

The Difference between the Attitudes of Male and Female Young Adults towards Juvenile and Adult Sex Offenders

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ABSTRACT

The views of the general population towards sexual offenders may play a key role in the rehabilitation of these offenders, and the political responses associated with sexual offending. Therefore, attitudes of the general population between the ages of 18-30 towards juvenile and adult sex offenders were measured in a sample of males (N = 40) and compared with a sample of females (N = 40). Results indicated that though the attitude of both the groups towards juvenile and adult sex offenders were negative, there is no significant difference for the same. Nevertheless, there exists several gender differences where women expressed a more liberal view towards juvenile and adult sex offenders compared to men who held more conservative views. Studies have shown that people who work directly with the sexual offender population have a positive attitude towards these offenders as compared to the general population who don't work with them. This current study explores the difference in attitudes of young adults towards juvenile and adult sex offenders.

Keywords: *Forensic Psychology, Sexual Offender, Reintegration, Sexual Crime, Juvenile Delinquency*

Sexual victimization of women is increasingly being recognized as a significant social issue; the ongoing debate of the campaign #MeToo has gone viral on social media since October 16, 2017. The motive of the campaign is to make the public aware of the extent of sexual harassment against women. Alongside this debate, many individuals step forward and report sexual offenses to the police, and the sexual offenders are put in the spotlight and have their own up to their crimes (Aftonbladet, 2017). While the attitudes and perceptions of professionals working with sex offenders may be influenced by their own experiences and level of training, the attitudes of the public can be fuelled largely by the media. Academic accounts from criminological and social studies stipulate that attitude towards sexual offenders could have reflective implications for clinical and social policymaking (LeBel, T. P., Burnett, R., Maruna, S., & Bushway, 2008).

Previous studies have found that positive attitudes towards offenders, in general, are associated with successful rehabilitation (D Glaser, 1969), successful reintegration back into society, decreased risk of recidivism (Harper & Hogue, 2015) and less discrimination (Fiske,

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2000). Hence, it is of interest to grasp people's attitudes towards sexual offenders and comprehend where it comes from.

Attitude can be defined in various ways, Breckler, S., & Manis (1984) defines attitude as a response to a former stimulus (e.g., something that triggers a reaction) or attitude object (e.g., objects that are related to positive or negative feelings and judgments), which is comprised of three components: cognition, affect and behavior.

1. **Cognitive component-** This refers to stereotypes (e.g., beliefs, thoughts, and attributes) that people have about a specific stimulus or attitude object. Second, the
2. **Affective component-** This refers to feelings and emotions related to that specific stimulus or attitude object.
3. **Behavioral component-** This refers to past behaviours and experiences regarding that stimulus or attitude object.

Hogue (1993) suggests that all these components should be considered when measuring attitudes. Hence, the definition and measuring of attitudes in the present study include these three components. A study done by Brown (1999) found that the statement of the sexual offender that only consisted of treatment was unacceptable and a 'soft option', while many believed that treatment was a good idea and that it should only occur in prison. Attitudes toward sexual offenders are popular and important topics for empirical inquiry in the study of social views about the criminal justice system. Sexual offenders are a group of criminals that instigate fear and contempt among people in society and are presented as evil, unpredictable and dangerous in media (Pickett, J., Mancini, C., & Mears, 2013). Earlier studies have also suggested that people can shape their attitudes through the media because the information might be discriminatory and prejudiced which in turn backs the mainstream image of sexual offenders. As a result, people may visualize a stereotypical "violent, predatory male pedophile" when speaking about sex offenders (Crano, W., Cooper, J., & Forgas, 2011).

In another study done by Higgins, C., and Ireland, C (2009) found that females emerged as viewing sex offenders in a more positive term, viewing them as individuals who could be rehabilitated. Whereas males were more supportive of harsh attitudes towards sex offenders. Respondents did not have a positive attitude to male sex offenders as compared to female sex offenders. In the same way, a study done by Cortini and Hanson (2005), using data from Canada, the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, concluded that 4-5% of women are responsible for all sexual offenses in the mentioned countries.

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) in sections 375 to 377 defines a sex offender. The classifications are extended to roughly extends to offenses committed by an individual like rape, child abuse, gang rape, sexual harassment, etc. A juvenile sex offender on the other hand, is an Indian citizen who has not completed 18 years of age on the date of the commission of an offense. The IPC specifies that a child cannot be charged for any crime until the age of 7. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 replaces the Indian juvenile delinquency law, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, and allows for juveniles in conflict with law in the age group of 16–18, involved in heinous offences, to be tried as adults.

The current literature around attitudes toward sexual offenders predominantly makes use of explicit (self-report) measurement procedures. With the rise in juvenile offenses and sex

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crimes, the number of individuals who work with this population has increased. With the realization that attitudes impact services rendered, there has been increased attention on understanding the attitudes of those who work with juvenile sex offenders. One instrument that has sought to assess the attitudes of these professionals is the Attitude Toward Sex Offenders (ATS) scale.

