



Ministry
of Justice

Impact evaluation of the prison-based Core Sex Offender Treatment Programme: a success story

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Protecting and advancing the principles of justice

Background

The task: Evaluating the impact of prison-based Core Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP) on reoffending.

- SOTP was a cognitive-behavioural psychological intervention intended to reduce sexual re-offending amongst sex offenders
- Delivered by NOMS (HMPPS) to imprisoned sex offenders
- Accredited by CSAAP since 1992
- Available in approximately one-quarter of male prisons in England and Wales
- Available for those sentenced to over 12 months - with a current (index) sex offence or a history of sexual offending; min 18 years old

Previous research on core-SOTP

Evaluation of 2000 SOTP (Friendship et al. 2003):

- No impact on sexual reoffending
- Reduced reconviction rates for treated offenders for combined sexual & violent reoffending

Some experts claimed that NOMS had overstated the evidence of SOTP's effectiveness.

Challenges in the field:

- Low reoffending rates
- Heterogeneity of sex offenders
- Small samples/short follow-up periods
- Poorly matched counterfactuals

The process

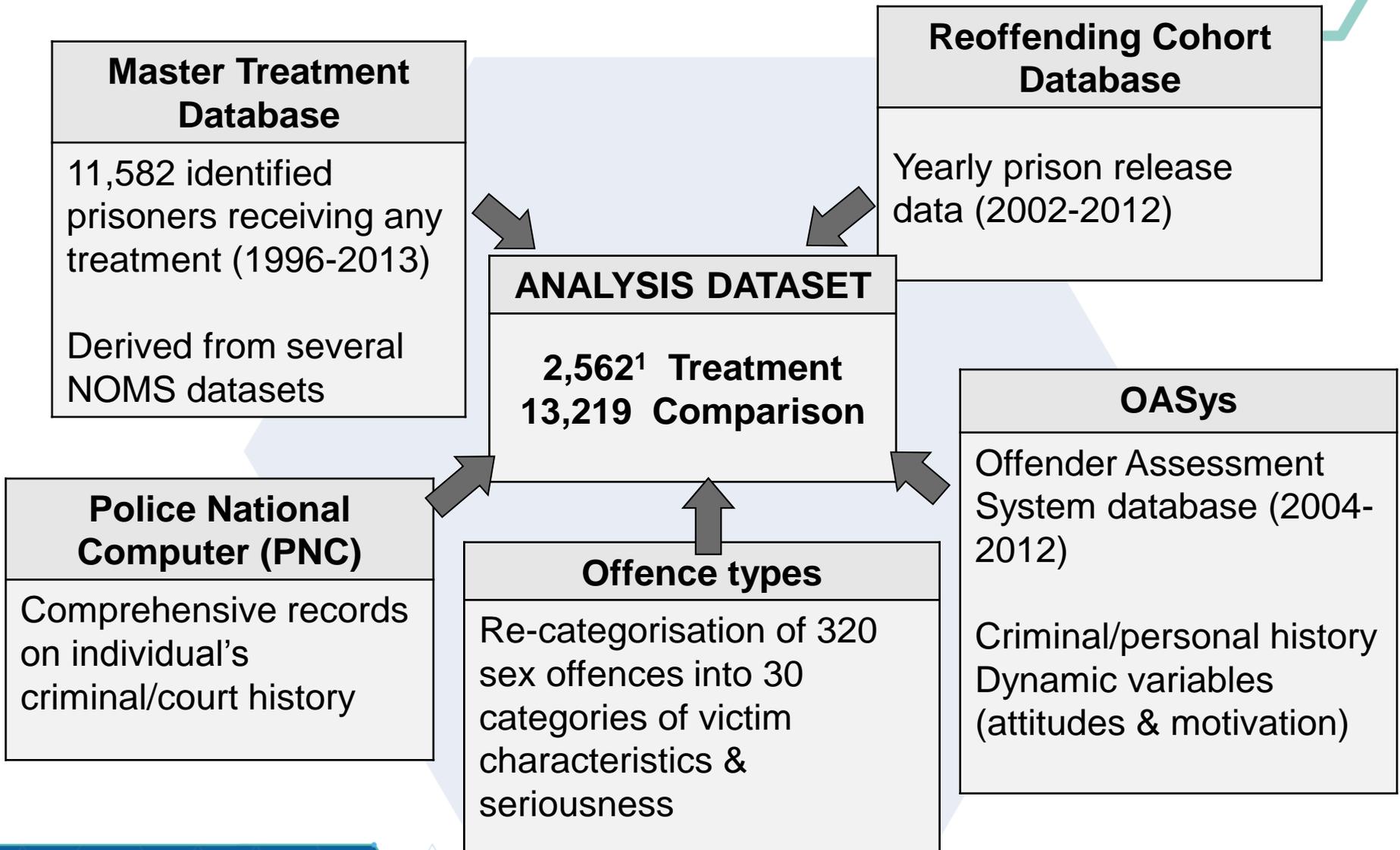
Multi disciplinary team (social researchers and statisticians), bringing together a range of expertise in data linking, evaluation design, research methods and statistics.

