Chapter 20
Sex Offender Treatment Program in Prison and Rehabilitation

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ABSTRACT

The chapter seeks to demonstrate and describe, from a critical perspective, the most widespread treatment models and programs for sex offenders in prison, opting for integrated approach based on risk assessment and the evaluation of their psychological and social characteristics. Furthermore, specifying factors that can affect the success of the treatment leads to the conclusion that sex offenders require the implementation of differentiated programs focused on their personal characteristics and needs. The reduction of recidivism is indicated as a criterion with which to assess the effectiveness of the programs, although the results achieved in research on the matter do not always agree and do not always confirm a reduction in repeat offenses in the subjects undergoing treatment. The chapter concludes by calling for greater program development and more precise methodological accuracy in verifying the results.

INTRODUCTION

Punishment or Rehabilitation? Which Intervention for Sex Offenders

Sexual crime is one of the most alarming and disconcerting aspects of the criminal phenomenon as a whole. It is in fact an offense that arouses particular social indignation and a greater sense of insecurity compared to other forms of crime, although these are certainly not less serious. The strong emotional impact caused by these crimes is an expression, as has been argued, not only of a culture where sexuality has a meaning that most frequently offends the moral sphere of people, but also of the violation of private life and of affective relationships, mostly used to guarantee protection and emotional development. In fact, statistics show that the overwhelming majority of sexual abuses and violence occur in intimate

relationships, and in acquaintance or educational/caring relationships. The recent survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics, which has updated previous data for 2006 to the last 5 years, shows that among women between the ages of 16 and 70 (6 million 788 thousand) 21% (4 million 520 thousand) have been generally a victim of sexual violence, 5.4% (1 million 157 thousand) suffered the most serious forms of sexual violence such as rape (652 thousand) and attempted rape (746 thousand). The data confirm the greater incidence of intimate relationships between victims and perpetrators or, in any case, the presence of pre-existing relationships: in fact separated or divorced women have suffered physical or sexual violence to a greater extent than the others (51.4% against 31.5% of the Italian average). Higher incidences are also found for women aged between 25 and 44 years old, among the most educated (with a degree or diploma), among those who work in important professional positions or who are looking for a job. Moreover, to be considered are the available data regarding sexual abuse against minors, which also include pedophilia phenomena: in Italy, according to Istat, in 2010 there were 574 sexual acts with minors, reported by the police to the judicial authorities (Istat, 2014 cit. in Rosso et.al. 2015). Most of the abuses and violence involve children, even though such offences are statistically less evident because they are mostly undeclared, an aspect that inevitably increases social indignation and the demand for exemplary punishment of offenders. The damage caused to the victims is incalculable, especially if they are developing adolescents: numerous surveys report the invasiveness of the consequences of the violence that affects the psychological and behavioral sphere of those who have suffered the crime. Some authors (Di Cori, Fedeli & Sabatello, 2012) stress the devastating and invasive effects of the traumas suffered. These can produce perversions in the structure of the individual's psyche, deviating his/her development and binding his/her to the paradoxical, coactive logic of repetition. Among the consequences is also the future growth of antisocial behaviors, which however presuppose the combined action of other forms of abuse, not just sexual (Di Cori, Fedeli, 2010, Fedeli, Di Cori & Sabatello, 2011). Other studies (Carr, Duff & Craddock, 2018) highlight the consequences on the life cycle of mental health, including post-traumatic stress disorder, physical health and psychosocial adaptation. To be stressed is that in many cases the perpetrators of sexual crimes do not always come from degraded and culturally poor social environments. An example is provided by pedophilia, which causes greater social alarm, considering that the perpetrators of sexual crimes are often hidden and, apparently, above suspicion. Because of the impact on victims, social alarm and indignation about a crime that injures people in the most private and intimate sphere of human relations, these offenders were for long subject to measures exclusively focused on physical punishment such as drastic pharmacological measures like chemical castration.

Recently, due to the observation that punitive and repressive actions did not yield effective results on the reduction of recidivism, experiments have been developed above all in North America, Canada and the United States, where the phenomenon of sexual abuse and violence is particularly widespread and where a significant number of sex offenders are brought to justice: for example, according to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2008 more than 165,000 sex offenders convicted of rape and sexual assault were in prison (Guerino, Harrison & Sabol, 2011). The National Parole Resource Center (2014) reports that 95% will be subjected to non-custodial measures with an approximate rate of 10,000–20,000 per year. Therefore, a fruitful basis has been created to envisage models of treatment during the execution of the sentence in prison and in community supervision, also after release. This is completely different to what occurs in Italy, where the experiences of treatment programs are implemented only within the prison, with the purpose of promoting a rehabilitation program for the offender as well as enacting punishment. The main aim is to rehabilitate the person, certainly, but also to reduce the recidivism and consequently ensure greater safety for the potential victims, mainly women, and children and for society as a whole.

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