

# **Sexual Offenders: An Overview of Risk Assessment, Recidivism & Treatment Effectiveness**

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# Types of Sex offenders

- Rapists
- Child molesters
- Internet and pornography offenders
- Exhibitionists
- Other paraphilic behaviors leading to norm violation (e.g., voyeurism)

# Rapists: Theories and Typologies

- Limited empirical validation
- MTC Typology (Knight & Prentky)
- Four primary types leading to nine overall types:
  1. Opportunistic (impulsive; instrumental aggression)
  2. Pervasively angry (gratuitous aggression)
  3. Sexual: Sadistic (overt or muted) and non-sadistic
    - Enduring sexual preoccupation
    - fusion of sex and aggression
  4. Vindictive
    - hostility toward women; denigrate and humiliate women
- High offense planning in sexual and sadistic category
- High aggression and violence in pervasively angry, vindictive, and overt sadistic types

## Other characteristics associated with rapists

- History of truancy and/or poor school achievement
- Deficits in employment history
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Personality dynamics w/ power & control
- Low self-esteem, anxiety, sexual inadequacy
- Hypermasculinity

# Characteristics associated with child molesters

- Degree of age difference to victims
- Relationship to victims
  - 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of incest offenders may be pedophilic
  - Frequency and duration of abuse higher in intra-familial or acquaintance abuse
  - Close relationships less likely to be reported
  - Only 1/4<sup>th</sup> to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of sexual assaults of children are by strangers

# Characteristics associated with child molesters

- Victim's Gender
  - Girls abused 2 to 3 times higher than boys
  - History of childhood sexual abuse=increased likelihood of male victims or cross-gender victims
  - Childhood sexual abuse=increased likelihood of offending in or beginning adolescence
- Basic types: child sex offenders
  - Pedophile
    - Pedophile-fixated (Groth, 1970s)
    - Regressed child molester
    - Pedophile-aggressive
  - Non-pedophile

# Some Sex crime statistics

- Number of rapes and sexual assaults (e.g., 1990s):
  - 350,000-500,000 in persons older than age 12.
- Less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> actually reported to law enforcement agencies.
- Sex crimes against children more likely underreported
- Upward trend 1976-1992
- Significant Downward trend from 1993 to 2002
- Some exception in 2002—rise of about 5% over previous year.
  - Reasons? Better criminal justice response? Better treatment and/or supervision?

Sources: Greenfeld, 1997; La Fond, 2005; Marshall, 1999; Schwartz, 1995; Salhotz, 1990; Snyder, 2000 (cited in La Fond).

# Some Sex crime statistics

- More than 2/3 of sexual assaults involve children under 18
- 99% of victims are females
- Level of harm=level of vulnerability
- Rate of rape in the U.S. substantially higher than that in Germany (four times), Britain (13 times), and Japan (20 times).



# Recidivism

- Rates of reoffending (after already having been charged or convicted of a sexual crime) are far lower than commonly perceived
- Lower compared to nonsexual violent and nonviolent crimes.
- Individuals who commit sex offenses are not a homogeneous group, and manifest different trends toward a reoffense.

# Recidivism

- Major issue creating confused arguments
  - The overall rate of sex crimes compared to other crimes and over time
  - The varied rates of offending for subgroups of offenders.
  - Difference between having multiple victims prior to being arrested and/or convicted, and continuing to offend after having been identified.
  - Prevalence/incidence vs. recidivism

# Recidivism

- Multiple methods to assess recidivism risk
- Specific operational definition of recidivism outcome affects estimates
  - Allegations reported to social services vs. rearrests or reconvictions)
- Variability in orientation and or method of risk assessment
- Actuarial > clinical assessments with some caveats
- Risk prediction vs. Risk assessment

# Recidivism

- Static vs. Dynamic Factors
  - Static factors are unchanging fixed factors (at time of assessment); good for evaluating long-term risk but cannot account for change over time
  - Examples include number of prior sexual or nonsexual convictions; prior stranger victims; prior male victims

# Recidivism

- Dynamic factors can be long-term or historical but have potential for changing through intervention
- Stable dynamic: persistent characteristics which can nevertheless change (e.g., sexual deviance; psychopathology; substance abuse proneness)
- Acute dynamic factors: rapidly changing characteristics (e.g., emotional states; intoxication; victims acquisition behaviors)

# Static and stable dynamic factors associated with sex offending (Craig, et al., 2008)

- Developmental factors
  - Juvenile sexual offense
  - Poor family background
  - Victim of sexual abuse
  - Age at first offense
  - Age at release (inverse)

