

Female Sexual Offenders: A Special Subgroup

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Semiahmoo, Washington

February 24, 2018

Outline

- The context of female offending
- Prevalence
- Gender-informed vs. gender-neutral theories
- Risk of recidivism: base rates and risk factors; implications for assessment
- Treatment and risk management: gender specific issues
- Conclusion

The context of female offending

Traditional views of female (non-sexual) offenders

- Theories have described criminalised women either as:
 - Emotionally disturbed;
 - Maladapted to their feminine role;
 - Physiologically or psychologically abnormal; or
 - Choosing to become masculine in rebellion against their 'natural' feminine role

see DeKeseredy, 2009 for a review

Stereotypes...

- Traditional perceptions about female *sexual* offenders:
 - Not enough of them to make it a significant problem
 - They only offend because they're mentally ill / mentally deficient
 - They only offend because they've been forced into it by a man because...
- ...a 'normal' woman would simply not want to hurt a child...

Who are female sexual offenders?

- Female sexual offenders - just like their male counterparts - are individuals who have committed a sexual act on another person (intended, attempted or completed) against that person's will
- Women who consume or produce child abuse images - with or without attempts to contact a child - would also be considered sexual offenders.

Who are **not** female sexual offenders...

- Do you agree?

- 1) Women who knowingly allow someone else access to a child for sexual purposes (e.g., a mother is aware that the father is sexually offending against the children but fails to intervene)
- 2) Women who facilitate sexual access to a child/teenager for financial gains

Categories of Female Sexual Offenders

- Various typologies – however, general convergence on categories:
 - Those who offend against children
 - Those who offend against adolescents
 - Those who assault adults
- Within each category:
 - solo offenders
 - co-offending

Prevalence

Prevalence

- Ongoing debates about the prevalence of female sexual offending. For example:
 - Allen (1991): 45% of the males and 6% of the females reported that their sexual abuser had been female
 - Finkelhor et al. (1990): 17% of the victimized men and 1% of the victimized women reported a female perpetrator
- ➔ **Assumption** that female sexual offending is **more** underreported than male offending

Meta-analysis of the proportion of s.o. who are women (Cortoni, Babshichin, & Rat, 2017)

- The proportion of sexual offenders who were women was estimated based:
 - Official police or Court reports of offender gender
 - Victimization surveys
- Data available from 12 separate countries

Meta-analytical Results

→ Official sources:

- $N = 57,164$ ($k = 10$)
- Fixed and random effects:
 - **$P = 2.2\%$** (95% CI = 1.6, 2.9%)

Example :

Proportion based on officially reported sexual crimes

Study	Sample	Type of Sexual Crime	Percentage (# offenders / total)
Kong et al. (2003)	Canada 2002	Sexual offences reported to police	3.0% (813/27,094)
Québec, Canada (2006)	Province of Québec, 2005	Sexual offences reported to police	2.00% (15/2,535)

cont...

U.S. Department of Justice	U.S.A. 2005	<u>Persons arrested</u>	1.31%
		- Forcible rape	(224/17,112)
		- Other sexual offences	8.71% (5,508/63,243)
<hr/>			
UK Home Office	England & Wales 2006	Found guilty or cautioned for sexual offence	2.04 (100/4,900)
	2003		1.8% (100/5,700)

Meta-analytical Results – cont...

- Self-reported victimization surveys:
 - $N = 802,920$ ($k = 6$)
 - Fixed-effect: **P = 11.6%** (CI = 10.8, 12.5%)
 - Random-effects: **P = 10.8%**, 95% CI = [5.4, 16.1%]

Example:

Proportion based on victimization surveys

Study	Sample	Definition of sexual offence	Sample Size		Percentage (# females / total)
			Survey	Sexual offences	
U.S. Dept of Justice (2003)	U.S.A., 2002	Rape / sexual assault in 2002	76,050	81 victims 96 offenders	4.2 4/96

(cont.)

Morrie et al. (2003)	New Zealand, 2001	Sexual interference, unwanted sex acts	5,147	57 victims 65 offender s	3.1 2/65
Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003)	Australia, 2002	Sexual assault prior 12 months	41,200	206 Victims	7.0 14/206

Meta-analysis Prevalence: Conclusion

- Official rates = 2%
- Victimization rates = 12%
- ⇒ Approximately 20% of female sexual offenses officially reported (2 out of 12 victims).
- ⇒ Among males - approximately 10 to 20% of male sexual offenses officially reported (between 1 and 2 out of 10 victims).
- ⇒ Based on the comparisons of official rates and population victimisation studies, female sexual offending appears *no more* underreported than male sexual offending.

