Therapists fear mandatory reporting will prevent paedophiles seeking help

Contrary to the impression given on BBC Radio 4 programme PM (July 13th at 5.36pm), and again on a Radio 4 programme later on the same day The Nature of Paedophilia (July 13th at 8pm), not everyone working with those at risk of sexual offending in the UK needs to report someone who has committed a sexual offence. Psychotherapists and counsellors working in private practice currently have no legal obligation to report someone who is looking at child pornography, or even suspected child abuse. This means that, at present, psychologists and psychotherapists working in private practice are free to provide confidential therapy to anyone worried about their sexual urges towards children. This allows organisations such as StopSO: The Specialist Treatment Organisation for the Prevention of Sexual Offending to train therapists around the UK to work with clients, many of whom may be completely unknown to the authorities but who choose voluntarily to seek help with their sexual urges. It is different for anyone working for the NHS or social services, as they are under a duty to report, but as part of their employment contract rather than by law.

Juliet Grayson, a practising psychotherapist, is convinced that making confidential therapy available to such men helps to reduce risk to children by encouraging victim empathy and by developing strategies to remain law-abiding. Grayson says, 'The StopSO training programme increases the pool of therapists in this specialist area. There is no cure for paedophilia but people can be helped to manage their thoughts and feelings. We need to encourage any adult sexually attracted to children to approach a therapist without fear of being reported, so they can get help and fewer children will be at risk of harm.'

However, there is a new child protection initiative by the Government which may actually put more children at risk. After the recent scandals at Rotherham and elsewhere, where crimes against children went unreported for decades, the Government is keen to strengthen the law on reporting suspected sexual abuse. This will mean that all public service workers in the UK - including police, council staff, social workers and healthcare professionals - will have a legal obligation to report concerns. Therapists are worried about the potential impact this mandatory reporting could have on their work with clients.

As the recent report by the National Crime Agency has highlighted, there may be around 3% of men who pose a sexual risk to children, many of whom may be able to benefit from confidential therapy. Dr Sarah Goode, an expert on paedophiles, argues that, 'The public are much more aware now of the prevalence of child sexual abuse and there is also much greater understanding of the harm that child sexual abuse causes. The next step in child protection is to work directly with paedophiles to offer support and so reduce offending. We must make sure that mandatory reporting does not mean that paedophiles are too frightened to come forward for help.'
Notes to editors:

Juliet Grayson is the co-founder and Chair of StopSO (Specialist Treatment Organisation for the Prevention of Sexual Offending) which is based in Wales and can be contacted via www.stopso.org.uk or 01291 638805. Juliet Grayson can be reached at juliet@stopso.org.uk. A spokesperson for StopSO is available for comment, newspaper interviews and live radio interviews.

Dr Sarah Goode was previously the Director of the Research and Policy Centre for the Study of Wellbeing in Communities, University of Winchester. She conducted research (funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and with the support of Hampshire Constabulary) into the daily lives of 'minor-attracted adults' living in the community (i.e. not a prison or clinical sample). She is the author of 'Understanding and Addressing Adult Sexual Attraction to Children' (Routledge, 2009) and 'Paedophiles in Society' (Macmillan, 2011). She can be contacted at drsarahgoode@btinternet.com