Sexual Offenders: An Overview of Risk Assessment, Recidivism & Treatment Effectiveness
Swarthmore College, April 2018

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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

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Characteristics associated with child molesters

- Degree of age difference to victims
- Relationship to victims
  - $\frac{1}{3}^{rd}$ 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 $\frac{1}{4}^{th}$ to $\frac{1}{3}^{rd}$ of sexual assaults of children are by strangers

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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

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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\textsuperscript{rd} 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.

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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

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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 method of risk assessment
- Actuarial > clinical assessments with some caveats
- Risk prediction vs. Risk assessment

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Recidivism

• Static vs. Dynamic Factors

  o Static factors are unchanging fixed factors (at time of assessment); good for evaluating long-term risk but cannot account for change over time

  o 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)

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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%

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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%)

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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