

## S57-01

### EMPATHY AS A COMPLEX CONSTRUCT: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE TREATMENT OF SEXUAL ABUSERS

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Nearly all treatment programs for sexual abusers contain a module for empathy enhancement, presuming it will help to prevent future offensive or delinquent behaviour. This appears to be a fair presumption, yet research results reveal a more complex reality. Some sexual abusers do not show a generalized lack of empathy ('trait'), but have a rather selective and contextual deficit, often limited to their own victims ('state'). Moreover, the construct of empathy consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components, which renders it more difficult to deduct precise assertions on its protective role as a whole. This presentation offers current views on the assessment of empathy and its effect in the dynamics of sexual offences. Referring to clinical illustrations, guidelines will be presented on the timing (staged interventions) and desirability (contraindications) to address the issue during psychotherapy.