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Sexual offender’s experiences of polygraph testing: a thematic study in three probation trusts

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Abstract

1
2 Post-conviction polygraph testing of sexual offenders is controversial and the use of the
3 polygraph as a means of supporting supervision of sexual offenders has only recently been
4 explored. This study examined qualitatively, offender managers' and sexual offenders' views
5 on the mandatory use of the polygraph in community-based supervision. Fifteen polygraphed
6 offenders and their ten offender managers (polygraph group), and ten non-polygraphed
7 offenders and their ten offender managers (comparison group) were asked about their
8 experiences and perceptions of mandatory polygraph use. Using thematic analysis, results
9 provided four main themes: (1) truth detection, (2) perceptions of behavior change, (3)
10 perceptions of polygraph as part of supervision and, (4) national implementation of polygraph
11 testing. Results suggest several benefits to mandatory polygraph testing as a support for
12 supervision, including: offenders making more high-risk disclosures, motivating offender
13 honesty, and aiding offenders' compliance with license conditions.

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15 Key words: *Sexual offender supervision, polygraph, thematic analysis,*
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Sexual Offenders’ Experiences of Polygraph Testing: A Thematic Analysis

The polygraph has been widely used in USA criminal justice settings (e.g., criminal investigations) for the past 80 years (Grubin & Madsen, 2005; National Research Council, 2003). However, despite its longstanding and extensive use, the accuracy and reliability of the polygraph have been heavily criticized (Adelson, 2004; British Psychological Society, 2004; Meijer, Verschuere, Merckelbach & Crombez, 2008), with many arguing that there is insufficient evidence to support its accuracy (Rosky, 2012).

Although the controversy surrounding the validity of the polygraph as a method of detecting deception has helped to nurture on-going debates regarding its use (Branaman & Gallagher, 2005), its use has been expanded to post-conviction situations, including the treatment and supervision of sexual offenders (Grubin, 2002). Within this context, polygraph testing is designed to generate offenders’ revelations regarding their involvement in risk situations (e.g., breaches of licence conditions), rather than as a “lie detector” (British Psychological Society, 2004; Cross & Saxe, 2001), and evidence suggests that polygraph use continues to grow in this post-conviction capacity (Consigli, 2002; English, Jones, Pasini-Hill, Patrick, & Cooley-Towell, 2000; Grubin, 2003; 2008; Grubin, Madsen, Parsons, Sosnowski & Warberg, 2004). For example, during the 1990s probation and parole supervisors’ use of the polygraph as a supervision aid increased from 9.8% to 16.3%, and by 2000, this had risen to approximately 25% (Abrams & Simmons, 2000).

Post-conviction polygraph testing with sexual offenders has generally focused on the test as a “truth facilitator”, concentrating on the content of disclosures made during the polygraph rather than the overall test result (i.e., pass or fail; Grubin et al., 2004; Holden, 2000). US research examining the polygraph as a “truth facilitator” suggests that its use lies in its ability to elicit more reliable information from offenders, including, more accurate descriptions of their sexual histories, sexual fantasies, offence behaviors, and victim

1 information (e.g., number and type; Ahlmeyer, Heil, McKee, & English; 2000; English et al.,
2 2000; Grubin, 2002; Grubin et al., 2004; Wilcox, 2000). It has been argued that using the
3 polygraph in this way can be helpful for treatment in terms of gaining further information for
4 relapse prevention and for developing effective supervision (Abrams & Ogard, 1986; Edson,
5 1991; Dutton, 2000; Harrison & Kirkpatrick, 2000). Although these findings are encouraging,
6 it is not clear whether polygraph testing leads to offenders disclosing more risk-relevant
7 information than they would under normal supervision. This is because no studies have
8 incorporated adequate comparison groups and, no evaluations of offenders' and offender
9 managers' views have been conducted. The current study aimed to remedy this by comparing
10 qualitatively, the views of offenders and offender managers undergoing polygraph-supported
11 supervision (polygraph group) with the views of offenders and offender managers undergoing
12 normal supervision (comparison group).

