difficulties'). The response format is a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Sum of item scores reflects general self-efficacy. The higher the total score, the more self-efficacious is the respondent. The scale has been found to have satisfactory internal reliability, but the findings are somewhat inconsistent regarding test—retest reliability (Chen et al., 2001). Self-efficacy, defined as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands' (Wood and Bandura, 1989: 408). The general self-efficacy scale conceptualizes this attribute as a trait, as opposed to a state. Consequently, it would be perceived as resistant to change. However, there is also a specific self-efficacy which is more amenable to change.

The Vulnerable Attachment Style Questionnaire (Bifulco et al., 2003) – This is a 22-item, 5-point Likert-scale which assesses the degree of attachment insecurity. The scale is reported to have two dimensions; insecurity which is characterized by the avoidance of intimacy and proximity seeking, which relates to a high level of dependency on others. The insecurity scale is reported to have a satisfactory internal reliability whereas that for the proximity seeking scale falls a little short of the level of satisfaction ($\alpha = .67$). Similarly, with regard to test re-test reliability, the insecurity and proximity seeking scales are reported to have moderate reliability.

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) is a 28-item, 5-point Likert-scale which assesses four dimensions of empathy: Perspective taking; empathetic concern; fantasy; and personal distress. Each of the sub-scales is reported to have satisfactory internal reliability (Cliffordson, 2001) and test—retest reliability 8—10 weeks between test periods (Davis, 1980). The scale has been used in work with offenders. It is permissible that empathy with the child might be associated with greater protective ability, whereas empathy with the offender might lead to less affective protection offered to the child. Empathy with the offender might be more likely for those who demonstrate a high level of dependency in their adult attachments.

Client Engagement in Protection Services (Yatchmenoff, 2005) was assessed by a 19-item, 5-point Likert-scale. The scale has been found to have four dimensions: buy-in, mistrust, working relationship and receptivity. Where receptivity refers to openness to receiving help and is characterized by a recognition of problems or circumstances that resulted in agency intervention and by a perceived need for help. Buy-in refers to the perception of benefit; a sense of being helped or the expectation of receiving help through the agency's involvement; a feeling that things are changing (or will change) for the better. It also involves a commitment to the helping process, characterized by active participation in planning or services, goal ownership, and initiative in seeking and using help. Working relationship relates to the interpersonal relationship with workers and the degree to which they are characterized by a sense of reciprocity or mutuality and good communication. Finally, mistrust relates to the belief that the agency or worker is manipulative, malicious, or capricious, with intent to harm the client. The construct validity of the overall scale and the internal reliabilities for each of the sub-scale are considered satisfactory for research purposes.

Child Sexual Assault Supportive Beliefs – assessed using The Sex With Children (SWCH) scale (Marshall, unpublished) which comprises 18-items reflecting statements made by offenders which serve to justify sex with children. The range of possible responses are 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = undecided, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. No items are reverse scored. Higher scores indicate greater agreement with scale items (more strongly held beliefs). Missing items are given a score of 2. The SWCH scale is considered to be a measure of general beliefs that justify sexual contact between adults and children. The scale is reported to have two dimensions: harmless sex with children beliefs and provocative sexual children beliefs. The internal reliabilities of both sub-scales are considered satisfactory (Mann et al., 2007).

Data analysis

The pre-test post-test analysis was conducted using a repeated MANOVA, which was performed comparing the scores at pre-intervention with those post intervention. Furthermore, to assess the likely moderating effects of self-efficacy, dispositional empathy and attachment insecurity, a series of zero order correlations were performed between these control and the outcome variables separately for the pre-intervention assessment and again for the post-intervention assessment. A comparison of the emergent correlation coefficients between the two time periods was then computed in order to ascertain whether dispositional factors which might have been associated with poor outcome measures at the beginning of the programme still maintained their effect despite engagement in the programme.

Results and discussion

See Table 1. The one almost statistically significant finding in the analysis of programme outcomes is that there appears to be an improvement in the working

Table 1. Comparing pre- and post-intervention scores.

