

## Beyond The Statistics: Unravelling the Psyche of a Sexual Offender

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### ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is still a major social issue with far-reaching implications. The fight against sexual violence, however, continues to be hampered by a lack of resources in the criminal justice system. "Making society safer" is a difficult task which necessitates not just the provision of resources, but also a thorough grasp of realistic crime patterns and risks. To launch a society-wide struggle against the epidemic of sexual offences around the world, there is an immense potential for the development of systems for assessing as well as managing sex offenders such as rapists, child abusers, murderers etc. To discover the fundamental cause of sexual offences, it is critical to obtain a better understanding of what goes on in the minds of sexual offenders. As a result, several researchers have worked hard to identify psychological factors that contribute to sexual violence and brutality. Because there is no single psychological algorithm to explain the mentality of a sexual offender, the current paper will attempt to review the numerous theories behind sexual offence as well as the steps/measures that mental health professionals can take to eliminate such heinous crimes.

**Keywords:** *Types of Sex Offenders, Sexual Offending, Treatment & Management of Sexual Offenders*

*"We mute the realisation of malevolence- which is too threatening to bear - by turning offenders into victims themselves and by describing their behaviour as the result of forces beyond their control." (Salter, 2020).*

**E**tiology can be defined as the study of the causes, origins or reasons behind the various phenomena that emerge in our environment. The roots or sources of sexually abusive behaviour, as well as the pathways that are linked with the behaviour's development, inception, and persistence, can therefore be referred to as the etiology of adult sexual offending.

The main reason to be interested in the etiology of sexual offence; trustworthy information of the underlying causes of sexual offending and victimisation is required for the development of successful preventative methods and public safety strategies. Furthermore, differentiating between the many typologies of sexual offences is also critical.

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There have been some interesting discoveries in studies involving sexual offenders. Significant study in the field of psychology has revealed that there are common factors and behaviours associated with sexual assault (Erickson et al., 1987). Sexual misdeeds and deviancies have grown much more widely publicised in recent years, and as a result, they have become a major source of public concern. The detection of sexual offenders is the first issue that society faces. Only ten percent of sex offenders are detected (Lisak & Roth, 1990). The treatment of sex offenders and prospective reoffenders is the second issue that society faces. To treat sexual deviance and offences, a variety of therapies are employed, the majority of which are based on relapse prevention techniques used to treat addiction. However, because the method contains the notion of "three steps forward, two steps back," such treatment models have proven ineffective in preventing recidivism (Polaschek, 2003).

### ***Types of Sex Offenders***

#### **Child sexual abusers**

“Child sexual abuse is the use of force/coercion of a sexual nature either when the victim is younger than age 13 and the age difference between the victim and the perpetrator is at least five years, or when the victim is between 13 and 16 and the age difference between the victim and perpetrator is at least 10 years” (Finkelhor, 1984). According to research conducted by the John Jay College Research Team (2004), based in Washington, the manipulative relationship that a child sexual abuser builds with a child because of which the child agrees to get indulged in the sexual act is the most dangerous aspect of this kind of abuse.

#### **Rapists**

Rape is a legal term that refers to unwanted sexual intercourse with the use of force and the absence of consent. Additionally, when a person has sex with someone who is ruled legally incapable of consenting due to mental illness, incapacity, or intoxication, it is considered rape (Eileraas, 2011). Rapists are more usually younger, socially active, and have been involved in an intimate relationship when compared to child sexual abusers (Gannon & Ward, 2008). According to Langstrom, Sjostedt & Grann (2004), rapists differ from child sexual abusers as they are more likely to abuse substances, have a personality disorder (e.g., antisocial disorder), or suffer from psychosis. Another noteworthy study revealed that rapists reported more frequent experiences of physical, parental, and emotional abuse alongside animal cruelty than child sexual abusers (Simons et al., 2004).