Expert advisory panel was set up:

- 1) Academic experts in evaluation and quasi-experimental designs
- 2) Academic experts in sex offending research
- 3) Experts from other Government departments
- 4) Practitioners from the prison service

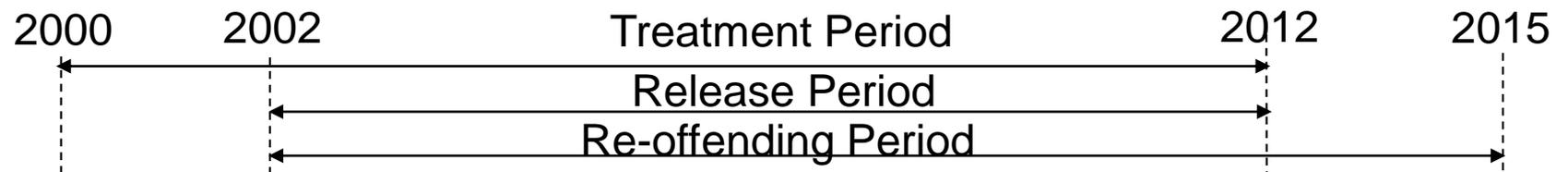
Experts and stakeholders were consulted at multiple stages, from design set-up to report drafting.

Creating the database

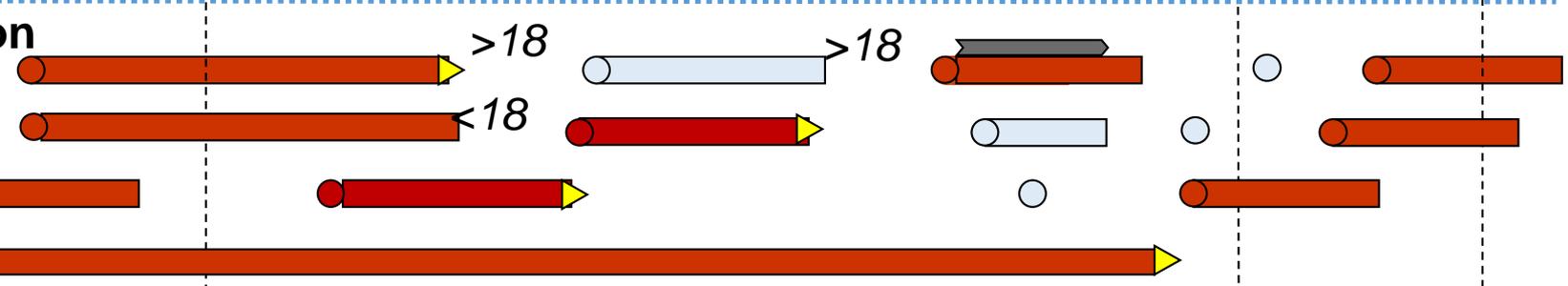


¹ Treated people who met inclusion criteria

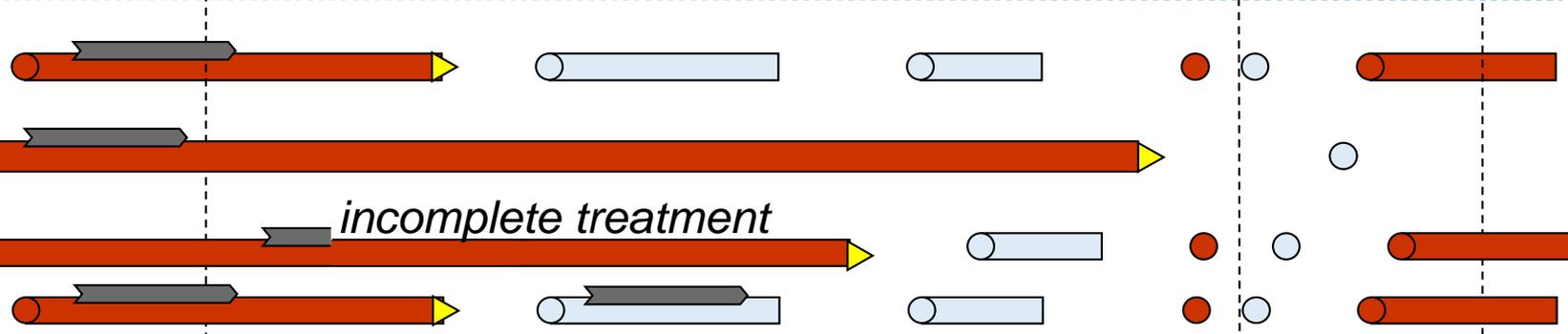
- ▶ Index Sentence Release
- Non-Sexual Offence
- Sexual Offence
- Prison Sentence
- ▬ Treatment (core-SOTP)



