

# Sexual offences on London trains (SOLT): Exploring how and why

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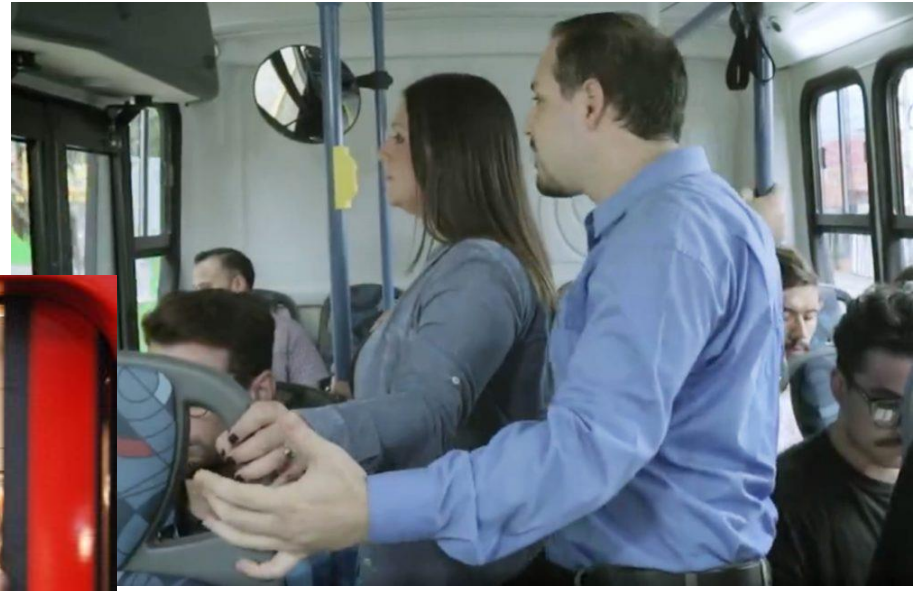
# Research project

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Study 1 - Offence process and officers' experiences

Study 2 – Narratives of individuals who commit SOLT

Study 3 – Temporal and spatial aspect of SOLT







# Theories of sexual offending



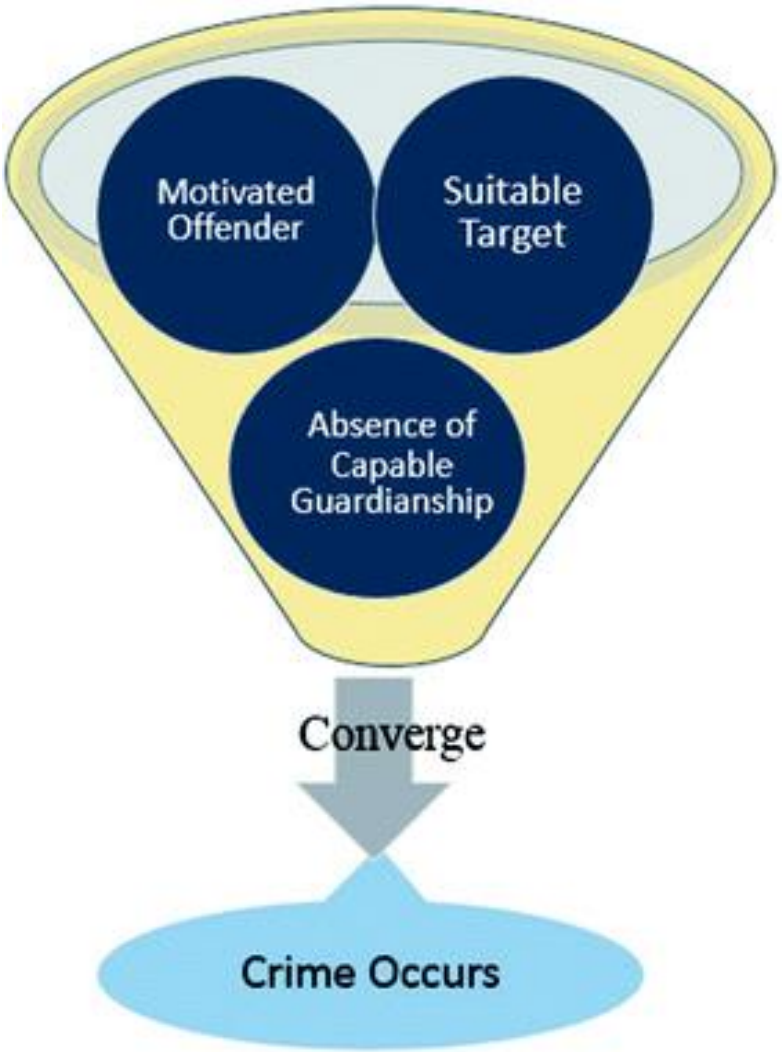
## HEDONISTIC CALCULUS



Rational Choice Perspective (RCP) (Cornish and Clarke, 1986)



# Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979)



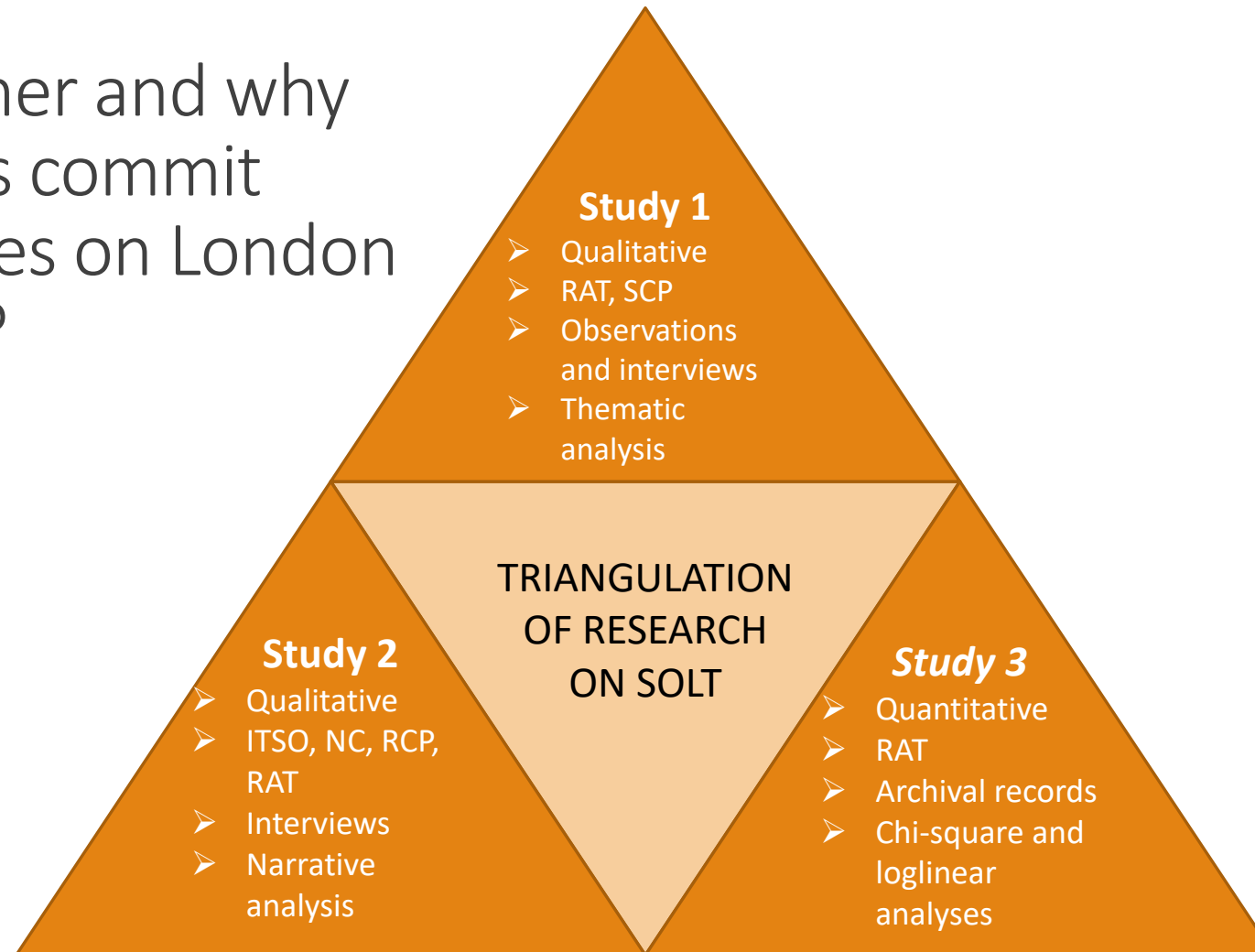
The problem analysis triangle (Clarke & Eck, 2005)

# Crime as a script





In what manner and why do individuals commit sexual offences on London trains (SOLT)?