13 In the UK, criminal justice agencies have avoided using the polygraph for treatment
14 and management purposes (British Psychological Society, 2004; Gannon, Beech, & Ward
15 2008). Consequently, few UK studies have examined the use of the polygraph as a
16 supervision tool. Those that have, have employed volunteer samples (Grubin, 2010; Grubin et
17 al., 2004; Madsen, Parsons, & Grubin 2004). For example, Grubin and colleagues carried out
18 a prospective study which evaluated whether expectations of a polygraph test led to
19 reductions in the likelihood that sexual offenders would engage in risky behavior.
20 Participants ($n = 50$) were informed they would undergo either a polygraph test or a behavior
21 review in 3 months' time. Three months later all participants were interviewed about their
22 risk-relevant behavior, and all underwent polygraph testing. The majority of offenders failed
23 their test and disclosed high levels of risky behavior (e.g., masturbating to deviant fantasies).
24 All offenders were then informed that they would receive another polygraph test in 6 months
25 and this test was failed by only 29% of offenders, who again reported risky behaviors. Of this

1 29%, 60% had already disclosed these risky behaviors to their supervisors, compared to only
2 3% who did so before the initial polygraph. Although these results are encouraging, the
3 voluntary nature of the study led to under half of the original sexual offender sample ($n = 21$)
4 engaging in the follow-up polygraph test.

5 Following this study the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)
6 commissioned a larger voluntary pilot across ten English probation areas (Grubin, 2010) to
7 compare volunteer polygraphed sexual offenders with a group of sexual offenders who
8 received normal supervision. Findings suggested that, compared to the normal supervision
9 group, polygraphed offenders were 14 times more likely to disclose risk-relevant information.
10 Nevertheless, this study also suffered from its reliance on volunteer participants, which,
11 together with a lack of robust matching criteria between polygraph and comparison groups
12 (i.e., on ethnicity, previous sexual offences, index offence, etc.) and a lack of data availability
13 due to incomplete disclosure forms, negatively impacted the quality of the findings.

14 Extending the context of these previous studies; Gannon et al. (2014), commissioned
15 by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), conducted an evaluation of a pilot-project using mandatory
16 polygraph testing. The evaluation compared the number of clinically significant disclosures
17 (i.e., disclosures which are relevant for management, supervision, risk assessment, or
18 treatment) made by polygraphed and non-polygraphed sexual offenders undergoing
19 supervision in the community. Over a 21-month period, offender managers of 332
20 polygraphed sexual offenders and 303 comparison offenders, supplied information about
21 offenders' risk-relevant disclosures, the seriousness of those disclosures, and the actions
22 taken by offender managers as a result. Findings showed polygraph testing increased the
23 chance that sexual offenders would reveal risk-relevant disclosures. More specifically,
24 offender managers in the polygraph group reported a higher proportion of offenders making
25 at least one risk-relevant disclosure compared to the comparison group (i.e., 76.5% vs. 51.2%

1 respectively). Compared to comparison offenders, polygraphed offenders also made more
2 total disclosures, and failed polygraph tests led to more in-depth conversations with offender
3 managers, more frequent tests and potentially increased levels of supervision. Findings also
4 showed that polygraph testing increased the likelihood of preventative actions being taken by
5 offender managers. Gannon et al. concluded that the polygraph appeared to be useful in
6 eliciting disclosures relevant to risk, for all types of sexual offender. These results prompted a
7 legislation change in 2014 to allow for polygraph testing of sexual offenders under license
8 (particularly high-risk offenders). However, what the Gannon et al. (2014) paper did not
9 show was how including polygraph testing as part of supervision was perceived by offenders
10 and offender managers.

11 The current study was based on the data collected in the Gannon et al., evaluation and
12 its aim was to identify qualitatively the strengths and weaknesses of using the polygraph as
13 an aid to supervising sexual offenders in the community. To this end, we had the following
14 research questions: **1.** How do offenders who are undergoing polygraph testing and their
15 offender managers view the use of the polygraph as an aid to supervision? **2.** How do
16 offenders who are not undergoing polygraph testing and their offender managers view the
17 polygraph as a potential aid to supervision?

18

19

METHOD

Design

21 As the Ministry of Justice designated which probation areas should include polygraph
22 testing and which areas should maintain usual supervision practice, the selection of
23 participants into this research was not random. Individuals released from prison into pilot
24 polygraph probation areas (probation trusts in the East and West Midlands of England)
25 between 31st March 2010 and 21st December 2011, were eligible for inclusion as the

1 polygraph sample. Comparison offenders were eligible for inclusion if they were released
2 from prison into comparison areas (in the North of England) between 1st April 2010 and 21st
3 December 2011. Although polygraph testing for these individuals was mandatory, research
4 participation was voluntary. All research was conducted in accordance with BPS Ethical
5 Guidelines.