Comparison

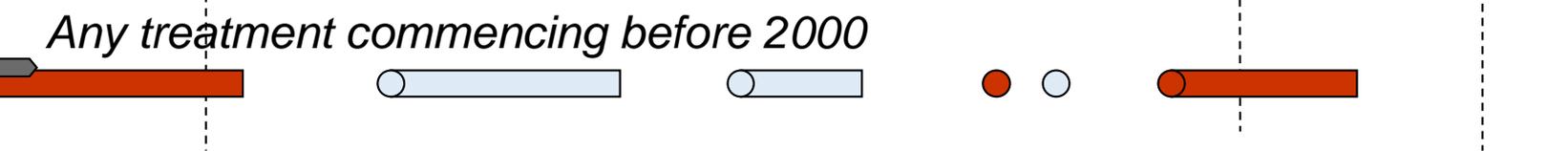


Treatment



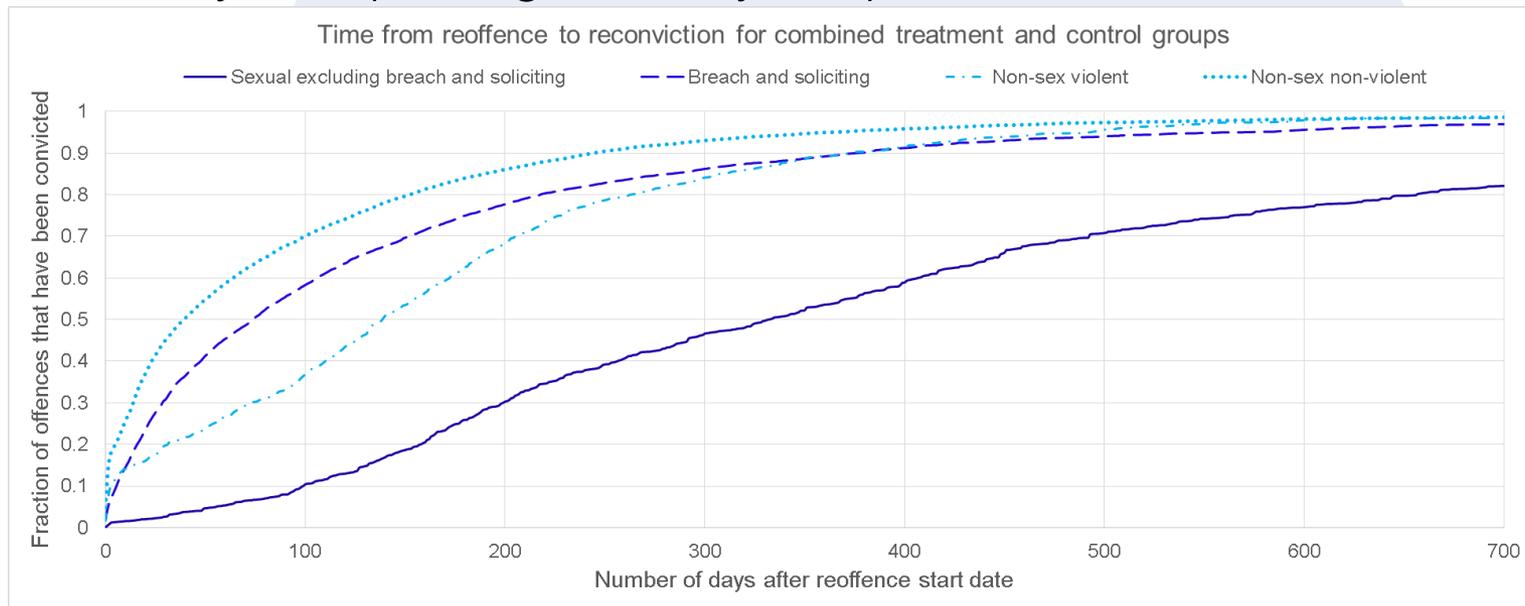
Excluded

Any treatment commencing before 2000



Creating the counterfactual

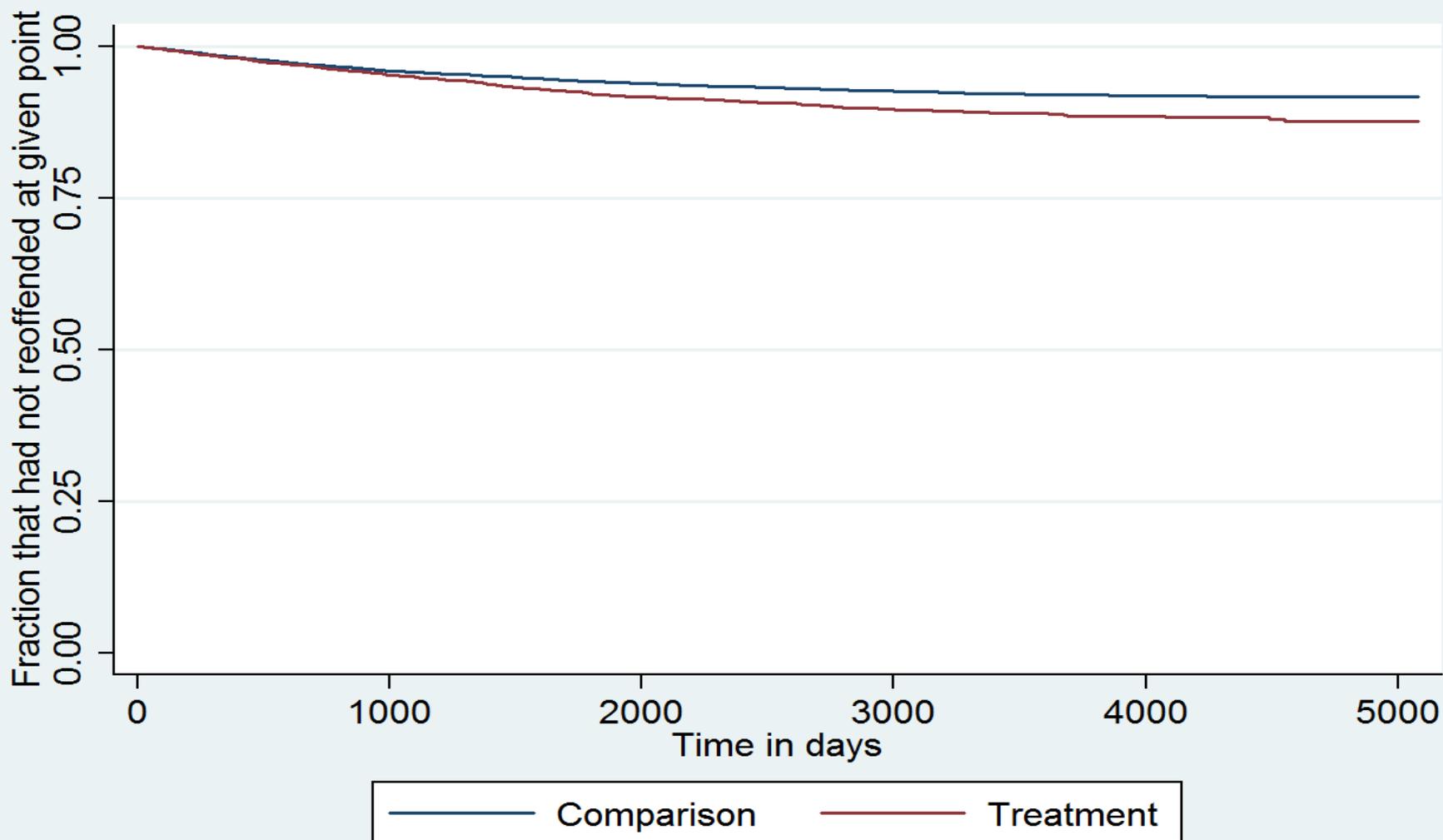
- Treated and untreated offenders were matched using Propensity Score Matching
- A range of static & dynamic matching factors were included
- The two matched groups were compared on a range of proven reoffending outcomes (sexual and non-sexual)
- Outcome measures were calculated over a period of up to 13.9 years (average of 8.2 years)



