

# **Addressing Denial and Promoting Accountability in Sexual Offending Treatment**

**Presented by:**

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<https://dcj.colorado.gov/boards-commissions/sex-offender-management-board>

# Learning Objectives

- Promoting evidence-based rehabilitation of those who commit sexual offenses
- Ensuring the safety of people who have been victimized

# Denial

- Failure to accept responsibility for sexual offending behavior
  - No internal locus of control
- Types
  - Categorical
  - Partial

# Denial from a RNR Perspective

- Denial is not a risk factor (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005)
  - Included as an item in dynamic risk scale (e.g., SOTIPS)
- Denial is a responsivity factor
  - Connected to treatment attrition (Olver et al., 2011)

# Denial in Treatment Research

- Options
  - Exclude
  - Specialized program like denier's treatment
  - Address in sexual offending treatment
  - No research on specific types of interventions (Ware et al., 2015)
- Goals
  - Accept responsibility before or during treatment, or
  - No requirement to accept responsibility

# Impact of Denial on Victims

- Restorative practices emphasize interest in offender accountability (Koss, 2014)
- Failure to satisfactorily take accountability caused further trauma for intra-familial victims (Paige & Thornton, 2015)

# Colorado SOMB Data

- SOMB PDMS data (Oct 2019 to Nov 2022). N=1,481.
- Denial definitions in the SOMB Adult Standards and Guidelines:
  - No Denial: accepts full responsibility, does not place blame elsewhere
  - Low Denial (level 1): accepts most responsibility, places some of the blame elsewhere
  - Moderate Denial (level 2): accepts some responsibility, places most of the blame elsewhere
  - High Denial (level 3): accepts no responsibility, denies committing unlawful sexual behavior



# Distribution of Denial Level at Beginning & End of Treatment

Table 1. Client Denial Level Beginning & End Treatment

Denial Level	<u>Beginning</u> (N=1,481)	<u>End</u> (N=1,472)
None	281 (19%)	550 (37%)
Low	634 (43%)	659 (45%)
Moderate	368 (25%)	183 (12%)
High	198 (13%)	80 (5%)
Total	1481 (100%)	1472 (100%)

# High (Categorical) Denial

- Outcomes
  - 65% of clients progressed to a lower level of denial
  - 35% had high denial at the end of treatment.

# Association with Risk Categorization

- High denial vs. lower levels of denial
  - Not associated with static risk
  - Associated with higher dynamic risk

# Treatment Strategies Utilized

- Use of a denier's intervention as prescribed by the SOMB Standards and Guidelines
- Use of the group process
- Use of a polygraph exam
- Addressing victim impact
- Developing a therapeutic relationship
- Decreasing stigma and shame
- Focusing on distorted thought patterns related to the offense
- Supporting client motivation
- Use of client support systems
- Addressing client trauma history
- Providing psychoeducation

# SOMB Standards and Guidelines

- 3.500 Acceptance of Responsibility and Accountability
  - Use protective factor language rather than deficit-based language
  - Accountability intervention for those in Level 3 – Accepts no responsibility (i.e., categorical denial)
  - 90 days with possible extension based on clinical indicators
  - Purpose not to determine the guilt or innocence of the client
  - Discharge may recommend other non-sex offense-specific treatment interventions for consideration by the Court