6 **Participants**

7 Forty-seven participants, who had previously taken part in Gannon et al.'s (2014)
8 pilot-project, were randomly selected and participated in the current study. They included
9 offender managers of polygraph sexual offenders ($n = 12$), offender managers of non-
10 polygraph comparison sexual offenders ($n = 10$), polygraph sexual offenders ($n = 15$) and
11 non-polygraphed comparison sexual offenders ($n = 10$). Three of the polygraph offender
12 managers were each supervising two of the polygraph offenders we interviewed. The
13 polygraph group (15 males, M age = 40.07 years, $SD = 12.72$) consisted of sexual offenders
14 released from prison into one of the selected probation areas and the majority self-identified
15 as White British (93.3%). The comparison group (9 males and 1 female; M age = 42.75, $SD =$
16 18.31) were recruited from seven comparison probation trusts and were matched to
17 polygraphed offenders as closely as possible on their location (i.e. rural/urban),
18 demographics, and Risk Matrix 2000 scores. All self-identified as White British (100%).

19 **Materials**

20 A semi-structured interview schedule was devised to assess offenders' and offender
21 managers' perceptions of supervision with and without the use of the polygraph.
22 For example, offenders and their corresponding managers in the polygraph group were asked
23 about their experiences of supervision which included polygraph testing (i.e., *expectations of*
24 *polygraph supervision, outcomes of each polygraph test, feelings surrounding these*
25 *outcomes, disclosures made during polygraph supervision*), effectiveness of polygraph

1 supervision (i.e., *behavioral change in offenders, helpfulness in stopping offending behavior,*
2 *effects on offenders' relationships*) and overall perception of polygraph supervision (i.e.,
3 *views of polygraph testing, the potential of using the polygraph for all sexual offenders*).
4 Similarly, offenders and corresponding managers in the comparison group were asked about
5 their experiences of supervision (i.e., *expectations of being supervised, disclosures made*
6 *during supervision, feelings surrounding these disclosures*) and the effectiveness of
7 supervision (i.e., *behavioral change in offenders, helpfulness in stopping offending behavior,*
8 *effects on offenders' relationships*). Those in the comparison group were also asked about
9 their perceptions of polygraph testing in supervision (e.g., *views on the polygraph, the*
10 *potential of using the polygraph for all sexual offenders, etc.*).

11 Interviewees were drawn randomly from the polygraph and comparison samples of
12 offenders and offender managers, and were representative of the wider demographics of
13 participants in the Gannon et al. (2014) quantitative pilot study. Interviews focused on the
14 open-ended questions, and prompts were used if necessary. All interviews were carried out
15 via telephone and ranged in length from 7 to 74 minutes ($M = 18.05$, $SD = 10.92$).

16

17 **Procedure**

18 Offenders and offender managers from Gannon et al.'s (2014) original study were
19 invited at random to participate in the telephone interviews. Potential participants were
20 provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the study and advised that their
21 participation was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time (up to two
22 months following interview) without explanation or consequence. All participants invited to
23 participate, agreed to do so and each was given a consent form to read, sign, and return. All
24 participants were told that their responses were completely confidential and could be linked
25 only to their participant number; not to their names. However, offenders were also told that

1 any disclosures relating to: an intention to harm themselves or others, historic offences for
2 which they had not been convicted, current or planned offences, would be reported to the
3 appropriate authorities. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity consent forms were not
4 numbered and were kept separate from numbered research materials which were stored in a
5 secure location, accessible only to the research team.

6 Interviews were conducted by postgraduate researchers who were trained specifically
7 in conducting qualitative interviews. Once the interview was complete, each participant was
8 debriefed verbally and in writing, and thanked for their time.

9

10

RESULTS

11 Data analysis

12 Data was analyzed using thematic analysis; the main aim of which is to identify,
13 analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using this
14 method, data was analyzed blindly by an independent reviewer to ensure validity across
15 interpreted themes (Hosmer, 2008). This reviewer had no previous involvement with Gannon
16 et al.'s (2014) pilot-project. The coding of data was therefore carried out without knowledge
17 of the expectations or hypotheses of the project directors (Silverman, 2013), to ensure strong
18 analytical credibility and reliability in the interpretation of data (Gibbs, 2002). Subsequent to
19 the independent reviewer identifying themes and participant excerpts to support each theme,
20 researchers involved in the original polygraph pilot confirmed and validated each theme (see
21 Miles & Huberman, 1994).