Victims of Female Sexual Offenders

- Both male & female victims of female sexual offenders report the same range of long-term effects as victims of male abusers:
 - Substance abuse
 - Self-injury
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Depression & Rage
 - Problematic relationships with women
 - Difficulties with sexuality and identity issues.
- Further, victims of both males and females abusers reported that the sexual abuse by females was more harmful and detrimental than the sexual abuse they had experienced by males.

Victims (cont...)

- **Problem**: societal responses to female sexual offending often re-victimize victims of women
 - Disclosure often met by disbeliefs and ambivalence on the part of their therapist
 - Victims are sometimes told that they must have imagined things, misinterpreted their mothers' care, or were fantasizing
 - Hetherton (1999) termed this situation as "secondary abuse" of victims of women.

Gender-informed Theory

The importance of gender...

- A gender-informed approach to the understanding of female sexual offenders is required.
 - ➔ *Gender-neutral* : explanations for / factors related to the criminal behavior *regardless of gender* (i.e., factor applies to both male and female offenders)
 - ➔ *Gender-informed* : explanations / factors that are either unique to, or that manifest themselves in unique ways, among women

Types of theories

- *Level I* theories: comprehensive multi-factorial theories that explain the etiology of sexually offending behaviour.
- *Level II* theories: explanations of individual aspects related to sexual offending.
- *Level III* theories: descriptive in nature and focus on proximal elements that lead to a sexual offence.

Level III explanation of female offending: offense process

- Three lines of inquiry:
 - Gannon & her colleagues (2008; 2013)
 - DeCou & his colleagues (2015)
 - Desfachelles & Cortoni (2017)

Descriptive Model of the Offence Process for Female Sexual Offenders (DMFSO)

- Gannon & her colleagues (2008; 2013)
- Developed a model of the offense process for female sexual offenders among 22 women convicted of sexual offenses in the UK
- Tested the model on 34 additional women from North America – 16% of the U.S. women could not be classified – indicating more work is needed.

Background factors

- Problematic Early Family Environment
- Abusive Experiences
- Lead to the development of vulnerability factors that provide foundation for and interact with an unstable lifestyle (& eventual offending)
- Inability to cope with life stressors

Pre-Offense Factors (cont...)

- Vulnerability factors:
 - Poor mental health issues
 - Passive personality characteristics
 - Isolation & lack of social support
 - Maladaptive coping strategies (substance misuse & passive coping)

Pre-Offense Period

- Unstable lifestyle characterized by:
 - domestic disturbances
 - general lifestyle deterioration
 - multiple caregiver responsibilities (e.g., children, sick relatives)
 - financial problems
 - criminal activity
 - general negative affect

Offense Motivations & Planning

■ 3 patterns of 'offense planning'

- Implicit planning
- Explicit planning
- Directed planning

■ Motivations:

- sexual gratification
- intimacy (with either a victim or a co-offender)
- instrumental other (e.g., revenge / humiliation or financial)

Implicit Planning

General Implicit planning:

- Adjusting circumstances to increase chances of physical / emotional contact with the victim.

But for some women:

- As offending becomes closer, they become disorganized & impulsive
- Associated with:
 - **Agression**
 - **Anger**

Explicit Planning

Explicit planning:

- Explicitly plans to offend
- Typical of offenders against adults whose goals were 'instrumental others'
- Associated with positive affect:
 - Excitement
 - Cognitions based on instrumental goals ("They'll get what they deserve").
 - Sexual elements designed to humiliate

Directed Planning

Directed planning:

- Women coerced into the abuse by a male partner due to
 - passivity
 - extreme fear
 - or ingrained cognitions or norms developed through years of grooming from their partners and early abusive experiences
- Associated with:
 - Anxiety
 - Cognitions to alleviate dissonance associated with their offending (e.g., “If I just do it once he will stop asking me”).

