

Offenders are heterogeneous in nature discuss.

Sociology, Violence



“ Offenders are Heterogeneous in nature, discuss” Offenders are a heterogeneous population of individuals, which range from shop lifters to murderers. There are clear intergroup differences based on characteristics of the offender, victim and the crime. Therefore it is very difficult to discuss the possible heterogeneity of all offenders as one group, thus this paper will focus on one particular type of offender.

Sex offenders are frequently viewed as a homogeneous class of individuals, the public do not tend to distinguish the difference between indecent exposure and rape merely considering these offenders as ‘ deranged or evil’ (Bartol & Bartol 2008). On the other hand research conducted by Knight, Rosenberg and Schneider (1985) shows that sex offenders differ extensively in terms of the frequency and type of sexual activity they engage in. They also differ in personal traits such as ‘ age, background, personality, race, religion, beliefs, attitudes, and interpersonal skills’.

Furthermore there are fundamental differences in the Modus Operandi (M. O) of sex offenders, for instance gender and age of the victim, the degree of planning before the offence and the amount of violence used or intended. Therefore preliminary research shows clear disparity regarding the heterogeneity of sex offenders, thus the homogeneity of this group will also be considered. A person is labelled a sex offender when they are convicted of a sex crime; this may include, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, paedophilia, frotteurism, exhibitionism, incest, necrophilia and so on.

The majority of studies used in this essay will be centred on sex offenders who have committed rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and

paedophilia. Thus it is necessary to define some of these terms, the most common definition of rape is ' the penetration of the anus or vagina by a penis, finger or object or the penetration of the mouth by a penis. '

(Polaschek, Ward & Hudson, 1997). Sexual abuse is defined by the Sexual and Domestic Violence Services (SDVS) as ' when a sexual act is intentional and is committed either by physical force, threat or intimidation and by ignoring the objections of another person. . The major difference between sex offenders is the age of their victim, rapists and offenders who commit sexual abuse prey on persons of 16 years of age or over, whereas child molester and paedophile victims are under 16 years of age. Firstly we need to consider when discussing the heterogeneity of sex offenders is the various typologies involved. Research has shown that offenders sexual aggression can be divided into two distinct groups; instrumental and expressive.

Instrumental sexual aggression occurs when the sex offenders only use enough coercion so that the victim complies and expressive sexual aggression this is when the offender's fundamental motive is to physically and psychologically harm the victim (Bartol & Bartol, 2008). On the other hand the assumption that sexual offenders always exhibit aggression is not always congruent; according to Revitch and Schlesinger (1988) many sex offenders are not prone to violence but rather are timid, shy and socially inhibited. Intra-group typologies should also be considered when looking at the differences between sex offenders. For example Groth et al. 1979) categorised Rapists into four main sub groups; power-assurance, power-assertive, anger-retaliatory and anger-excitement. This first sub group is the most common type of rapist, who rapes due to insecurities about their

masculinity. The power-assertive rapist is socially skilled, displays a high level of violence and is sexually confident. The third sub group has high levels of anger towards women, commits blitz attacks and also degrading activities are often involved. Finally the anger-excitement rapist is rare and gains pleasure and sexual excitement from seeing the distress of the victim (Bartol Bartol, 2008).

Groth and Birnbaum (1978) created the regressed-fixated dichotomy of child molesters. Regressed offenders are men who have matured sexually but have returned to an earlier level of psychosexual development. Fixated offenders are said to be 'developmentally fixated on... basis such that their sexual interest is in children' (Howitt, 2002). These typologies give an insight into the major differences in basic characteristics and motives of sex offenders, which illustrate the point that they diverge in terms of their 'nature'. The demographics of sex offenders also shed light on the similarities and differences of sex offenders.

First gender will be considered, unsurprisingly the majority of sex offenders are male, and 95.5% of sex offenders in the Federal Probation and Pre-trial Services System in the U. S are male. On the other hand, Kaplan and Green (1995) reported data which indicated that between 4 and 25 percent of victims of child sexual abuse stated their abusers were female. Therefore it indicates that the population of female sex offenders is underestimated. However it can be said with conviction that the majority of sex offenders are male, this fact contradicts that they are heterogeneous in nature.

Surprisingly research shows that sex offenders are often adolescent males (Bartol & Bartol, 2008), Becker and Johnson (2001) found that 20-30 percent of all rapes and 30-50 percent of child molestations are committed by this group. However the issue of average age of a sex offender has been found to be more complex, as Hanson (2001) reported that child molesters tend to be older. This conclusion was supported as Henn, Herjanic, and Vanderpearl (1976) found that 75 percent of convicted rapists were under the age of 30 and 75 percent of child molesters were over.

This indicates that the average age of the sex offender is in dispute. Knight, Rosenberg, and Schneider 1985 conducted a study which demonstrated a number of notable commonalities between aggressive paedophiles and rapists. The first is that sex offenders have problems with alcohol. Another similarity is that they have a high rate of high school failure and dropout; this is supported by a recent case study of 437 sex offenders conducted by Black and Pettway (2001). They discovered that 60 percent of child molesters and 70 percent of rapists did not graduate high school.

The third commonality found was that sex offenders tend to have unstable work histories in unskilled occupations, Black and Pettway (2001) study supported this; however it was found that child molesters had a higher history of stable work. The final commonality noted was the sex offender's tendency to come from a low socioeconomic class. However, the case study previously discussed also enlightened several differences between sex offenders; it found that the majority of rapists had never been married (65%) whereas two thirds of child molesters were married (66%).