22 Themes were sought on the basis of recurring comments reflecting participants' views
23 of their supervision experience, the use of the polygraph within supervision, and overall
24 views of the polygraph (e.g., effect on behavior, effect on supervision). Identified themes for
25 the polygraphed sexual offenders ($n = 15$) focused on their views of supervision using the

1 polygraph, whilst themes identified from comparison sexual offenders ($n = 10$) included their
2 views of normal supervision, and whether they thought the polygraph would improve it.
3 Themes for polygraph offender managers ($n = 12$), focused on their views of supervising
4 offenders who were undergoing polygraph testing, whilst themes for comparison offender
5 managers ($n = 10$) focused on their views of normal supervision and how supervision might
6 change if polygraph testing were introduced.

7 Themes were identified using an inductive ('bottom up') approach (Frith & Gleeson,
8 2004). This approach involves identifying themes which link strongly to the data (Patton,
9 1990). As such, they may not have a strong relationship to specific questions. We used this
10 method because our aim was to investigate overall views of supervision and polygraph
11 testing, rather than focusing on specific research questions.

12 Several themes emerged from the transcribed interviews: (1) Truth Detection; (2)
13 Perceptions of Behavior Change; (3) Perceptions of Polygraph as part of Supervision; and (4)
14 National Implementation of Polygraph Testing. Within each of these overarching themes,
15 sub-themes also emerged, see Table 1 for a summary.

16

17 **Insert Table 1 about here**

18

19 **Truth detection**

20 This theme refers to using the polygraph to motivate offenders to disclose risk-related
21 factors such as; thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, sexual behavior, historical information,
22 changes of circumstance and risky behaviors. This theme was further broken down into two
23 sub-themes; (1) *Enhances high risk disclosures* (2) *Motivates honesty*.

24 **Enhances high risk disclosures.** Nearly half of the offenders undergoing polygraph
25 testing talked about making more risk-relevant disclosures (e.g., increased access to children

1 and contact with other sexual offenders), during polygraph sessions. Others made disclosures
2 to their offender managers. For example, one offender explained that because he knew he
3 would soon be taking a polygraph test, he disclosed to his offender manager that he had
4 accessed a pornography website, *'...there was a porn website that I'd been on which*
5 *appeared to have underage girls on it and I felt it appropriate to mention that'* (PSO2). Most
6 of those who made risk-relevant disclosures admitted that they would not have done so if
7 they were not undergoing polygraph testing. Similarly, a polygraph offender manager who
8 talked about a disclosure made by an offender post-polygraph, stated that the disclosure was
9 made

10 *'...regarding substance misuse so after the test when the examiner instructed*
11 *him to go have a discussion with myself, sort of away from the equipment,*
12 *and we went into a spare room, he did then disclose to me that he had been*
13 *using steroids, and he had never previously told me that before'* (POM3).

14 In contrast, the majority of comparison offenders claimed that they could talk to their
15 offender manager about anything, but that their discussions mostly focused on low risk
16 disclosures, relating to thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and historical information, but not
17 particularly offense related. For example, when asked about any relevant disclosures they
18 made to their offender manager, one offender responded:

19 *Since I've come out, I've always felt that I can pick up the phone and have a*
20 *chat with him about anything really. All that's pressing on my mind, like*
21 *today I've just been to the doctor's because I suffer from high blood*
22 *pressure, so they have put me on medication and I came to tell him about it*
23 *because I feel that I can have a chat with him and I can tell him how I am*
24 *feeling (CSO1).*

1 When asked if they believed that offenders would have made the risk-relevant
2 disclosures that they did without the polygraph, the majority of polygraph offender managers
3 reported beliefs that offenders would not have made the disclosures without the use of the
4 polygraph. This view was supported by a majority of comparison offender managers who
5 stated that they believed that using the polygraph would lead to more disclosures.

6 **Motivates honestly.** When asked if they were truthful and honest throughout
7 supervision, all offenders in the polygraph and comparison group claimed they were always
8 honest, using phrases such as '*I always tell the truth*', '*always honest*' and '*I was absolutely*
9 *truthful*'. Although all claimed to be honest, several polygraph and comparison offender
10 managers did not believe this. Specifically, some polygraph offender managers believed that
11 their offenders were trying to beat the test. Several comparison offender managers also
12 believed that their offenders were not open and honest throughout supervision and believed
13 that polygraph testing had the potential to generate more honesty in supervision.