Ecological process model of female sexual offending

- DeCou & colleagues (2015) – qualitative analysis of offense patterns of 24 women.
- Examined their offense-related experiences to identify the internal and external factors that contributed to the offending.
- Found distinctive motivations for solo- and co-offending – each contextualized within ecological layers of social and environmental influence.

Solo offenders

- Motivations for offenses:
 - Isolation
 - Need for social and emotional support
 - Filling a void through the relationship with the victim
 - Implicit assumptions regarding the lack of harm associated with the offense (“no deviant intent”)

Co-offenders (male spouse)

- Motivations / circumstances:

- Giving in to a partner's deviant interests
- Offending due to threats of harm or abuse
- Wanting to placate a partner
- Desire for greater closeness with the co-perpetrator

EMFSO (cont...)

- Like Gannon's model, found that victimization histories; patterns of interpersonal interactions; and life stressors interacted to lead to the offending behavior.
- In contrast to Gannon – found that these processes were continuous and dynamic rather than temporally sequential.
- The ecological model more akin to Ellerby et al. (2000) Unhealthy Life Cycle -

Offending Patterns of Female Co-offenders

- Desfachelles & Cortoni (2017) – 17 women incarcerated in France who co-offended with their spouse
- Goals of the study:
 - To better understand how women get involved in co-offending
 - To better understand patterns of offending over the course of the assaults

Relationship Pattern:

- All women were constantly seeking someone as they were incapable of being alone.
- Nine participants had at least one prior live-in relationship, some of these lasted for years.
- Relationships characterized by social isolation, conjugal violence, inadequate parenting
- These dysfunctional and abusive relations consolidated the women's personal, emotional, and social difficulties.

Role as mother

- Difficulties in prioritizing the welfare of their children – these women tended to be focused on their own needs (s/a Saradjian 1996's findings)
- They tended to not consider/understand that their children's welfare was their responsibility.
- Often viewed themselves in equal footing with their children → e.g., consider that their own suffering at the hand of partner was the same / worse than the children's suffering
- Presence of an incestuous family climate which was unopposed by the women

Three new elements in the relationship with co-offender

- 1) Considered their spouse (co-offender) to be, finally, the “protectors” they had been seeking to take care of them and change their lives .
- 2) As a result, these women yielded total control of their lives to their spouse – which led to even more isolation and dependency on their spouses.
- 3) The offending couples had unconventional sexual lives that the women accepted and in which they freely participated (s/a Davin, 1999).

Initial Offending

- In 13 cases - spouse was the instigator of the initial co-offending assault. Among these:
 - 6 women offended on their own accord
 - 7 women offended as a direct result of their spouse's coercion (emotional dependence / fear of physical and sexual reprisals)
- Four main motivations were identified:
 - Pleasing the spouse in order to keep him in the relationship,
 - Self-protection (fear / avoidance of reprisals)
 - Exchange of services
 - Material gain

Levels of involvement

- Three levels of involvement in sexual assaults***:
- **Passive**: the woman is an observer; indifferent; or facilitator of the abuse (9 cases)
 - **Directed**: the woman performs the acts requested by the spouse (13 cases – **NB**: directed **≠** coerced)
 - **Active**: the woman initiates acts by herself (11 cases)

***Not mutually exclusive categories / no woman had been only passive

Offending Pattern

- Degree of coercion and implication may vary from assault to assault :
 - Some initially coerced women become more active and/or continue to offend in the absence of coercion.
 - Half (6/11) of the active women also offended on their own.
 - So different types of co-offending appears...

3 types of female co-offenders

Subjugated (n=6)

- Coerced by co-offending spouse
- May suggest the assault.
- Is passive or directed.
- Expresses negative emotions.

Engaged (n=5)

- May have been coerced by co-offending spouse in the past, but is no longer so.
- May suggest the assault.
- Initiates assaults, together with others.

Diversified (n=6)

- Rarely coerced by co-offender.
- May suggest the assault.
- Usually active - rarely passive or directed.
- Acts alone.
- Experiences pleasure during assaults.

Offense Process: Conclusion

- Offence pathways do not represent static descriptors of the offending process among women ⇒ but may be a useful guide to assess how a woman may have reached her offending.
- A woman who has committed multiple sexual offences may shift pathways (e.g., directed then on to solo offending) ⇒ flexibility is required to understand her offending pattern.
- Still does not explain the etiology of female sexual offending – more research needed!