# How are the different types of sexual assaults committed on London railways?

## Methodology

	Data	Method	Analysis
Study 1	14 Proactive Police officers	Observation/ interviews	Thematic
Study 2	5 convicted offenders	Interviews	Narrative
Study 3	1359 case records including 321 offenders' data	Archival	Chi-square/ Loglinear

# Study 1 (part 1)

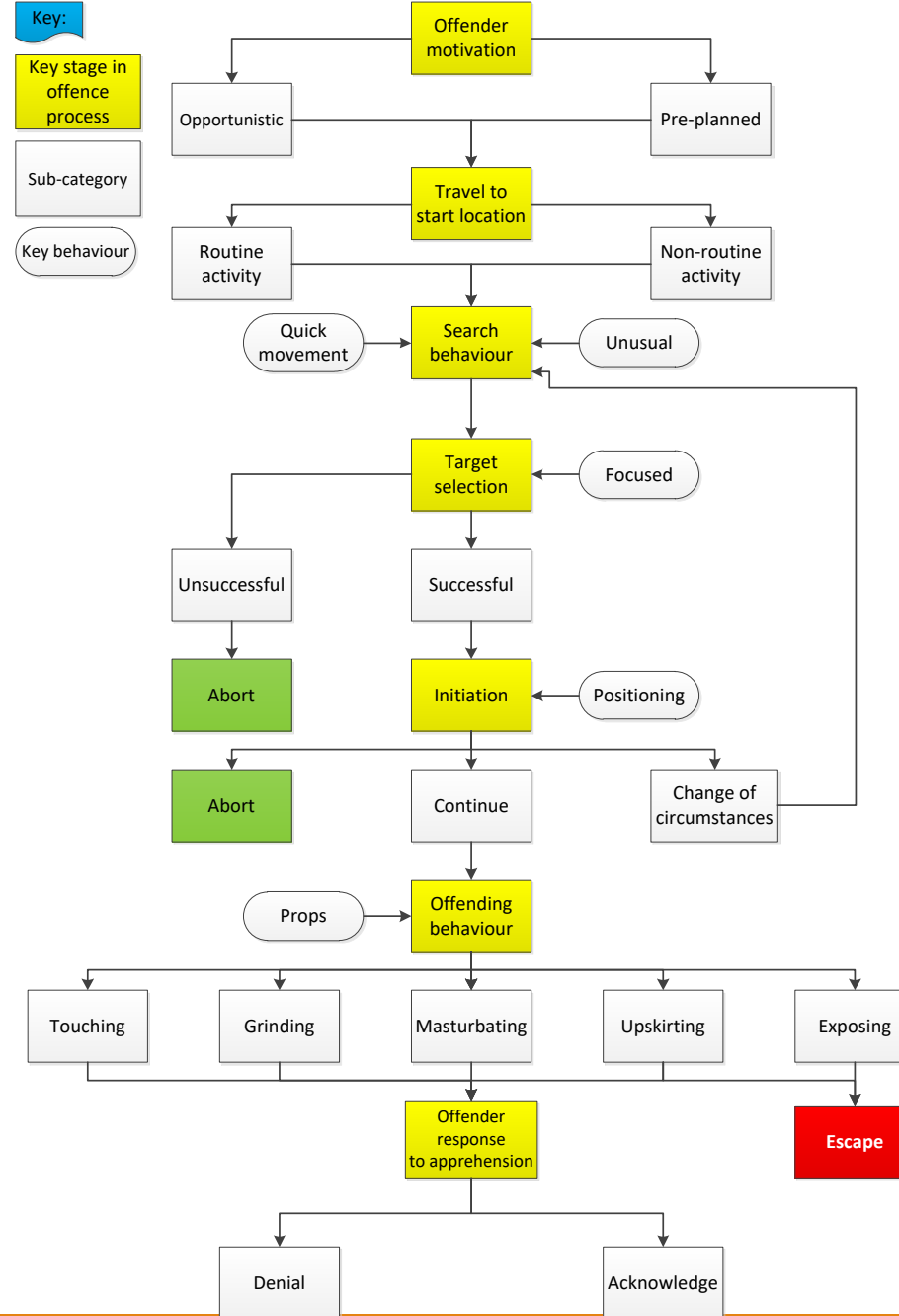
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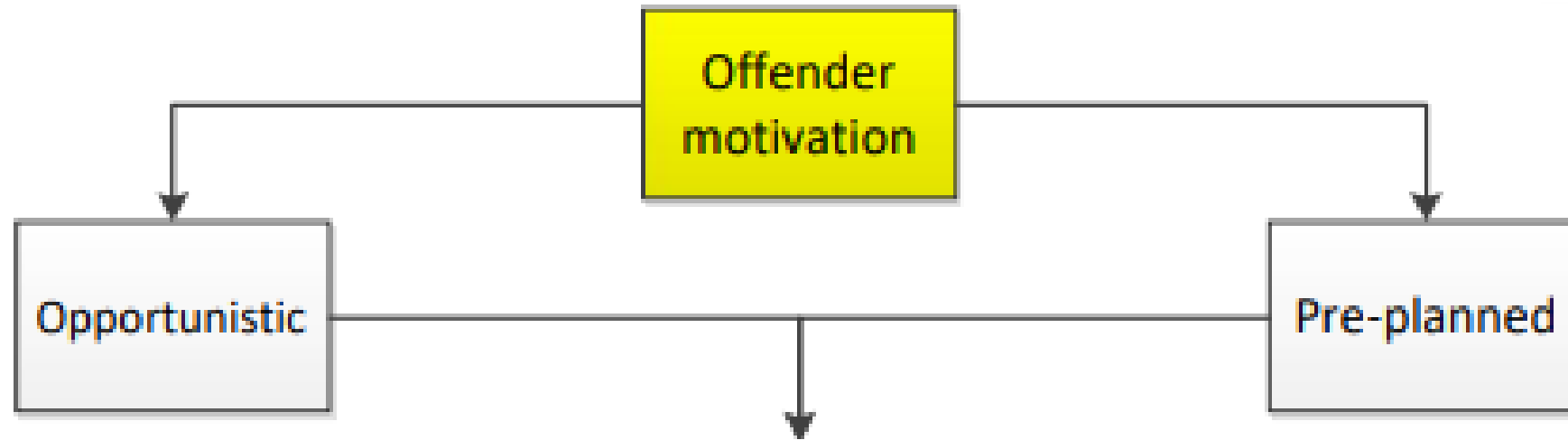
**How are the different types of sexual offences committed on London railways?**

