

Opening editorial: Special issue on reactive strategies for situational management

Gary W LaVigna and Thomas J Willis

Institute for Applied Behavior Analysis, Los Angeles, CA

This special issue of the *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support* (IJPBS) addresses the management of challenging behaviours when they occur, otherwise referred to as situational management, within a positive behavioural support (PBS) framework. Ethics mandate that situational management should be accomplished using the least restrictive reactive strategy or strategies possible. In other words, non-restrictive, 'first resort' reactive strategies should be applied instead of restrictive, reactive 'last resort' strategies, whenever feasible, to resolve dangerous situations that are putting people at risk. Further, the effectiveness of situational management should be primarily measured by the effects of the reactive strategy or strategies on episodic severity; a quantified measure of the gravity of a behavioural episode. Episodic severity has been recognised as a dependent variable by the field of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) generally (Vollmer et al, 2011) and specifically by the field of PBS (LaVigna and Willis, 2005). That is, a major objective of a plan for the situational management of challenging behaviour (as a component of an overall PBS plan) should be to reduce the episodic severity of the behaviour(s) of concern. IJPBS is happy to provide the following four papers that focus on these important topics and to acknowledge the contribution they may make to the reduction in the use of restrictive procedures in the field.

The first article, by LaVigna and Willis, sets the stage for the following three articles. First, the article carefully and explicitly defines the measure of episodic severity as an important dependent variable for a PBS plan. This very relevant measure is missing from much of the research investigating restrictive practices. Secondly, the article introduces the 'alignment fallacy'. The concept of 'alignment' has to do with an established principle in the field that the restrictiveness of a situational management strategy should be proportionate to the risk or danger of harm related to the behaviour of concern. Unfortunately, due to the poor wording of laws and regulations that govern the use of restrictive strategies, some people may think

that the restrictiveness of a reactive strategy should be aligned with the severity and risk associated with the behaviour. This article argues that the need for alignment is a fallacy and that there are a host of positive, non-restrictive reactive strategies that can achieve the resolution of challenging situations rapidly and safely. In most cases, this renders the need for restrictive measures unnecessary, even for the most severe and imminently dangerous behaviours. The article also describes the multi-element, PBS model, including the measure of episodic severity, as the important context for using the identified positive, ie first resort, reactive strategies, without negative side-effects.

The second article in this special issue is 'The impact of situational management strategies on episodic severity', by Geoff Potter. Potter uses the multi-element model for a study of non-aversive reactive strategies using a multiple baseline design for three adults on the autism spectrum and one with a history of trauma. The behaviours of concern included self-injury sometimes resulting in the need for first aid, physical aggression severe enough to sometimes result in the need for medical attention and/or property damage that resulted in the need for expensive repairs (on one occasion alone, over AU\$20,000). Some of the first resort reactive strategies employed in this study included stimulus change, active listening, and capitulation. For all four participants, the episodic severity of their behaviour was dramatically improved with the use of first resort reactive strategies without the need for restrictive practices. Further, even though capitulation, giving in to the person and letting them have their way, was used as one of the reactive strategies for all four, their behaviour was not reinforced, evidenced by a reduction in their behavioural rates.

The third article in this special issue is 'Reactive strategies within a positive behaviour support framework for reducing the episodic severity of aggression', by Nicola Crates and Matthew Spicer. In their study, they address the concern held by many that capitulation, redirection to a preferred event, or other positive,

non-aversive reactive strategies (NARS) may end up reinforcing, and thereby increase the rate of the behaviours of concern. Crates and Spicer investigated the effects of 24 multi-element, BSP plans, using NARS, on the rate of the targeted behaviours, their episodic severity, and, for the three cases in which they were used, on the use of restrictive practices. The 24 plans were developed by 24 different practitioners based on their comprehensive functional assessments as part of the training in multi-element PBS they were receiving. Training was provided by a specifically trained team. In all 24 cases, based on a three-month follow up after initial plan implementation, the episodic severity of all of the behaviours of concern was reduced, as were the rates of occurrence of these behaviours. Further, for the three applicable cases, the use of restrictive practices was either eliminated or dramatically reduced. Again, we see evidence that within a multi-element, PBS framework, it appears that NARS can be used without reinforcing the behaviours of concern.

The fourth article is 'Non-aversive reactive strategies for reducing the episodic severity of aggression', by Matthew Spicer and Nicola Crates. In our opinion, this last article provides an exceptionally strong finish to this special issue for two particular reasons. Firstly, it delineates the most comprehensive and explicit listing in the published literature of the NARS available for inclusion in a multi-element, PBS plan to reduce episodic severity. Remarkably, they list over 25 such 'first resort' strategies. Further, Spicer and Crates make an important distinction in categorising these NARS as either based on or not based on the function of the behaviour, as determined by a functional behaviour assessment. Secondly, they introduce a standardised measure, the momentary effect severity scale, for measuring the effects of each situational management strategy on the episodic severity of aggression, the behaviour of concern for their study. Their analysis was based on the data recorded by staff on 233 behavioural incident reports for 17 clients. Using the scale, they measured the effects on episodic severity of four different categories of reactive strategies, ie function based NARS, non-function based NARS, aversive reactive strategies and restrictive reactive strategies. We believe that many readers will be excited and inspired by the results of this study to change their practice and more pervasively adopt 'first resort' NARS.

In fact, we believe this excitement and inspiration will come from the entirety of this special issue. We also hope that this excitement and inspiration will go beyond practice and extend to further research in this important area. There is certainly more research to be done through carefully controlled studies that strongly validate the conclusions reached. The studies presented here add encouraging findings to the nascent research investigating the effectiveness of 'first resort' reactive strategies. This assists our field to further reduce the need for restrictive practices, even for the severest forms of challenging behaviour

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References

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