14 **Perception of behavior change**

15 This theme referred to both offenders' and offender managers' perceptions of whether
16 offenders changed how they managed their behavior, or how their behavior towards others
17 and/or their overall behavior had changed since being supervised. Perception of behavior
18 change was further broken down into two sub-themes; (1) *Perceived behavior change under*
19 *polygraph conditions* and (2) *Perceived behavior change under regular supervision*.

20 **Perceived behavior change under polygraph conditions.**

21 When polygraph offenders were asked if undergoing polygraph testing had helped
22 them change their behavior, the majority claimed that being tested made them think more
23 about their license conditions and a minority stated that it had helped them to *manage/change*
24 *behavior*. One participant stated:

1 *Yer, like I said it does make you think, you know, I'm not saying I would*
2 *break my license, but it also adds that extra, no I better not do it because it*
3 *might come out in the thingy, you know what I mean?(PSO4).*

4 Nearly half of the polygraphed offenders agreed that the polygraph made them focus on
5 license conditions. In particular, offenders seemed to believe that the polygraph made them
6 adhere more closely to their license conditions:

7 *Yes, it does actually, you do actually think more about your license*
8 *conditions so it sort of, every sort of day like I've always, always keep in*
9 *my mind what conditions I've got what I can't do and what I can do and*
10 *that kind of thing and you just stuck to them and its very, it's just very*
11 *very good (PSO15).*

12 This was also a common thread for polygraph offender managers, who stated that polygraph
13 testing made the offender focus more on their license conditions:

14 *Yeah, I definitely do think so because often if we're just relying on self –*
15 *disclosures from offenders we can't always check the validity of what*
16 *they're saying to us whereas the polygraph test gives you that back-up so*
17 *to speak. It gives you the opportunity to ask the questions that you are*
18 *concerned about and find out whether the offender has been deceiving at*
19 *all (POM4).*

20 Other offenders maintained that the polygraph had not impacted on their behavior, and
21 expressed views consistent with:

22 *No not really, I'm behaving and being a good boy so I really need to, I*
23 *don't feel that the polygraph, it doesn't make me change my behavior*
24 *(PSO7).*

1 Whilst offenders were mixed on their views, the majority of offender managers maintained
2 that polygraph testing had shaped certain aspects of their offenders' actions. As one offender
3 manager explained:

4 *Yes, definitely 100 percent. I would say that through the discussion that*
5 *he's had with myself and my manager, receiving the warning and the*
6 *three-way meeting after, it would have identified to him that his license*
7 *conditions are serious. And that the fact he's on recall as I've explained to*
8 *him that's privilege that being on license rather than being on custody so*
9 *its reinforced his compliance really that he needs to behave and be good*
10 *when he's in the community (POM3).*

11 **Perceived behavior change under regular supervision.**

12 When comparison offenders were asked if they thought supervision helped change
13 their behavior, nearly half stated that their behavior had not changed due to supervision,
14 whilst a small number stated that supervision had helped them manage/change their behavior.
15 A small number of offender managers also stated that supervision had helped their offenders
16 to think about their behavior.

17 When comparison offenders were asked if they thought the polygraph would help
18 them to manage/change their behavior, only a few said it would help. In contrast, a common
19 view expressed by comparison offender managers was that using the polygraph would help to
20 manage supervision sessions. For instance, when asked how additional polygraph testing
21 could help standard supervision, one offender manager stated:

22 *I think, I think it would provide more supportive evidence if that makes*
23 *sense in terms of what he's saying is the truth because obviously all I can*
24 *go on is what he self-reports and what other people report so it might have*
25 *added, in terms of when I'm looking at his sexual sort of things, I think*

1 *that would have been helpful in terms of exploring more, you know if that*
2 *highlighted issues I could have explored that area, it might highlight areas*
3 *that need exploring (COM4).*

4 **Perceptions of supervision**

5 When polygraph offenders and offender managers were asked for their views on
6 supervision and the use of the polygraph, perceptions were either predominantly (1)
7 Optimistic (e.g., the polygraph was useful for the offender) or (2) Critical (e.g., the polygraph
8 was not useful for the offender).

