Dynamics Related To Youth Sex Offending

South Africa just like other countries is faced with the challenge of youth engaging in sexual activities. It is important to note that the study and treatment of young offenders are new and not much is known, however many male offenders share some common characteristics (Charles et al, 2005). It is believed that there are many things that push youth to sexually offend, it can be sexual curiosity, repetition of violating the rights of other people, sometimes it can be a result of mental health problems, their behaviour can be associated with poor judgement and they can be aggressive to prove how powerful they are(Holtzhausen at el,2014). According to Naidoo et al (2014), adolescent offenders are sometimes influenced by their peers into engaging in sexual offences and their offending can also be initiated by watching pornography, being stimulated by it and eventually growing a desire to experiment with what has been seen. Holtzhausen et al (2012) also mention that youth sex offending in this lifetime cannot be discussed without focusing on the role played by technology. Sexual behaviour problems in youth can be associated with traumatic situations; the trauma cycle implies that there is a level of exposure to trauma experienced by the offending youth (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). It is further stated that, in order for a crime to take place, there has to be a selection of victim by the offender, stalking, planning and making a decision to act (Holtzhausen et al, 2012)

Factors Impacting Youth Offending Behaviour

Chances to change an offender’s behaviour may be slim unless there is an understanding of the factors that contribute to it (Naidoo et al, 2014). These factors include the following:

Family Factors

The characteristics of families of youth who offend differ, but factors associated with youth offending for almost all of them, often include lower levels of positive communication and warmth, lack of parental monitoring, high rate of conflict within the family, high rate of substance use by parents, parents with histories of abuse (Holtzhausen at el, 2012, Naidoo at el,2014). Children in violent homes learn that violence is an appropriate way of resolving conflict in intimate relationships and that assaultive behaviour and threats are effective in maintaining power and control over other people (Naidoo et al, 2014).

Community Factors

These factors are allocated in the community where the offender originally comes from and may cause offending behaviour. Offending behaviour and violence are likely to take place in communities where people have little attachment to the community, also in disorganised communities with limited social cohesion, limited infrastructure and lower levels of social control (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Other factors leading to offending behaviour in communities include easy access to crime, lack of positive role models, association with people who are involved in criminal activities, level of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in the community (Holtzhausen et al, 2012).

School Factors

Youth who get involved in anti-social behaviour at an early age are at risk of dropping out of school, academic failure also adds to their reasons of dropping out of school and their lack of commitment to school suggests that their focus may be shifted to delinquent activities such as substance abuse (Holtzhause at el, 2012). Other factors in the educational setting include continuous criminal activities, rebellious behaviour towards school management, inability to build positive relationships with schoolmates of their age (Holtzhausen et al, 2012).

Individual Factors

Young people who feel isolated from the community, who associate with peers participating in criminal activities, sexual activities are at risk of offending (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). The earlier young people start committing crimes, dropping out of school, becoming sexually active, the greater the chances of them engaging in offending behaviour (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Other individual factors include the inability to establish adequate relationships, emotional loneliness, low self-esteem, stress, loss of hope, anger if problems are not solved according to one's wishes, not understanding the impact of crime on others and some factors are biological such as brain trauma at birth, foetal alcohol syndrome and psychiatric disorders (Holtzhausen at el, 2012).

Treatment Modalities And Theoretical Frameworks Towards Youth Sex Offending Treatment

Treatment of sexual offenders has gradually developed over the years; new models of treatment have been developed to complement existing models (Yates, 2013). Sexual offending, for a very long time, has been seen as a serious problem with significant impacts on victims, their families and the entire society (Yates, 2013).

Treatment Modalities

Principles Of Effective Correlational Intervention

In correctional intervention to deal with offenders, specific principles have been found to be essential in reducing recidivism. According to Holttzhausen (et al, 2012), these principles include the risk principle which states that criminal behaviour can be predicted and that treatment should match the level of the risk posed by the offender. Yates (2013) suggests that treatment and supervision should be longer in duration, be applied more frequently when assessed risk to re-offend increases. He further states that intensive treatment should be given to higher risk offenders and lower risk offenders are unlikely to need specialised treatment, therefore they can benefit from routine supervision, the risk of recidivism will be reduced (Yates, 2013).