- Police officers' perceptions of offender actions in cases that are being actively observed or investigated.



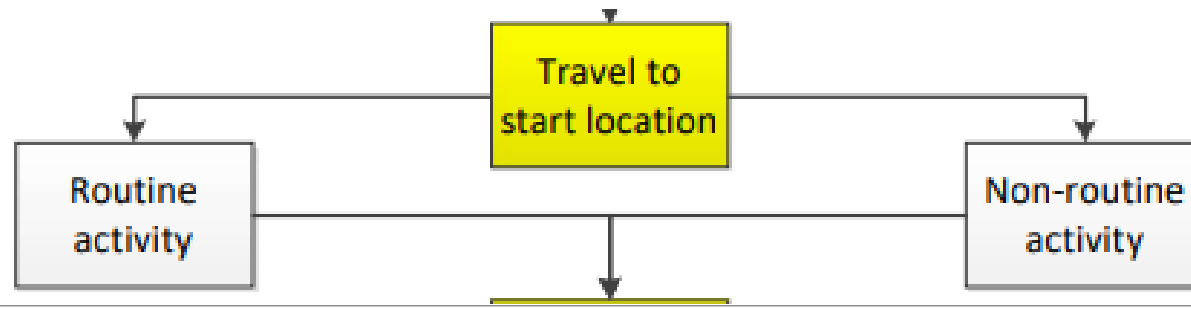
# Preliminary model of police officers' observations of SOLT





# Offender motivation

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## Routine activity

- “Mr Smith works in the city and you know he travels from St Paul's to Lewisham every evening and that's his little window of opportunity to do what he does.” (Charlie)
- “I'm going home myself and I need to, to do it before I go home.” (Seb)
- “People have probably been doing it all their life coming home from work.” (Ian)

## Non-routine activity

“then you have another chap who thinks ‘oh it's 4 o'clock I'm gonna go on the underground and do whatever I'm gonna do for the next 3 hours.’” (Charlie)



# Temporal and spatial themes

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## Prime time

“Morning or evening rush hours”

“Evening”

“View the rush hours as their time slot”

“Depends what time of year as well”

## Environmental attributes

“The train was busy”

“Goes through the City”

“It’s a very busy station”

“It’s a big interchange”



# Search behaviour

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# Search behaviour

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Unusual – goes  
against tube  
norms/culture

“Walking on the platform not looking at the board... it's not just one single thing that they might do it will be a combination of a few little things. Not look at the board, looking at people, going from the quiet end walking down to where there is bigger crowds, which obviously no one with any... you want an empty carriage don't you? Not the busiest parts. “ (Gary)

Quick  
movement

“Sometimes literally you will see them run down the platform after someone and it's quite comical”. (Jenny)



# Target selection

## Focused

- “You will see exactly that they've clocked on to a target.” (Jenny)
- SCOTT: ... following their eyes they're looking down, they quite often will be looking at a girl's, generally their arse and he'll, they'll just go towards it like, like...
- ROBERT: A moth to a flame.
- SCOTT: That's it, a moth to a flame.