9 **Optimistic perceptions.** Two subthemes developed from polygraph participants who
10 exhibited an optimistic view of polygraph testing: useful tool within supervision and extra
11 deterrent/ guidance within supervision. All polygraph offender managers agreed that
12 polygraph testing was an excellent tool for enhancing supervision; *'I think it's fantastic to be*
13 *quite honest with you. [...] I think it's very very useful for offender managers... (POM4).*

14 Polygraph offenders who viewed the polygraph as a positive addition to supervision
15 made comments such as: *'I've enjoyed it', 'I can see a place for it' and 'It's just a very*
16 *positive thing.'* They also noted the usefulness of polygraph testing. For example, one
17 polygraph offender stated:

18 *I think it's there for a good guidance, it's to keep you on, as I understand,*
19 *to keep you on the straight and narrow and you've probably got a bit more*
20 *in thinking and understanding when required (PSO14).*

21 Surprisingly, some of the comparison offenders also agreed that polygraph testing
22 would be useful for helping to build trust. For example, one stated: *'it would have proved I*
23 *was telling the truth'* and another said it would show that *'I was being committed'*.

24 Whilst many comparison Offender Managers reported beliefs that offenders were
25 mostly honest and open during supervision, many noted that supervision sessions tended to

1 focus more on offenders' needs (e.g., employment problems) rather than on offence or risk
2 related issues. Several other statements made by comparison Offender Managers indicated
3 beliefs that the polygraph could help their supervisions, since supervision sessions were not
4 sufficiently challenging, and they had doubts about offenders' honesty:

5 *...it could be good because it's easy to make assumptions and get*
6 *comfortable in thinking that he seems alright.....it might keep you a little*
7 *more cautious. (COM5)*

8 *...and the ones motivated to offend obviously the polygraph would be a huge*
9 *tool in the toolbox (COM6).*

10 *I think as a tool to sort of support your assessment, I think it's, it's positive,*
11 *if that makes sense. If it's used in terms of support but it's not the be all and*
12 *end all... (COM4).*

13 **Critical perceptions of polygraph use.**

14 The majority of polygraph offenders expressed negative views of the polygraph, and
15 two main themes emerged: Skepticism about polygraph accuracy and beliefs that the test is
16 inefficient and an unnecessary waste of public money. Specifically, all polygraph offenders
17 who held negative perceptions of the polygraph seemed to doubt its ability to accurately
18 detect deception and/or that it was a 'waste of time' and 'money.' As one offender observed:

19 *I think it is merely just a paper chasing exercise in order to sell*
20 *papers. It's not something that can be used to potentially recall you*
21 *because it can't be used in a court case, because it's not libel, I*
22 *already checked that with my solicitor (PSO1).*

23 Similar thoughts were echoed by comparison offenders, the majority of whom
24 believed polygraph testing would not be useful in supervision. One offender claimed it would
25 impact on trust; another could not see its potential for effectiveness since he felt he knew his

1 own personal boundaries and limitations. Similar issues were raised by a small minority of
2 comparison offender managers who expressed concerns that using the polygraph would
3 disrupt the trust established with offenders: *'I think it moves to an interrogative style of*
4 *intervention rather than enabling educational engagement (COM8)'*. So, it appeared that
5 critical views of the polygraph were held by polygraph offenders, comparison offenders, and
6 a small minority of comparison offender managers (e.g., *accuracy/ trust of the polygraph* and
7 *justification of its use*). In contrast, the overwhelming majority of polygraph offender
8 managers said that they preferred supervision using the polygraph to regular supervision
9 practices.

10 **National Implementation of Polygraph Testing**

11 This theme refers to offender managers' and offenders' perceptions of whether the
12 polygraph should be used for offenders released on license. Based on each participant's
13 experience or knowledge of the polygraph, this theme was further divided into three
14 subthemes which became evident through participant responses; (1) Polygraph use for sexual
15 offenders; (2) Polygraph use for other offenders and (3) Opposition to polygraph use.