	Mean Pre-intervention Score	Mean Post-intervention Score	Statistical Significance (One-tailed)
Sex with children is harmless	11.29	11.64	p = .104
Children are sexually provocative	9.36	8.14	p = .127
Mistrust in the CPS	9.43	9.00	p = .292
Working relationship with the CPS	11.79	12.36	p = .052
Receptivity to the CPS	14.14	14.21	p = .442
Buy-in with the CPS	26.79	28.36	p = .145

relationship that the partners have with Child Protection Services. Other important trends that are heading towards significance are: 1) There is an increase in the partners' level of buy-in to Child Protection Services, which includes both having positive expectations about the usefulness of the support offered and their own degree of investment in the engagement; 2) There is quite a notable reduction in the degree to which children are seen as sexually provocative at the post-intervention stage of assessment; 3) There is a slight trend towards there being a small increase in seeing sex with children as harmless.

With regards to the relationships between the different personality and dispositional variables assessed at the pre-intervention stage and the outcome variables at pre and post intervention (see Table 2), the following relationships are noteworthy:

1. Individuals who indicated relatively high scores on the measures of self-efficacy, personal distress or avoidant attachment style demonstrated an increased (although not statistically significant) chance of seeing sex with children as being relatively harmless at the post-intervention, but at not the pre-intervention, stage of analysis;
2. Furthermore whilst empathic concern was negatively associated with both belief in the harmlessness of sex with children and the notion that children are provocative, this relationship was no longer evident at the post-intervention stage.

It is tentatively suggested here that the programme's focus on understanding the offenders' behaviour might be serving to increase empathy for the offending partner. This would relate to the discussion in the background literature about the tendency for taking sides in three-person scenarios. Whilst not all of the participants are affected in this way, it appears that sufficiently diverse individuals are affected and thus it is recommended that more consideration is given to the child victim's perspective in the training. Overall, at the post-intervention the belief that sex with children is harmless is positively associated with participants' scores on self-efficacy and avoidant attachment style. Again, as was noted in the descriptive analysis of the Sex with Children scale, the participants' perceptions of children as being provocative is not adversely affected.

Table 2. Relationships between the personality variables and the Sex with Children scales.

Scale	Sub-scales	Harmless sex		Provocative children	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy	r = .379	r = .506*	r = -.004	r = .194
Insecure attachment	Avoidant attachment	r = .371	r = .595*	r = .107	r = .133
	Attachment dependency	r = .347	r = .292	r = .281	r = .292
Trait empathy	Perspective taking	r = .313	r = .252	r = -.057	r = .035
	Fantasy	r = .047	r = .116	r = -.078	r = -.073
	Empathic concern	r = - .239	r = -.002	r = -.302	r = .025
	Personal distress	r = .206	r = .455**	r = .167	r = .324

NB: 'r' refers to the correlation coefficient for Pearson's Product Moment calculations. * means that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant; ** means that it has attained a level of borderline significance.

The most noteworthy findings from these correlational analyses (see Table 3) were:

a) There was a positive relationship between empathic concern for others and a mistrust in the Child Protection Services. This relationship was evident at pre-intervention and appeared to increase in strength (but not significantly) at post-intervention. This suggests that those who demonstrate high empathic concern are the most distrusting of the Child Protection Services both pre- and post-intervention;

b) There was a positive relationship between avoidant attachment styles and favourable working relationships with the Child Protection Services. The strength of this relationship appeared to be stronger at the post-intervention stage.

c) There is a borderline trend indicating a positive relationship between self-efficacy and receptivity towards the Child Protection Services at the post-intervention stage. Importantly, this relationship was not evident at the pre-intervention stage. This suggests that the programme may have a greater positive effect on enhancing receptivity for the participants with high self-efficacy.

d) Post-intervention there is a negative relationship between scores on the measure of avoidant attachment and receptivity to the notion that they have a need that can be fulfilled by the Child Protection Services. This relationship was not evident at the pre-intervention stage. Whilst this finding appears strange in relation to the positive association found between avoidant

Table 3. Relationships between the personality and dispositional variables and the Clients' Engagement with Child Protective Services subscales.