The ATS scale is said to provide a comprehensive examination of all three components of attitudes. Despite its status as a measure of stable attitudes (Hogue, 2015), several authors have used the ATS scale as an outcome measure. That is, researchers have adapted ATS items to examine respondents' attitudes towards specific 'types' of sexual offenders such as analyses of attitudes towards female sexual offenders (e.g., Gakhal & Brown, 2011), and juvenile sexual offenders (e.g., Harper, 2012). The present literature on attitudes towards sexual offenders is largely descriptive where the researchers have mostly made use of ATS or The Community Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders scale (CATSO) and administered these scales among diverse groups to identify possible between-groups differences. The test was commonly administered on people who directly worked with sexual offenders such as mental health professionals, parole officers, social workers, etc (Hogue, 1993). Research has consistently supported the relationship between exposure to sexual offenders within a work environment (predominantly treatment-based work) and more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Hogue & Peebles, 1997; Johnson, Hughes, & Ireland, 2007; Radley, 2011). Thus, it is possible that working in a supportive or therapeutic manner with sexual offenders improves one's attitudes towards sexual offenders. Studies done by Kjelsberg & Loos (2008) and Sanghara & Wilson (2006) found that teachers and students hold a more negative attitude towards sexual offenders compared to probation workers and psychologists who are directly involved in sex offender treatment and management. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore the attitude of young adults towards juvenile and adult sex offenders and to understand whether there will be any difference in their attitude for the same.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to compare the difference between the attitudes of male and female young adults towards juvenile and adult sex offenders using The Attitudes to Sexual Offenders Scale (Hogue 1993) scale adaptation.

Hypothesis

H₀ - There is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female young adults towards juvenile and adult sex offenders.

H_A - There is a significant difference in the attitudes of male and female young adults towards juvenile and adult sex offenders.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 80 participants (40 males and 40 females) from across India participated in the study. The age range of the participants was 18-30 years.

Measure

The Attitudes to Juvenile and Adult Sex Offenders (An adaptation of ATS Scale developed by (Hogue, 1993): A 36-item survey consisting of a 5-point Likert scale that allows

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respondents to rate their attitudes on various items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedure

The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Participants were assured confidentiality and thanked for their cooperation.

RESULTS

The responses of the participants were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to assess the difference in attitudes of males and females towards Juvenile Sex offenders (JSO) and Adult Sex Offenders (ASO) and paired sample t-test to assess the attitudes of males and females separately towards JSO and ASO. Mean and standard deviation is depicted in Table 1. Table 2 shows the difference in attitudes of males (M) and females (F) towards JSO and ASO among the sample. Table 3 presents the paired sample t-test of males for all variables. Table 4 presents paired sample t-test of females for all variables. Table 5 displays correlations between the attitudes of males and females towards JSO and ASO. Figure 1 illustrates the correlation between the attitudes of males towards JSO and ASO, females towards JSO and ASO, males and females towards JSO, males and females towards ASO.

Table 1: N, Mean and Standard Deviation

Variables	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
ASO	M	40	64.350	21.496
	F	40	67.100	22.819
JSO	M	40	74.275	18.384
	F	40	75.600	18.404

Table 2: t-test scores of all variables

Variables	Group	N	Mean	t-score	df	Sig (2-tailed)
JSO	M	40	-1.32500	-.322	78	.748
	F	40	-1.32500	-.322	78	.748
ASO	M	40	-2.75000	-.555	78	.581
	F	40	-2.75000	-.555	77.723	.581

Table 3: Paired sample t-test of males for all variables

Variables	Group	N	Mean	t-score	df	Sig (2-tailed)
JSO-ASO	M	40	9.92500	6.010	39	0.000001