16 **Polygraph use for sexual offenders.**

17 Despite a general distrust of the polygraph, some polygraph offenders believed that
18 polygraph testing should targeted:

19 *sexual offenders most at risk: 'Like myself, you know, the serious, the*
20 *more serious the offence, then yes' (PSO12).*

21 These perceptions were supported by a few polygraph offender managers:

22 *I think it should be rolled out and I think it should be targeted towards*
23 *sexual offenders in particular 'cause they are a more manipulative bunch of*
24 *individuals. They will lie and be deceitful and yet they will appear very*
25 *honest and forthcoming when you're actually interviewing them. However,*

1 *the polygraph will allow you to gain the information to challenge what*
2 *they're saying if they're not actually telling the truth (POM10).*

3 The vast majority of polygraph offender managers believed the polygraph should be part of
4 the license conditions for all sexual offenders:

5 *Targeted for, how it has been, people with sexual convictions, that, I think it's got to*
6 *be part of a license really, I think in an ideal world it would be great to do everyone*
7 *that's got a community order but I think to enforce it, and to, the way it's sort of run, I*
8 *think it would have to be people with license, on license. (POM11).*

9 This was also a common thread for the comparison offenders who also perceived the
10 polygraph to be an effective tool for all sexual offenders (e.g., '*...definitely some people that*
11 *have done sexual offences*' - CSO3), with the general consensus being that it would be a
12 helpful tool to support offender managers' assessments. These views were further echoed by
13 the majority of comparison offender managers. For example:

14 *I'm under no illusion, sexual offenders are devious, manipulative*
15 *individuals who would not be able to commit their offences most of the time*
16 *if they weren't devious or manipulative, so 9 out of 10 they're not being*
17 *100% honest so something like that would definitely help to encourage them*
18 *to be honest I guess (CSOM2).*

19 It is also interesting that when asked if they would benefit from any additional resources, all
20 polygraph offender managers said that they needed nothing more than the polygraph. In
21 contrast, *all* comparison offender managers claimed that they needed additional resources to
22 support their supervision.

23 **Polygraph use for other offenders.**

24 A third of polygraph offenders considered polygraph testing as beneficial for most
25 sexual offenders. They also believed it should be used for those who are a high risk for

1 offending (i.e., prolific offenders) rather than just with sexual offenders. These perceptions
2 were illustrated in many of the responses within the polygraph offender group; *'if it's good
3 for one person, it's probably good for everyone else' (PSO14)* and *'I think so I think it could
4 become common place and it's not the answer I would have given at the very start' (PSO11)*.

5 Similarly, nearly two thirds of polygraph offender managers thought that the
6 polygraph should be part of the license conditions for all sexual offenders, and that it should
7 be part of the license conditions for all high-risk offenders. This included those at a high risk
8 of recidivism; *'...maybe it could be put for other offenders, if there's a reason, like if you
9 could justify why, if you get what I mean?'* (POM11).

10 A few comparison offenders who held positive views of polygraph testing also saw it
11 as a resource for other types of 'high risk' offenders; *'I don't know it's hard to say, murders
12 for one I suppose, murderers, bank robbers, things like that' (CSO4)*. Similarly, the majority
13 of comparison offender managers viewed the polygraph to be an effective tool for all high-
14 risk offenders, including sexual offenders: *'...I think in terms of if you are looking at
15 particularly high risk sexual offenders and high risk violent offenders, it needs to be reserved
16 for those who are riskiest' (COM9)*.

17 In contrast, a few comparison offender managers saw the use of the polygraph as an
18 effective tool for both 'high risk' offenders and those motivated not to offend:

19 *... we are talking about the men who are motivated not to reoffend and the
20 ones who are motivated to offend, obviously the polygraph will be a huge
21 tool in the toolbox. But for the men who decided that's it they don't want to
22 hurt anybody anymore they want to stop offending, it will be an aid to
23 supervision... (COM6)*.

24 **Opposition to polygraph use.**

1 managers' reports that supervision sessions often focus more on offenders' needs (e.g.,
2 medical or employment issues) than on offense-related information. The findings also
3 indicate the potential value of polygraph testing in motivating more honest interactions
4 between offenders and offender managers. These results enhance previous research
5 suggesting the benefits of using the polygraph as a truth facilitator and for increasing relevant
6 disclosures that enhance supervision (Buschman et al., 2010; Cross & Saxe, 1992; Gannon et
7 al., 2014; Grubin et al., 2004; Grubin, 2010; Roese & Jamieson, 1993; Wilcox, Sosnowski,
8 Warberg, & Beech, 2005; Wilcox, Sosnowski, Middleton & Grubin, 2002)

9 In terms of participants' perceptions of how polygraph testing impacted their
10 behavior, the majority of polygraphed offenders reported that the polygraph made them focus
11 on, think more about, and adhere to, their license conditions. Equally, polygraph testing
12 helped some to manage and/or change their behavior; a view firmly supported by the majority
13 of polygraph offender managers. These findings support previous research conducted with
14 volunteer samples, which suggest that polygraph testing helps offenders abide more closely
15 to their license conditions over time (Grubin et al., 2004).