Scale	Sub-scales	Mistrust		Working Relationship		Receptivity		Buy-in (expectancy and investment)	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy	r = .077	r = .051	r = .211	r = −.059	r = .083	**r = −.460**	r = .143	r = .239
Insecure attachment	Avoidant attachment	r = .334	r = −.041	r = .313	**r = .550**	r = .014	**r = −.428**	r = −.233	r = −.345
	Attachment dependency	r = .169	r = .346	r = .070	r = .021	r = .243	r = .212	**r = −.406**	r = −.356
Trait empathy	Perspective taking	r = −.063	r = .307	r = .051	r = −.069	r = .085	r = .181	r = .297	r = −.173
	Fantasy	r = −.096	r = −.104	r = −.142	r = .130	r = .310	r = −.097	r = .049	r = .085
	Empathic concern	**r = −.559**	**r = −.685**	r = −.180	r = −.407	r = −.039	r = −.058	**r = .415**	r = .376
	Personal distress	r = −.078	r = .109	r = .283	r = .212	r = −.088	**r = −.664**	r = −.125	**r = −.416**

NB: 'r' refers to the correlation coefficient for Pearson's Product Moment calculations. Results highlighted in bold have reached 0.05 level of confidence. Those highlighted in bold and italicized have attained a level of borderline significance.

      attachment and working relationships with Child Protection Services, it may be that their need is less and engagement with Child Protection Services is less difficult.

e) Importantly, at the pre-intervention stage there was a negative relationship between 'buy-in' with the Child Protection Services and dependent attachment, which by the post-intervention stage had changed to a positive relationship. Analysis exploring the relationships between attachment style and engagement with Child Protection Services suggests that whilst participants with a dependent attachment style may not appear to be engaging well with the Child Protection Services at the pre-intervention stage, they appeared to demonstrate a very significant and favourable change in their level of engagement after the programme. The practical significance of these is that these partners are the ones most likely to be viewed by referrers as being unsuitable for the programme, when in fact they possibly have the most to gain in terms of facilitating active engagement with the Child Protection Services.

There was a borderline trend post-intervention which indicates that those with high levels of personal distress are less likely to buy-in to the Child Protection Services. Whilst there was a negative relationship at the pre-intervention stage this appears to become stronger following programme participation, although not significantly so. This, in combination with earlier findings in relation to high scorers on personal distress, might suggest that potential programme participants who score high on this measure might benefit from some personal psychotherapeutic support either prior to, or to run alongside the programme.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations of this study associated with being based on a relatively small sample size and the lack of control group, the findings do offer some tentative support for the efficacy of Circles South East Non-Offending Partners' programme (Breaking the Cycle) in achieving their aims. Importantly, engagement in the programme appears to be associated with an enhancement in the relationships between Child Protection Services and the non-offending partners. This has positive implications for the safeguarding of their own children. Overall, the non-offending partners' scores were not suggestive of a tendency to endorse the child sexual abuse myths and thus they did not appear to have been groomed by their partners to accept their rationalizations, minimizations and denials. However, there was slightly less likelihood of seeing children as sexually provocative, but a small, non-significant risk of seeing sex with children as relatively harmless. This latter finding might be attributed to the tendency identified by Breithaupt (2012) for individuals to empathize with those who they are most connected. This then serves to reduce their ability to take the perspective of the victim who is unknown to them. Two recommendations would be offered in light of this. First, to consider enhancing the amount of time given during the training to the victim's perspective. Second, to inform the

programme participants of the tendency to only feel empathy for one person in a victim−offender dyad, and to allow them to explore how this might impact on their ability to take the perspective of the victim. It would be premature to conclude that a similar finding would emerge had the victims been their own children, since according to Breithaupt's conception, they should feel empathy more readily for children with whom they are connected.

The findings in relation to the possible influence of individual differences related to attachment style, self-efficacy and dispositional empathy should offer reassurance to referrers. Non-offending partners who exhibit a high level of dependency in their intimate relationships may not be seen by referrers as suitable candidates for this type of programme. However, the analysis suggests that such individuals can experience a positive change in relation to their inclination to 'buy-in' to Child Protection Services. High levels of empathic concern appear to be associated with a greater distrust of Child Protection Services and this did not appear to be reduced following engagement in the programme. It might be that the suggestions made above to increase victim-perspective taking might help to overcome this issue. Finally, and unsurprisingly, high levels of self-efficacy were associated with slightly higher rates of positive change in levels of receptivity towards the Child Protection Services. Consequently, where potential referrals have particularly low levels of self-efficacy it might be advisable to offer counselling or peer support to increase self-efficacy so that they are able to benefit maximally from the programme.

Funding

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