Assessing Risk of Sexual Recidivism in Women

Female S.O. & Recidivism

- Tremendous advances in the knowledge of risk assessment and treatment needs of adult male sexual offenders.
- In contrast, little is known about female sexual offenders.
- While some research available on recidivism rates, research on risk factors still preliminary.

Purpose of Risk Assessment

The assessment...

- Informs on:
 - the level of risk posed by the offender
 - when the offender may be most at risk of reoffending
- Identifies treatment needs
- Provides strategies for supervision to promote the effective management of the offender's risk.

What information is needed to assess risk?

- Fundamental to the assessment of risk of recidivism is empirical knowledge about:
 - Base rates of recidivism
 - Static and dynamic factors
- What are the:
 - Female sexual recidivism rates?
 - Static and dynamic risk factors of female sexual offenders?

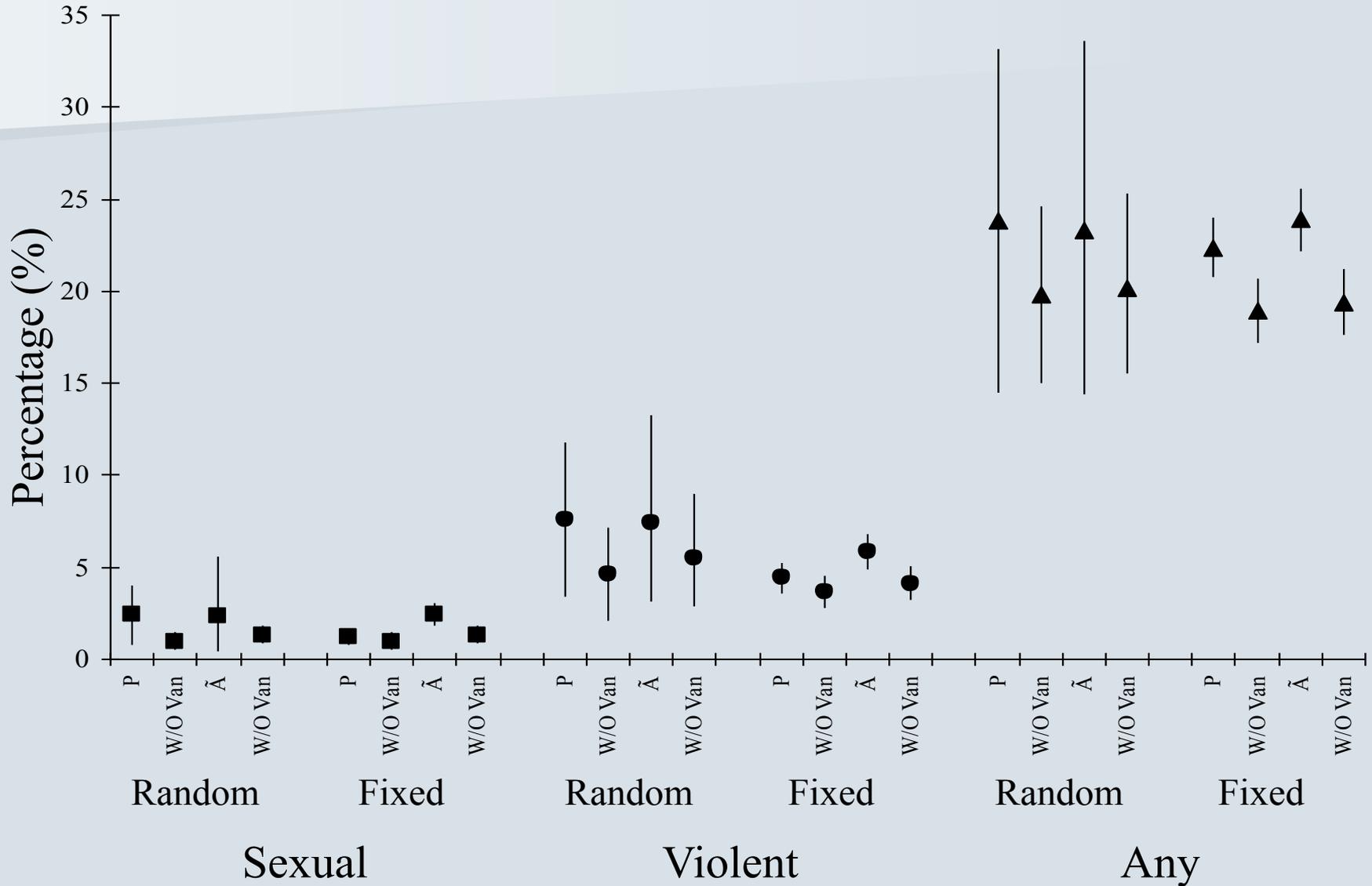
What do we know about the
recidivism rates of female
sexual offenders?