RESULTS: Reoffending rate over follow-up period (average 8.2 years)

	Treated rate	Comparison rate	Difference	T-value
Total	39.4%	38.9%	0.5%pts	0.35
Sexual	10.0%	8.0%	2.0%pts	2.45*
Non-sexual	24.0%	23.7%	0.3%pts	0.27
Adult serious	2.7%	2.4%	0.3%pts	0.59
Adult other	2.1%	1.4%	0.7%pts	1.86
Child contact	2.2%	2.1%	0.1%pts	0.18
Child image	4.4%	2.9%	1.6%pts	2.96*
Child other	0.5%	1.0%	-0.4%pts	-1.86
Breach	21.9%	22.4%	-0.5%pts	-0.41
Soliciting	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%pts	1.36

RESULTS: Sexual reoffending survival rate over follow-up period



Conclusions from the evaluation

“The results suggest that while Core SOTP in prisons is generally associated with **little or no changes** in sexual and non-sexual reoffending, there were some statistically significant differences. The small changes in the sexual reoffending rate suggest that **either Core SOTP does not reduce sexual reoffending as it intends to do, or that the true impact of the Programme was not detected.**”

The Sun: *THERAPY ‘HELPS’ PERVS: Sex offenders who complete group therapy in jail are more likely to commit similar crimes, review finds*

New Statesman: When you put a bunch of rapists together, the message that some take away is this: oh, I’m not so deviant after all. And anyway, that guy is worse. “Group treatment may ‘normalise’ individuals’ behaviour: when stories are shared, their behaviour may not be seen as wrong or different,” the Ministry of Justice report found. The response to the Weinstein coverage has borne this out.

Conclusions: main factors that facilitated success

1. Multidisciplinary team being put in place
2. Independence from the programme
3. Senior management understanding of challenges, and willing to support the project
4. Access to large sample and long follow-up period
5. Collaboration from partners, that ensured access to the data
6. Expert scrutiny across all stages, from set-up to write-up.