Another characteristic that showed disparity between sex offenders was race, it found that a larger proportion of child molesters were white (72%) and a greater proportion of rapists were black (60%). This shows that as a whole sex offending occurs across races, although it illustrates that specific sex crimes have a specific racial majority. Research has shown homogeneity in the level of intelligence of sex offenders. Cantor et al. (2005) found that male sex offenders score significantly lower in IQ measures than male who commit non-sexual offences.

Nevertheless, this difference is not displayed uniformly across sex offender sub-types; it was found that those offenders that commit rape against adults have the same IQ as non-sexual offenders. It was found that a significant decline in the level of the IQ of the sex offender came hand in hand with a decline in the age of the victim. Cantor et al. (2005) concluded that these results do not indicate that low IQ scores cause sex offending, merely that something may have happened during early childhood to inhibit their cognitive functioning.

Studies have supported the conviction that someone who has experienced sexual abuse as a child is more likely to later engage in sex offences. For example Seto and Lalumiere (2008) conducted a meta-analysis and found that sex offenders were much more likely to have been sexually abused than non-offenders. Therefore, groups of adult sex offenders contain a disproportionate number of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse. This provides evidence that sex offenders are homogeneous and a high number of them suffered sexual abuse as a child.

Personality research into sex offenders has shown a homogenous trend among sex offenders. Aromaki, Lindman and Eriksson (2002) conducted a study into the levels of antisocial personality traits among a group of Finnish sex offenders and found that 50% had an anti-social personality disorder according to DSM-IV specifics. Furthermore sex offenders reliably demonstrate high levels of psychopathology (Stinson, Becker & Tromp, 2005). In a study of adult sex offenders it was found that 63% of these offenders exhibited a significant level of psychopathic traits ranging from mild to severe.

Another homogeneous trait which male sex offenders share is cognitive distortions; cognitive distortions are attitudes and beliefs which offenders use to deny, minimise and rationalise their behaviour (Murphy, 1990). Most rapists tend to conform to attitudes that support men to be 'dominant, controlling and powerful' whereas women are expected to be 'submissive permissive, and compliant' (Bartol & Bartol, 2008). Furthermore Malamuth and Brown (1994) studied the perceptions of women in sexually aggressive men and found that suspicion was associated with attitudes which supported sexual aggression.

These men generally believed that women do not tell the truth when it comes to sex (Milner & Webster, 2005). Also Polsheck and Gannon (2004) found that male rapists view women as hostile and they 'are dangerous'. The combination of these attitudes and schemas has a strong disinhibitory effect on sex offenders, they encourages them to interpret ambiguous behaviour of their victims as 'come-ons' and believe that sexual behaviours

that are intended to coerce women are not offensive. They also believe their rape victims derive satisfaction from being assaulted. Lipton, McDonel, & McFall, 1987). Cognitive distortions are also common among child molesters and paedophiles. For example Abel, Becker, and Cunningham-Rathner (1984) outlined seven common cognitive distortions among child molesters these included ' if children fail to resist advances, they must want sex', ' sexual activity with children is an appropriate means to increase the sexual knowledge of the children' and so on. Several researchers confirm that child molesters do report similar sexual attitudes and beliefs about children. Hayashino et al. 1995) found in a comparison between the level of cognitive distortions of child molesters and non-offenders, that child molesters had more. This shows there is a theme of cognitive distortions among sex offenders. An imbalance of sex hormones has been shown to be a homogeneous factor throughout sex offenders, although the type and levels of hormones do vary between sex offender sub groups. A recent study conducted by Dabbs et al. (1995) high testosterone was found to be linked to crimes of sex and violence, so that the highest risk ratios for high testosterone men were observed for rape, child molestation and homicide, respectively.

The Giotakos et al. (2003) study in rapists provides a more complex account of the hormone imbalance noting that, rapists were found to have higher levels of plasma testosterone, dihydrotestosterone and free androgen index than controls but lower levels of a major metabolite of serotonin. In paedophiles several serotonergic disturbances and increased epinephrine levels have been found (Maes et al. , 2001). Thus hormonal imbalances are a

congruent theme in various sub-groups of sex offenders, indicating homogeneity.

Another homogeneous aspect of the nature sex offenders is there general increase in sexual arousal due to ' abnormal sexual material'. Many studies have used phallometric measurements in order to measure the sexual arousal of a participant to a specific sexual stimulus. Abel et al. (1997) used this technique to create the rape index which measured responses to erotic material including force and coercion. The men with the highest response have the greater rape potential. A similar index was created for dangerous child molesters (Avery-Clark & Laws, 1984).

The validity of this index was confirmed by Wormith (1986) who found that the majority of the classifications based on circumference phallometric measurements of sex offenders were accurate. The final feature of the sex offender which should be discussed is their likelihood to commit recidivism. Some statistics show homogeneity in this area too, Hanson (2001) discovered a 19 percent sexual recidivism rate for child molesters and a 17 percent recidivism rate for rapists during five years follow-up time after release. This points towards rates of recidivism being just under 20 percent for sex offenders.

Although other studies show disparity in recidivism rates, one study found a 39 percent recidivism rate in child molesters after a three year follow up (Langan, Schmitt & Durose, 2003). In conclusion, although research indicates significant fundamental homogeneous themes of sex offenders such as alcoholism, low IQ, high school drop-out, history of sexual abuse, unskilled

occupations, hormone imbalance, cognitive distortions and personality disorders. However these were shown to vary depending on the sub-group of sex offenders being discussed.

Research has shown that sub-groups of rapists and child molesters vary on levels on the themes previously discussed. Demonstrating sex offenders can be divided into clear heterogeneous sub-groups based on their nature. This paper has highlighted the complexities of researching the heterogeneity of the offender as a whole group and has clearly supported the idea that sex offenders have inter-group heterogeneous characteristics. References
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