Base rates of recidivism in female sexual offenders?

(Cortoni, Hanson & Coache, 2010)

- Meta-analysis of 2,490 women convicted of sexual offences
- Mean follow-up time = 6.5 years
 - Sexual Recidivism $\approx 1.5\%$
 - Violent recidivism $\approx 6\%$
 - Any recidivism $\approx 20\%$

Meta-analytical Results



Confirmatory study #1

- Wijkman & Bijleveld (2013) examined the recidivism rates of all adult females (N = 261) over age 18 between 1993 and 2011.
- Mean follow-up time = 13.2 years
 - Sexual recidivism = **1.1%**
 - Violent recidivism = 7.3%
 - Any recidivism = 27.6%

Confirmatory study #2

- McCoy & Miller(2015) examined (among other issues) the sexual recidivism rates of 244 adult females in Texas released between end of 2008 and beginning of 2014.
- Recidivism data were collected at end of 2014.
- Mean follow-up time = 4 years
 - Sexual recidivism = 0%

What do we know about *static* factors for recidivism in female sexual offenders?

Static Risk Factors

- Historical factors empirically associated with recidivism potential.
- These factors cannot be changed through intervention (e.g., age, prior sex offenses, nonsexual violence, etc.)

Williams and Nicholaichuk (2001)

- 61 women; mean follow-up = 7.6 years
- Found 2 *differences* between sexual recidivists & other female sexual offenders:
 - Solo offending
 - Unrelated victims
- *However* → N of sexual recidivists = **2**

Vandiver (2007)

- 471 women; mean follow-up 12 years.
- 2 separate findings:
 1. Prior # of any offences predicted re-arrest for new **general** and **violent** offenses
 2. **No factor** predicted new sexual offenses.

Sandler & Freeman (2009)

- N = 1,466 women; mean follow-up = 5 years
- Evidence of 2 types of women considered to be sexual offenders:
 - 1) Contact or child abuse images offenders
 - 2) Criminal women for whom sex of a commodity

Sandler & Freeman (2009) – cont...

- Predictors of re-arrest for **general** offenses:
 - # Prior drug offense arrests;
 - # Prior violent felony offense arrests;
 - # Prior incarceration terms;
 - Younger offender's age at arrest for index sexual offense.

Sandler & Freeman (2009) – cont...

- Predictors of re-arrest for **sexual** offenses:
 - Prior # of child maltreatment (non-sexual) offenses

** Age was linearly related to promoting prostitution offenses – **only** for women with prior promoting prostitution offenses

** Age was **not** related to sexual recidivism among women with contact or child abuse images offenses

Wijkman & Bijleveld (2013)

- N = 261 women; mean follow-up = 13.3 years
- Predictors of **general** and **violent** recidivism:
 - Antisocial personality disorder (diagnosis)
 - History of non-sexual crimes
 - Substance abuse history
- ➔ *** Not surprisingly given the low base rate ($\approx 1\%$) - ***no factor*** predicted sexual recidivism

Summary: Static Factors

- Predictors of **General** Recidivism:
 - Prior criminal history;
 - Younger age;
 - History of substance abuse
- Predictors (preliminary) of Sexual Recidivism:
 - Prior (*non-sexual*) offenses against children

What do we know about *dynamic*
factors for recidivism in female
sexual offenders?

Dynamic Risk Factors

- Changeable factors that are empirically associated with recidivism potential.
- These are the factors addressed in treatment when the goal is to reduce recidivism.

Dynamic factors for sexual recidivism in women

- The dynamic risk factors related to sexual recidivism in women are ***unknown***
- This is not surprising → given the extremely low base rates of sexual recidivism.