#### **Female sexual offenders**

Female sexual offenders, in contrast to male sexual offenders, are more prone to sexually abusing males and strangers (Allen, 1991; Vandiver, 2006). Wahl (1960) published two case studies focusing on the victim's experience, which marked the beginning of modern research into the attitudes and behavior of women who had molested children. The offending mothers were claimed to have been actively or passively seducing their sons in this famous study. Furthermore, on average, records from a range of nations' conviction rates and victimisation studies indicate that around 4–5% of all adult sexual offenders are females (Cortoni & Hanson, 2005; Cortoni et al., 2010).

It has been found that the majority of female sexual offenders have had traumatic and sexualised childhoods (Heil et al., 2010). Finally, according to several studies, in addition to their abusive behavior, female sexual offenders stand out from the general community due to high rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in their past (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006; Tewksbury 2004).

### **Internet offenders**

Owning or distributing child pornography; generation of child pornography; sexual solicitations (online interactions with minors for sexual gratification, which include plans to meet offline); and conspiracy crimes (e.g., working in conjunction with others to disseminate or produce child pornography, sexually solicit minors, etc.) are the numerous forms that internet sexual offending can take. As part of a research, internet child pornographers reported higher psychological troubles in adulthood and fewer sexual convictions than child sexual abusers (Webb et al., 2007). Furthermore, the rise in internet sexual offending has been accompanied by a drop in the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse, as well as a general drop in violent crime (Mishra & Lalumière, 2009; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006). This shows that internet sexual offending is a novel phenomenon that isn't driven by the same contextual characteristics as previous types of sexual or violent offences.

### ***Theories of Sexual Offending Behaviour***

#### **Biological/evolutionary theories**

These explanations of sexual offending have focused on evolutionary processes, brain structure anomalies, hormone levels, genetic and reproductive makeup, and intellectual functioning deficiencies. According to Jones (1999), selection for rape-influencing psychological qualities might possibly occur in four ways, two of which are: (1) through direct selection (the "adaptation" hypothesis); and (2) through indirect selection (the so-called "by-product" or "incidental effect" hypothesis). Natural selection may spread a psychological, information-processing predisposition for contingent (context-specific) rape conduct if it was adaptive, that is, if it had a beneficial impact on the reproductive success of all men possessing the tendency. Natural and sexual selection are to blame for this. Because indiscriminate copulation (sexual intercourse) is more costly to females than to men (females cannot avoid the costs of internal gestation). Natural selection has favored females of internally fertilising species in choosing a potential partner for coitus. The differing average costs of copulating together for males and females have resulted in diverse male and female psychologies, especially when it comes to the desire to mate indiscriminately (particularly with strangers).

Unmated males and females in ancestral contexts are likely to have clashed when a male sought to copulate with a female who did not want to copulate with him, for example. Forced copulation could increase the number of male mates in such a situation, potentially enhancing male reproductive success. However, this advantage would have come at the expense of the female's mate choice, perhaps lowering her lifetime reproductive success as compared to the reproductive success she would have likely achieved if she mated only with males she chose.

Proponents of the by-product (or "incidental effect") model argue that rape may endure within a species not because forced coitus was specifically adaptive in itself, but because forced copulation was a by-product of adaptations to other generalised behavior that is adaptive for the organisms bearing them.

Several studies have discovered anomalies in the brains of some sexual offenders (Aigner et al., 2000; Corley et al., 1994). The notion of a genetic abnormality in sex offenders that makes them more inclined to engage in aggressive sexual behavior has also been explored (Beckmann et al., 1974).

### Personality theories

According to numerous studies, over 70% of jailed sexual offenders have been diagnosed with a mental disorder, with approximately 50% meeting the diagnostic criteria for a personality disorder. The existence of pathological personality traits and impairments in personality functioning are the distinguishing characteristics of a personality disorder (Wakefield, 2013).

Personality theories arose from the work of Sigmund Freud, who felt that sexual deviance is a manifestation of unresolved issues that arise in the early phases of a person's development. Bowlby (1988) established one of the later personality theories, attachment theory, to explain the bond between a child and his or her primary caregiver and how this early interaction impacts latter adjustment. According to Bowlby, there is a key phase for attachment development (2.5 years). If an attachment hasn't formed during this time, it's possible that it won't form at all. Bowlby later proposed a five-year sensitive period.