The second principle is the need principle which states that treatment and interventions such as supervision should clearly target the criminogenic needs of offenders and that these should be highlighted when providing the treatment (Holtzhausen et al, 2012, Yates 2013). Criminogenic needs can be categorised into two: a) dynamic risk factors (changeable) and b) static risk

factors (unchangeable), and when these factors are addressed properly they are more likely to be followed by reduced reoffending (Holtzhausen et al, 2012).

The third principle is the responsivity principle; it highlights how the treatment should be provided (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Treatment should be administered in a way that is responsive to different characteristics of an individual, such as language, personality style and cognitive abilities in order to increase the effectiveness of treatment provided (Yates, 2013).

The application of the RNR model and its principles indicate that treatment that complies with these principles is more effective than the treatments that do not adhere to these principles (Yates, 2013).

Cognitive-behavioural Treatment

This modality of treatment is based on the idea that in every situation or interaction, thoughts of an individual, attitudes and beliefs determine his/her emotional experience and behaviour (Moster at el, 2008). If an individual wants to change his/her behaviour and experiences, cognitive behaviour therapy suggests that person must change his/her thoughts and beliefs (Moster at el, 2008). According to Yates (2013), the main focus of cognitive treatment is on changing patterns of behaviour associated with sexual offending, by doing that criminal thoughts are replaced by non-deviant patterns. The main goal of cognitive behavioural treatment with sexual offenders is to help reduce chances of re-offending in future but the therapist should also help offenders regain a sense of self-worth, which will also reduce the chances of re-offending (Moster et al, 2008). Cognitive behavioural interventions include changing attitudes, challenging cognitive distortions, addressing problem-solving skills, improve sexual and intimate relationships and that increases the chances of reducing deviant sexual arousal (Yates, 2013).

Group Therapy

Some youth sexual offenders receive treatment by means of individual psycho-therapy but many treatment programmes prefer a group therapy (Efta-Breitbach at el, 2004). The important goal of group therapy treatment is identifying and expressing feelings, developing social skills and appropriate relationship with peers (Efta-Breitbach at el, 2004). One benefit of using group therapy with youth sex offenders is that the environment and the procedure of interaction provide many opportunities for extended learning and modelling from peers. Group-based treatment offers a number of opportunities to develop new skills such as dealing with conflict effectively, improved emotional communication and learning about one’s impact on other people (Ware et al, 2009). Given the fact that sex offenders are viewed differently by society and as such, they are stigmatised for their behaviour, group therapy helps them deal with that stigma by associating with those who share the same problem, in the process provide opportunities for learning, getting support and positive feedback (Ware at el, 2009). Having the offender talk about his offence in a group setting allows other members to reflect on their offences as well as that of the sharing offender, this give and take the approach of group therapy to provide a learning opportunity for all those involved (Moster et al, 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks Towards Youth Sex Offending Treatment

Strength Perspective Theory

The strengths perspective approach assumes that human beings have capacity for growth and changes (Early at el, 2000). This approach attempts to understand clients in terms of their strengths and capabilities, it involves examining survival skills, knowledge, abilities, resources and desires that can be used in some way to assist the individual meet the intended results (Early et al, 2000). This theory is also built on the assumption that people have an important knowledge in defining their situations, problems as well as potential problems, however, Holtzhausen (2012) is of the view that, even though offenders know exactly what happened during the commission of the offence, that does not necessarily mean they know all the factors involved. The social worker should be responsible for helping the youth offender through a specific process in discovering the strengths needed for change (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). The perspective is also of the view that individuals and families have many abilities, capabilities, strengths, therefore if they seek help for the problem, they are already more than the problem (Early at el, 2000). In order for this perspective to be effective, there has to be a relationship between youth offenders, correctional facilities, NGO agencies, family, community and other relevant stakeholders (Holtzhausen et al, 2012).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is built on the idea that individuals engage in behaviour they have been exposed to on a repeated basis, this explains the possibility that an individual who has been exposed to trauma as a result of sexual abuse is likely to repeat the act willingly or unwillingly (Holtzhausen at el, 2012). The repeated behaviour by the offenders hinders the process of effectively developing decision-making skills as well as the ability to solve problems. Psycho-educational techniques have been put in place with cognitive-behavioural techniques to deal with cognitive distortions (Efta-Breitbach et al, 2004). The main purpose of psycho-education is to offer youth sex offenders and their loved ones information regarding factors associated with sexual offending (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Psycho-education involves sex education topic which discusses common sexual myths, diseases that are sexually transmitted, also talks about anger management, where youth sex offenders are taught how to control their anger as they tend to be aggressive when committing an offence (Efta-Breitbach at el, 2004).