Dynamic factors for general recidivism

- *Hypothesis*: female sexual and non-sexual offenders share the same dynamic risk factors for *violent* (non-sexual) and *general* recidivism:
 - Antisocial attitudes and associates
 - Substance abuse as precursor to offending
 - Problematic relationships
 - Emotional regulation issues
- NB*: Evidence that these dynamic factors manifest themselves in *gender-specific* ways in women

*See Blanchette & Brown (2006) "Assessment and Treatment of Female Offenders" (published by Wiley) for an in-depth discussion of these factors in women.

Implications for Assessment

Assessment of Risk for Sexual Recidivism

- Risk assessment tools developed for male sexual offenders (e.g., Static-99) are *not* valid for women – they will over classify the risk of female offenders.
- 2 reasons:
 - Bases rates of recidivism are much lower for women
 - Risk factors included in the scales for men are *not valid* for women.

Cont...

- When the evaluation question specifically concerns the risk for sexual recidivism:
 - The risk factors must be so blatant that they overcome the presumption of low risk for sexual recidivism in females
 - e.g., she tells you she will do it again.

Assessment of Risk for General Recidivism

- General (i.e., non-sexual) recidivism is much more common among female sexual offenders than sexual recidivism.
- Evaluators should consider the use of tools validated to assess risk of general and violent (non-sexual) recidivism among these women (e.g., LSI-R, Andrews & Bonta, 1995).
- Caveat: Even the use of general risk assessment tools require an understanding of the general research on risk factors and recidivism among female offenders

What about women
convicted of promoting
prostitution of a minor?

Recidivism Rates of Prostitution-Related vs. Traditional Female Sexual Offenders

- Vandiver (2007):
 - 471 female sexual offenders
 - Follow-up of \approx 12 years
- Female sexual offenders had sexual recidivism rates virtually identical to the male sexual offenders (10.8% vs. 11.4%)
- *** However, the sample also included women with offenses related to prostitution (proportion not provided)

Recidivism (cont.)

- Sandler & Freeman (2009):
 - 1,466 female sexual offenders
 - Follow-up ranged 2-14 years
- Overall sexual recidivism = 2.18% (32 out of 1,466)
 - 'Traditional' sexual offenders = 1.59% (22 out of 1,387)
 - Promoting prostitution group = 12.66% (10 out of 79)

***The prostitution offenders were all re-arrested for new promoting prostitution-related offenses as opposed to 'traditional' sexual offenses

Prostitution vs. 'regular' female sexual offenders

(Cortoni, Sandler, & Freeman, 2015)

- Sample consisted of 94 females convicted of sexual offenses and reviewed for possible civil management in New York State
- Of these 94 offenders, 6 (6.4%) of them had promoting prostitution of a minor as their sole sexual offense
- Examined differences on demographic factors, static criminal history, and dynamic factors

Sample Characteristics ($N = 94$)

	Promoting Prostitution Only ($n = 6$; 6.4%)	Other Sex Offenders ($n = 88$; 93.6%)
Variables	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Age at first conviction*	22.00 (7.48)	29.24 (8.34)
Age at SOMTA review*	28.67 (8.12)	35.77 (8.71)
Total incarceration sentences***	8.00 (6.54)	2.33 (1.55)
Total prison admissions***	2.67 (0.82)	1.42 (0.74)

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Criminal History

	Promoting Prostitution Only (<i>n</i> = 6; 6.4%)	Other Sex Offenders (<i>n</i> = 88; 93.6%)
Variables	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Mean (<i>SD</i>)
Prior criminal history		
Total arrests***	10.50 (8.39)	2.27 (2.23)
Felony arrests	2.00 (1.55)	1.48 (0.83)
Assault offenses	0.00 (0.00)	0.28 (0.68)
Robbery offenses**	0.33 (0.52)	0.04 (0.19)
Burglary offenses***	1.17 (1.17)	0.08 (0.27)
Theft offenses***	0.83 (1.60)	0.09 (0.33)

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Criminal History (cont.)