Personality disorders were frequently diagnosed among sex offenders, according to several studies. Craissati and Blundell (2013) evaluated 137 male sex offenders and discovered that 52% had at least one personality disorder and 25% had multiple personality disorders. The most frequently diagnosed personality disorders among those evaluated were avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive. In a recent study by Chen, Chen, & Hung (2016) discovered that 59% of 68 sex offenders had a personality condition. Antisocial, borderline, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders were the most common diagnoses in their sample.

### Social learning theories

As plausible reasons for sexual offending behaviours, two basic social learning hypotheses have been proposed. The first is that sexually abused children grow up to be sexually abusive adults, and the second is that sexually graphic information encourages sexual offence.

Rada (1978) provides a detailed account of rapists' childhood experiences and the parental training procedures to which they are frequently subjected. Those boys who will grow up to be adult rapists are regularly and brutally punished in a manner that is contradictory and hardly functionally related to their behavior. Langevin et al. (1984) discovered that rapists' mothers and fathers were both poor parents with whom their children did not identify. The fathers were violent, inebriated, and in problems with the law, and their sons followed in their footsteps.

Another social learning theory about compulsive sexual behavior claims that pornography functions as a model for sexually aggressive behavior for some people, motivating them to indulge in the behaviors displayed in pornographic films/shows. From a social learning viewpoint, Check & Malamuth (1986) investigated the impacts of being exposed to pornography. They pointed out that pornography is likely to influence attitudes and behavior by the means of its antecedent and subsequent effects. While the antecedent variables make the observer expect enjoyment by committing rape since forcefulness in sex is linked to sexually attractive stimuli in pornographic material; consequent effects arise from the observed behaviour's functional value and therefore can increase a man's arousal to rape.

Further, according to Malamuth & Check (1981), exposure to pornography caused normal males to increasingly accept violence against women and enhanced their support towards

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rape myths. Moreover, more recent study suggests that child pornography can be used as a reliable indicator of a sexual interest in children (Seto et al., 2006).

### **Cultural theories**

Interpersonal aggression, male dominance, and negative views about women are three broad traits of communities that appear to influence the prevalence of rape, according to anthropologists. It's vital to keep in mind that these findings are based on primitive and undeveloped communities. Furthermore, the researcher often derives the rates of rape in various societies from the identification of such incidents by members of each society. Finally, it also is apparent that rape has different meanings in different cultures (Chappell, 1976).

Acceptance of interpersonal violence as a means of dealing with problems is the most consistent trait of communities with high incidence of rape. Otterbein (1979) looked at 135 illiterate societies and discovered that feuding (bitter quarrels) was one of the key factors linked to increased rates of sexual assault. In addition, Burt (1980) discovered that men's acceptance towards interpersonal violence against women was strongly linked to their acceptance of myths related to rape.

Tieger (1981) discovered that non-offender males who demonstrated a greater likelihood of raping also believed that nonsexual aggressive behavior against females was common and desirable.

The social acceptance of male dominance and prevalent negative views toward women are two more cultural factors linked to high rates of sexual assault. In the rape-prone Yanomamo, for example, men have all political authority, while women primarily serve as the spoils of wars and battles, with their sexual desires and interests mostly ignored (Chagnon, 1977).

### ***Treatment & Management of Sexual Offenders***

In recent years, policymakers, the public, and mental health specialists have paid close attention to sex offenders. This is due, at least in part, to the devastating effect that sex crimes have on victims and the community at large. The successful implementation of treatment interventions aimed at reducing the risk of recidivism (a convicted criminal's tendency to reoffend), empirical work that focuses upon treatment effectiveness, and an increase in the availability of treatment programs for sexual offenders have all coincided with this recognition (McGrath et al., 2010). The following are some examples of current and upcoming models, as well as their research foundations and suggestions for recommended practice in the treatment of sexual offenders:

### ***Principles of Effective Correctional Intervention***

According to the popular RNR model by Andrews & Bonta (2010), there are 3 such principles:

- **Risk principle:** The severity of correctional interventions must be matched to the degree of risk posed by the offender, according to the risk principle. As a result, the most intensive levels of intervention should be held for higher-risk offenders, whereas lower-risk offenders should receive lesser levels of intervention (or none at all).
- **Need principle:** The need principle, which is the second principle of effective correctional intervention, suggests that treatment and intervention strategies such as

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supervision should precisely target offenders' criminogenic needs, or the specific risk factors that can be altered through intervention and are empirically strongly correlated with recidivism risk.