Sex education is based on the principle of social learning theory as youth sex offenders learn about factors associated with sexual offending (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Youth sex offenders learn about factors associated with sex offending with the hope that their behaviour will change for better.

Systems Theory

Systems theory is based on the idea that an individual does not exist in isolation, the nature in which an individual, their society and services co-exist is central to this theory (Lesser at el, 2007). Holtzhausen (2012) suggests that understanding the system perspective is important as youth offending does not only affect the abuser and victim; it also impacts other people involved in their lives. This theory also implies that in order for change to take place effectively, the factors leading to sexual offending have to be understood (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). It is further stated that in many cases youth sex offenders show signs of family instability, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental problems and sometimes they are victims themselves

(Holtzhausen et al, 2012). The family and significant others of the offender can either contribute positively or negatively in the treatment of the youth offender, therefore a social worker has to be aware of every factor affecting the offender's treatment so as to provide the best services possible.

Behaviour Theory

Behaviour therapy is another approach that is being used in the treatment of youth sex offenders. It is based on the idea of relapse prevention. Relapse prevention teaches offenders to dissect their offences into component parts of thoughts, feelings, behaviours and triggers (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). It requires youth sex offenders to identify all the internal and external factors that were part of the original offending process and find ways to reduce the triggers of such behaviour (Efta-Breitbach et al, 2004). Having the youth sex offender accept responsibility for behaviour is often the first step in behaviour treatment, accepting responsibility is encouraged through addressing shame, embarrassment and fear of consequences (Efta-Breitbach et al, 2004). Building empathy for victims and potential victims is improved by means of behavioural treatment, addressing faulty thoughts that contribute to offending behaviour, youth sex offenders are believed to benefit from exploring what their victims may have been thinking during the offence (Efte-Breitbach et al, 2004).

Helping the offender develop empathy is beneficial because it can help the offender become more sensitive to the undesired outcomes that his/her family, as well as the potential victims and their families, could experience should he/she re-offend. The social worker must work towards helping the offender identify factors that trigger the offending behaviour, should those be addressed, chances of re-offending could be reduced.

Assessment And Intervention

Assessing youth people with sexually harmful behaviours can be very important in a number of ways. Assessment is based on the offence, the traumatic events and it includes the strengths of the youth sex offender (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). It pays attention to possible risks of re-introducing the individual back into society, pays attention to the young person's environment to check whether there is an opportunity of further offending or not (Griffin et al, 2004 and Holtzhausen et al, 2012). The assessment seeks ways of modifying behaviour; therefore effective change cannot take place without thorough and accurate assessment (Holtzhausen et al, 2012). Assessment of sexual offending is based on identifying all elements and factors contributing to the offending behaviour, the dynamics underlying sexual offending, circumstances where sexual behaviour manifests and an individual's ability to function effectively without showing any form of inappropriate sexual behaviour (Holtzhausen et al, 2012).

The process of assessment is needed to gather information about the youth sex offender and make informed decisions as to how to manage them and their situation (Griffin et al, 2004). It helps practitioners to understand the view their clients have about their situation, what the problem means to them, helps to identify obstacles and strengths, address what needs to change, examine the young person's dedication to change and their suitability and readiness for change (Grffin at el, 2004). An informed assessment is more likely to assist the social worker to intervene in a manner that will bring an effective change in youth sex offenders, the accurate

the assessment, the more relevant the intervention programme.

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