Kidnapping offenses**	0.50 (0.55)	0.09 (0.33)
Drug offenses***	1.67 (2.42)	0.11 (0.36)
Child welfare offenses	0.83 (0.41)	0.66 (0.62)
Judicial offenses	0.17 (0.41)	0.05 (0.22)
Sexual performance by a child offenses	0.33 (0.52)	0.08 (0.31)
Public order offenses***	3.50 (3.56)	0.10 (0.41)
Criminal mischief offenses***	0.33 (0.52)	0.01 (0.11)
Variety of offense offenses ***	3.00 (2.37)	0.62 (1.04)
Re-arrests* <i>n</i> (%)	3 (50.0)	14 (15.9)

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Differences - Summary

- Significant differences between promoting prostitution offenders and 'traditional' female sexual offenders in terms of criminal history:
 - Younger age at first conviction
 - More varied criminal history and more general violence
 - Greater number of prison terms
 - Longer periods of incarceration
- Promoting prostitution offenders significantly more likely to be re-arrested in general (50.0% vs. 15.9%)

Different types of women...

- A. Offenders with traditional (e.g., contact, child pornography) sexual offenses
 - Few general criminogenic factors
 - Low base rates of both sexual and non-sexual recidivism
 - Likely motivated by sexually-related factors (e.g., intimacy, sex)

- B. Offenders with only prostitution-related 'sexual' offenses
 - Frequent and varied criminal activities
 - Much higher rates of 'sexual' and non-sexual recidivism
 - Likely motivated by criminal gains (e.g., money, drugs)
 - Should be considered general criminals as opposed to sexual offenders

Prototypical Profiles

Promoting Prostitution Offender

- 24-years old at the time of her index offense
- Index offense: Recruited a 15-year old girl into prostitution, then repeatedly arranged for men to pay to have sex with the victim over the course of a month; offended alone
- Criminal history:
 - Overall: Multiple arrests for prostitution, trespass, robbery, burglary, criminal mischief, and others
 - While incarcerated: Lots of minor violations
 - On probation/parole: Minor violations and a re-arrest for public lewdness (likely related to prostitution)
- Mental health: A long history of substance abuse

'Traditional' Female Sexual Offender

- 27-years old at the time of her index offense
- Index offense: Sexually assaulted the daughter of her friend over a period of 1-2 years (started when victim was 10-years old); occasional non-sexual violence (if victim wanted to spend time with others); solo offender; during babysitting
- Criminal history:
 - Overall: None before the index offense
 - While incarcerated: None on record
 - On probation/parole: Was re-arrested for harassment while on parole for her index offense
- Mental health: None on record

Gender-informed Treatment

Treatment Areas

- Just like with male offenders, treatment should address the following areas – but with a clear understanding of their *unique manifestation among women*:

- (1) intimacy and relationship issues;
- (2) cognitive processes;
- (3) emotional processes;
- (4) sexual dynamics;
- (5) social functioning.

Unique to women: Co-offender (often related to dependency & domestic violence issues)

- About 38% of female sexual offenders offend in the company of an accomplice (based on 20 years of FBI National Crime Reporting database - Williams & Bierie, 2015).
- Co-offender:
 - Typically male (32%)
 - Although other grouping of female co-offending does occur (6%)
- Types of relationships co-offender:
 - 1) Coerced via force or fear (but sometimes subsequently engage in solo offending)
 - 2) Co-offends willingly (sometimes even initiates)

Cognitive Aspects

- Research suggests that prior experiences and sociocultural norms differentially influence the offence-related cognitions of female sexual offenders
- Cognitive Schemas** :
 - Tendency to see *men* as dangerous & entitled to sex
 - View their own victims as sexual beings capable of making informed decisions about sexual activity
 - Considers that the offending was not really harmful to their victims.

** Results are preliminary & await replication

Relationship Issues

- *** Problematic relationship appear particularly relevant for female sexual offenders:
 - Demonstrate a history of problematic relationships characterized by violence (emotional; physical – likely related to their victimization histories)
 - Important lack of familial and social support
 - Female sexual offenders may be particularly vulnerable, socially abused women.

Female / Male Differences

Women:

- Very limited social networks and social support
- Negative feeling about sexual experiences with adult partners
- Pattern of relationships characterized by abuse

Men (Hanson et al., 2007):

- Emotional identification with children
- Instability in current intimate relationships
- Hostility toward women
- General social rejection/loneliness
- General lack of concern for others

Sexual Arousal & Offending

- Women's sexual arousal patterns are different from those of males (see Basson, 2002; Chivers et al., 2010)
 - much more diffuse and less likely to correspond to actual preferred sexual behavior.
- In women, measures of increases in genital physiological arousal correlate poorly with subjective arousal
- Evidence also indicates that women initiate or agree to a sexual encounter for numerous non-sexual reasons – and will do so even in the absence of sexual desire/arousal (Basson, 2008).