- **Responsivity principle:** The responsivity principle, the third principle of effective correctional intervention, is concerned with the relationship between the individual and the treatment. This principle specifies that treatment should be administered in a manner that is responsive to many aspects of the individual, such as language and culture, in addition to being cognitive-behavioural in nature.

### *Cognitive-behavioural treatment*

In terms of reducing recidivism, cognitive-behavioural treatment remains the most widely acknowledged and empirically validated form of sexual offender treatment (example: Hanson et al., 2002). According to behavioural, cognitive, and social learning theories and models, sexual offending is defined by behavioural and cognitive patterns that emerge and are maintained as a result of modelling, observational learning, and reinforcement of behaviour, attitudes, and cognition. Treatment focuses on changing patterns of behavioural, cognitive, and emotional reactions linked with sexual offending, so that problematic, deviant, and/or criminal behavioural patterns and responses are replaced with adaptive, non-deviant, pro-social behaviors and responses.

### *Relapse prevention*

Relapse prevention (RP) has long been one of the most widely used treatment methods for sexual offenders (example: Laws, 1989, 2003). As originally conceived, the purpose of RP was to help patients detect, anticipate, and avoid high-risk circumstances that could lead to lapses. Treatment entailed teaching patients how to deal with issues and high-risk situations as they arose, as well as addressing skill inadequacies in their capacity to do so.

### *The Good Lives Model*

The good lives model (GLM) is a new approach to sexual offender treatment that contends that, like other humans, sexual offenders are goal-oriented and try to acquire fundamental primary human goods, which are defined as actions, experiences, and activities that are intrinsically beneficial to their individual well-being (Ward & Gannon, 2006; Ward & Stewart, 2003). As a result, in GLM-based treatment, there is a clear emphasis on aiding individuals in achieving essential and valued life goals in pro-social, non-harmful ways (Ward et al., 2004; Yates et al., 2010)

## **CONCLUSION**

There is yet to be a clarification or causation underlying sexual offending behavior in the field of sex offender management. Even though many concerns remain unsolved, research has yielded several significant results regarding the etiology of sexual offending. The most important conclusion drawn from these studies is that there is no definite answer to the question of why people engage in sexually inappropriate behavior. This is because the issue of sexual offence is extremely complex and multifaceted. As a result, over the years, a variety of approaches such as personality, cognitive, biological, and others, as well as studies to back up their claims, have attempted to explain the etiology behind the same.

Since so much of the etiological research done so far has been retrospective in nature, there is an obvious necessity of prospective, longitudinal study so as to analyze the antecedent causes behind sexual offending and changes in sexually aggressive behavior over time. Research which includes samples of non-offenders and research that reflect the perspectives

of victims are also necessary, as are efforts to utilise samples which are more reflective of the range of people who commit sexual offences. Victims, both female and male, may well be useful in providing information about criminal motives and behavior by disclosing details about their experiences with offenders.

The research papers reviewed above have shown the importance for all of us to develop an understanding. This understanding involves our acceptance of the truth that sexual offending cannot be eliminated only using a country's legal system. Instead, it is a deep-seated issue that can only be remedied if we make sincere efforts to address the root causes. Therefore, social workers, mental health professionals, doctors, and other medical advisers, among others, would be required to help. Finally, there is also a need for more research about the integration of the numerous theories and the ways in which different factors involved in sexual offending interact with one another, allowing the world to more effectively cope with the major difficulties posed by sexual offenders.

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