16 Unsurprisingly, offenders' and offender managers' views on the use of polygraph
17 testing differed. Both polygraph and comparison offenders held negative views on the
18 accuracy and efficacy of the polygraph, which supports similar findings in previous work (see
19 Cross & Saxe, 1992; 2001; Iacono & Lykken, 1997). Our findings also show that the majority
20 of comparison and polygraph offenders consider polygraph testing as a hindrance to
21 supervision relations. These views were echoed by a small minority of comparison offender
22 managers who had concerns that polygraph testing would have a disruptive influence on the
23 trust between offenders and offender managers. However, all the polygraph offender
24 managers and the majority of offender managers in the comparison group stated that
25 polygraph testing was/could be a useful tool for supervision. Further, a few polygraph and

1 comparison offenders considered that polygraph testing had some value in reassuring
2 offender managers and family members that they were complying with their license
3 conditions.

4 Most significant, perhaps, was the view held by offender managers and offenders that
5 the test emphasized the importance of adhering to license conditions and thus, it has
6 deterrence potential, as noted in earlier work (Abrams & Abrams, 1993; Blasingame, 1998).
7 This is also supported by previous findings suggesting that offenders subject to periodic
8 polygraph testing as part of supervision, remained offence-free compared to non-polygraphed
9 offenders (Abrams & Ogard, 1986; Edson, 1991; Gannon et al., 2012; Grubin 2004; 2010).

10 The findings of the current study add to existing research by providing vital insight
11 into how the polygraph is viewed by both offenders and offender managers and by comparing
12 the views of those undergoing polygraph testing and their associated offender managers with
13 the views of those not undergoing polygraph testing and their offender managers. Our
14 findings indicate that offender managers are largely in favor of polygraph testing and,
15 surprisingly, so are some offenders (polygraph and comparison). The favorable views held by
16 offenders mostly centered around the use of the polygraph in demonstrating to offender
17 managers and to family members, that they were abiding by their license conditions. As such,
18 the polygraph is considered to be useful as *a demonstration of truth* as well as its more
19 commonly perceived use as a lie-detector. It was also interesting that during a time of
20 economic strain and limited resources, that offender managers, whose supervision of
21 offenders was supported by the use of the polygraph, claimed that they did not need
22 additional resources. This contrasts directly with comparison offender managers all of whom
23 named several additional resources that they believed would help their supervision practice.

24 There are, some limitations to the current study. Due to the method of participant
25 selection, results cannot be viewed as representative of all offenders or offender managers.

1 The themes found within the transcripts were developed with qualitative accounts from only
2 a small number of offenders and offender managers and so cannot be viewed as generalizable
3 to all offenders or offender managers, nationally or internationally. In addition, findings
4 cannot be generalized to female sexual offenders. Nevertheless, as previous researchers have
5 noted (Fine, 2002), an important strength of thematic analysis is its ability to identify patterns
6 within pieces of narratives which can be developed and edited within future research. Future
7 research would therefore benefit from gathering the views of a larger group of offenders
8 (both male and female) and offender managers regarding the effectiveness of the polygraph
9 as a supervision tool over a longer period of time.

10 This study reports some of the thoughts that offenders and their supervisors have
11 regarding polygraph testing of sexual offenders in the community. Our findings suggest that
12 polygraph testing can be used as a tool to support supervision by encouraging open and
13 honest discussions relevant to risk. It also encourages offenders to fully understand and
14 adhere to their license conditions. Whilst controversy regarding the polygraph as a
15 supervision aid, is likely to continue, the positive experiences reported by both offenders and
16 offender managers in this research, support contentions that polygraph testing, when used in
17 conjunction with other supervision practices, has the capacity to support offender supervision
18 and enhance public protection (Wilcox, 2013). Nonetheless, more longitudinal research is
19 needed to identify even more strengths and weaknesses of supervision using the polygraph
20 before definitive conclusions can be reached to resolve the contentions surrounding
21 polygraph testing.

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Author Note

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