Paraphilias & Female Sexual Offenders

- The role of sexual paraphilias as a motivator in female sexual offending is unclear.
- Paraphilias less frequent in women (Federoff et al., 1999) but their manifestation could be gender-specific (e.g., sadism in women – Pflugradt & Allen, 2011).
- Suggestions that for at least some women, their arousal during the offending may be more related to emotional states (e.g., anger at past abuse) than to a sexual preference (e.g., Saradjian, 1996).

What about women
convicted of promoting
prostitution?

Likely Intervention Targets

Prostitution-Related F.S.O.

- Antisocial orientation
- History of rule violation
- History of violent crime
- Lifestyle instability
- Substance abuse
- Cluster B personality features (antisocial, narcissistic, borderline)
- Problematic general regulation (e.g., poor cooperation with supervision)

Traditional F.S.O.

- Cognitions supportive of child molestation
- Deviant (or undifferentiated) sexual interests
- Sexual regulation problems
- Relationship issues (dependent/passive/domestic violence)
- Poor social support
- Emotional regulation issues
- Maladaptive coping – including the use of substance and/or sex as coping mechanisms

Gender-Specific
Treatment
&
Risk Management Issues

Special considerations

- Cognitive limitations
- Substance abuse problems
- Mental health issues
- Antisocial orientation

Victimisation Issues

- High rates of sexual and other victimization (e.g., Levenson et al., 2015), but victimisation *is not* predictive of recidivism
- However, history of victimisation leads to later mental health problems such as:
 - emotional dysregulation and poor coping ability
 - substance abuse problems
 - externalizing problems such as aggressive behaviour
- In turn ⇒ these problems are related to recidivism among women

Relational model of treatment

- A treatment model that recognizes the centrality of relationships in women's lives - helps the woman learn to:
 - Appropriately challenge others *and* being appropriately challenged (i.e., targets emotional regulation issues)
 - Counteract the passive acceptance or normalization of abuse in relationships commonly found among female sexual offenders
 - Develop, practice and maintain new boundary and other relationship skills needed to establish healthy and abuse-free emotional connections with others

See also Levenson et al. (2017) on trauma-informed treatment to incorporate within the relational model of treatment for women

Single or mixed gender groups?

- Single-gender programs more useful for women when dealing with deeply personal issues connected to their problematic behavior.
- Mixed-gender groups useful in later phases of treatment (e.g., maintenance programs)
 - *After* the woman has made sufficient progress on offense-related issues such as intimacy and dependency problems, substance abuse issues, and/or victimization-related problems
 - *and* she is able to establish the appropriate boundaries needed for healthy relationships

Community functioning

- In comparison to men \Rightarrow women tend to have greater needs for healthy connections to significant others including children and family.
- Also \Rightarrow women deal better with stress when supportive social networks are available.
- As such \Rightarrow female offenders usually require much more extensive support than men to improve their general functioning
- They also need to develop and maintain a more stable lifestyle with *less* dependence on others

Special considerations (cont.)

- Family reunification:
 - Only when the children also wish to reunite with their mother
 - Child protection agencies & family therapists skilled in dealing with abused children *a must!*

Conclusion

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- Female sexual offenders are different from male sexual offenders – a blanket application of male-based knowledge to them is not a viable option.
- While much remains to be known about female sexual offenders – the need for a gender-specific approach to risk assessment and intervention is evident.
- There are sub-types of female sexual offending that do not exist in males (e.g., women who knowingly give sexual access to their children; online child molestation – for financial gains) – more research is needed to better understand offending issues among these women.

Helpful hints

- Know your population (e.g., contact vs. prostitution offenses; providing access to children vs. actual sexual contacts) – where does your client fit?
- Understand that unless there is strong evidence to the contrary – the odds of a new sexual offense (for contact offenses) are extremely minimal.
- Ensure you have an understanding of the gender-specific nature of factors related to sexual and general offending among *women* when providing treatment and risk management services!

Thank you!