## Unaware of surveillance

- “The fact that they've been followed and they don't understand that concept at all.” (Seb)
- “Sex offenders if you see one when they are actually working, they've got their eyes glazed over they are just transfixed on one thing they won't really care who's around them other than who they're looking at.” (Fynn)

# Initiation

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## ➤ Positioning

“Once their target, if you want to call it that, comes on they'll suddenly move and they'll just walk, walk, walk and then their target stops they'll suddenly stop... when the train comes in and the, and the victim tries to get on the train and can't, the victim will sometimes move down the platform and this will be when they then move down the platform.” (Gary)

“They'll um, board a train behind some, behind a female.” (Jenny)

CHARLIE: He positioned himself in such a way that the lady, the victim, was more or less...

JENNY: She was pinned.

CHARLIE: ...Trapped... and face on, face on.

JENNY: She was pinned into the door.

# Offending behaviour

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“touch female  
bums”

“Stroking”

“An erection and started  
rubbing themselves into  
them”

“Upskirt filming”

“Flashing”

“A groin  
either pushed in or  
... rocking”

“Groping”

“Masturbating”

“Brush”

# Offender responses to being apprehended

“Gobsmacked”

“Remorseful”

“Mortified”

“Admitted  
it”

“Urinated”

“Denial”

“Excuses”

“Aggressive”

## Study 2

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- What can offender perspectives add to what we know?
- 5 interviews were conducted with individuals who had been convicted of a SOLT
- A narrative criminological framework was used to analyse the data
  - How individuals talked about their offences
  - How individuals described themselves
  - What the narratives revealed in relation to constructing their identities



# Key themes across the narratives

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## Maintaining a positive sense of self

- Rationalisations were observed to be central to explanations of starting to sexually offend, whereby upskirting was an extension of street photography and nobody was harmed. Individuals who commit upskirting offences tended to use the excuse that they are not directly harming victims.
- They saw their actions as *“different from any other kind of sexual crime in that the victim won’t know what happened” (Ben) and that “It’s a current reflection of the objectification of women” (James).*

# Key themes across the narratives

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## Negative childhood experiences

- The narratives described adverse developmental antecedents in the form of abuse, trauma or lack of emotional warmth, which appeared to develop into the presence of vulnerabilities relating to attachment.
- Had a profound impact on their social development “*I found it very difficult to relate to other people*” (Ben).

# Key themes across the narratives

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## **Problems with emotional regulation**

- There were examples within the narratives of how individuals experienced emotional deficits and social difficulties, which were risk predictors for sexual offending.
- These manifested as ongoing problems relating to self-regulation or the development of sexual coping strategies in response to their difficulties in adolescence.

# Key themes across the narratives

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## Poor mental health

- All individuals experienced mental ill health at various times in their life; either suffering poor levels of mental wellbeing in early childhood, through loss and trauma, experiencing deterioration in mental health during late childhood/early adolescence or experiencing difficulties in late adulthood related to situational factors in his life.

# Contribution to SOLT script

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- The desire to achieve a thrill appeared to be the main driver of the individual's actions.
- The “thrill” also featured in their risk/cost benefit analysis of going through with the intended behaviour
- The perception that sexual assaults were easy to get away with, due to the crowded environment
- Four out of the five individuals would commit the sexual offences on the commute to and/or from their place of work
- There was a hunting process involved for Sexual Assault offences



# Conclusions

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- The narrative accounts illuminate the manifestation of predictors for the development of potential vulnerability risk factors over time.
- These vulnerabilities contributed to the ‘readiness to offend’, which individuals brought to the situation.
- Findings from both studies examine crime specificities to understand offenders’ behaviours when committing SOLT.
- Contribution of offender perspectives on the explanations for their behaviour, which is useful for situational crime prevention efforts.

# Practical implications and recommendations

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## Crime prevention measures

1. Social marketing campaigns targeted towards the general male population using the transport network, which encourages those prosocial men to potentially be activated as bystanders.
2. BTP to employ moral engagement strategies within interventions that explicitly acknowledge the wrongfulness of the act.
3. Explore opportunities that utilise the train population to adopt guardianship capabilities through bystander intervention.

# Thank you

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