Table 4: Paired sample t-test of females for all variables

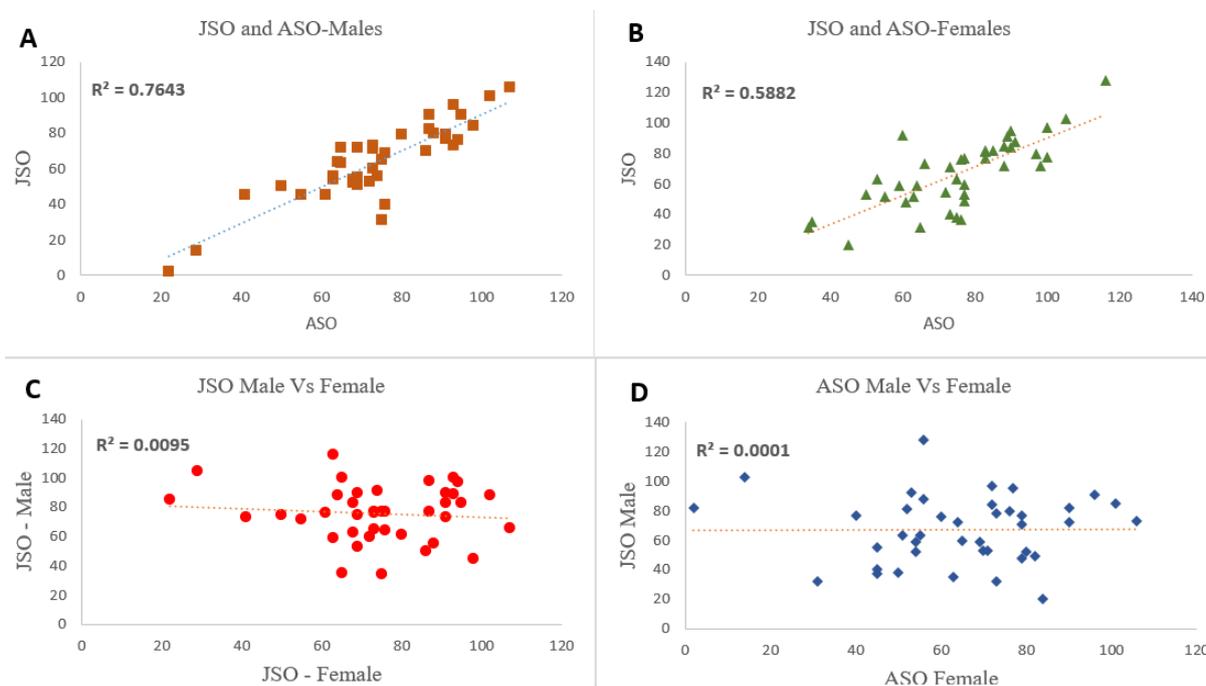
Variables	Group	N	Mean	t-score	df	Sig (2-tailed)
JSO-ASO	F	40	8.50	3.66	39	0.001

Table 5: Correlation JSO and ASO

Variables	Type of correlation	Correlation
JSO- ASO	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.819**

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Figure 1: The correlation between the attitudes of (A) males towards JSO and ASO, (B) females towards JSO and ASO, (C) males and females towards JSO, (D) males and females towards ASO.



DISCUSSION

The t-test indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female young adults towards juvenile sex offenders (JSO) and adult sex offenders (ASO) ($t = -3.22$) as depicted in Table 2. However, the paired t-test results found that there is a significant difference in the attitude of males towards JSO and ASO ($t = 0.0001$) as seen in Table 3. Also, it was found that there is a significant difference in the attitude of females towards JSO and ASO ($t = 0.001$) as seen in Table 4. It was further observed that the mean difference of attitudes of males towards JSO ($\bar{x} = 74.27$) and ASO ($\bar{x} = 64.35$) shows that there is a positive attitude towards juvenile sex offenders compared to adult sex offenders. Correspondingly in females, it was observed that the mean difference of attitude towards JSO ($\bar{x} = 75.60$) and ASO ($\bar{x} = 67.10$) shows that there is a positive attitude towards juvenile sex offenders compared to adult sex offenders.

The results found that there is a positive correlation between the attitude of males towards JSO and ASO ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$) and the attitude of females towards JSO and ASO ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$). It was seen that there is a positive correlation between the attitude of males and females towards JSO ($r = 0.0095$, $p < 0.05$). However, there is no correlation between the attitudes of the two groups towards ASO ($r = 0.0001$, $p < 0.05$) as represented in Figure 1.

A study done by Hogue (1993) stated that research has consistently supported the link between exposure to sexual offenders within a work environment to a positive attitude of individuals which supports this study as the participants have no direct exposure to neither juvenile sex offenders nor adult sex offender, therefore having a negative attitude towards the same. The majority of the select population are students and researches done by Kjelsberg & Loos (2008), Sanghara & Wilson (2006), and Gakhil and Brown (2011) have

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found that teachers and students have found to hold a more negative attitude than probation workers and psychologists who are involved in sex offender treatment and management.

CONCLUSION

In studies done by Salerno et al. (2010) and King and Roberts (2015) found that attitudes towards sexual offenders in a general sense may be skewed by the instigation of stereotypical images. In 2018, the Indian government launched the National Registry of Sexual Offenders that contains personal details of convicted sex offenders which can only be accessed by law enforcement agencies. The list is said to have over 4.5 lakh people registered. India is the ninth country in the world to have such a registry however, this was set up without assessing the economic and social costs or the privacy and civil liberty of the convicted people. This registry is likely to cause more problems than it solves for several reasons, the main being that the data would permanently be stored in the database vilifies offenders even after they have served their sentences and challenges the idea of restorative services offered in reformatories.

Being listed in such a registry will likely strengthen the stigma attached to sex offenders, causing social and economic harm to the convicts, who are often underprivileged and marginalized. There also increases the probability that they will have face challenges in finding jobs or even face harassment from police. Considering this, addressing societal stereotypes about sexual offenders, either directly through education, or indirectly through secondary exposure to counter-stereotypical paradigms, maybe a potential route to positive attitude change.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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