# Static and stable dynamic factors associated with sex offending (Craig, et al., 2008)

- Victim factors
  - Extra-familial victim
  - Male victim
  - Stranger/unrelated victim
  - Multiple victims

# Static and stable dynamic factors associated with sex offending (Craig, et al., 2008)

- Sexual interest factors
  - Sexual arousal/preference for children
  - Deviant sexual interests
  - History of noncontact sexual offense



# Static and stable dynamic factors associated with sex offending (Craig, et al., 2008)

- Forensic factors
  - Past criminal history
  - Past sexual convictions
  - Past violent convictions
  - Number of prior sentences
  - Time spent in custody

# Static and stable dynamic factors associated with sex offending (Craig, et al., 2008)

- Clinical factors
  - Lower IQ
  - Marital relationship (inverse)
  - Treatment drop-out/discontinuation
  - Diagnosis of personality disorder
  - Psychopathy

# STABLE DYNAMIC FACTORS

1. **SOCIAL INFLUENCES (Negative/Delinquent)**
2. **INTIMACY DEFICITS**
  - Intimate partners
  - Emotional identification with children
  - Hostility toward women
  - General social rejection / Loneliness
  - Lack of concern for others
3. **SEXUAL SELF-REGULATION**
  - Sexual pre-occupation / Sex drive
  - Sex as coping
  - Deviant sexual interests
4. **ATTITUDES SUPPORTIVE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT**
  - Entitlement attitudes
  - Attitudes congruent with sexual abuse of adults or children
5. **COOPERATION WITH SUPERVISION**
6. **GENERAL SELF-REGULATION**
  - Impulsivity
  - Poor problem-solving
  - Negative emotionality / hostility

# Acute Dynamic Risk Factors

- Symptoms Worsen Immediately Prior to Recidivism
- Increased Social Isolation
- Decrease in Psychological Functioning
- Decreased Cooperation with Supervision
- Increased Sexual Preoccupation
- Increased Anger
- Access to Victims

# Recidivism Studies

- Importance of Meta-analytic studies or large samples
- Hanson & Bussiere Metaanalysis (1998)
  - 61 studies; N=28,972 (offenders)
  - 4-5 year follow-up
  - Re-arrest (new charges) or reconviction
  - overall rate=13.4% (n= 23, 393)
  - Rapists=18.9%; child molesters=12.7%

# Recidivism Studies

- Harris & Hanson (2004)
  - 10 sub-samples from US, Great Britain; Canada N= 4724
  - 7 to 32 years follow-up
  - Re-arrest (new charges) or reconviction
  - 5-15 year recidivism 14% to 24%
  - After 20 years, 73% offense free
  - 5, 10, 15, 20 years= 14%; 6%; 4%; 3%
  - Previously convicted > First time offenders (37% vs. 19%)
  - Boy CM > girl CM (35% vs. 16%)
  - Rapists > Incest offenders (24% vs. 13%)
  - Under age 50 > Over age 50 (26% vs. 12%)

# Recidivism Studies

- ▶ Bureau of Justice Statistics; Langan (2003)
- ▶ Representative sample of sex offenders released from US State prisons (across 15 states) in 1994 (N=9691)
- ▶ Sample consisted of 2/3 of all sex offenders released from prison in US that year
- ▶ Follow-up=3 years
- ▶ Re-arrest rates: Any crime
  - ▶ Sexual offenders= 43%
  - ▶ Nonsexual offenders= 68%
- ▶ Re-arrest rates: Sexual crimes:
  - ▶ Sex offenders=5%
  - ▶ Nonsexual offenders= 1.3%
- ▶ BUT: Nonsexual offenders accounted for 87% of new sexual offenses
  - ▶ Larger size as a group

# Recidivism Studies: Implications

- ▶ Overall level of recidivism lower than assumed by general public, media, even professionals
- ▶ Certain subgroups of sex offenders may be especially at risk with as high as 50% to 80% rates of recidivism
- ▶ Erroneous assumptions may lead to over-supervision of low risk offenders or to diversion of funding to extremely restrictive measures
- ▶ Importance of empirical assessment of risk
- ▶ Focus only on convicted sex offenders is problematic with respect to prevention



# Myth: Risk assessment of sex offenders is not reliable or empirically sound

## ► Facts:

- We can estimate whether or not an offender belongs to a high or low risk group with reasonable scientific accuracy.
- Recent empirical analysis has identified a significant number of risk factors that are correlated with repeated sexual aggression
- Qualification and training required to use risk assessment tools to screen offenders