

Females Who Sexually Offend FAQ's

Q: What is the prevalence and risk of recidivism for females who sexually offend?

A: Males are responsible for approximately 95% of all sexual offenses, and females are responsible for approximately 5% of all sexual offenses. Females tend to recidivate at a rate of 1.5%. This means that out of 100 females who have offended sexually, only 1-2 of those females will be arrested for a new sexual offense.

Q: What risk instruments can be used with females who sexually offend?

A: At this time, there is no actuarial or structured professional judgment instrument validated to assess the risk of sexual recidivism for females. Cortoni (2016) stated, "because of their low risk of sexual recidivism, female sexual offenders would virtually never be considered to pose a high risk for sexual recidivism". Risk instruments developed for men over-estimate risk of recidivism for females who sexually offend.

The Level of Services Inventory is a valid instrument for risk of general criminal and violent (non-sexual) recidivism for females.

Q: Are females who sexually offend different from males who sexually offend?

A: Gender-specific issues need to be taken into account when assessing and treating females who sexually offend. Like males who sexually offend, females who sexually offend have different motivations and patterns for offending. Some women engage in prostitution-only related offenses, which are typically not sexually motivated; some women offend with a male co-offender; some women seek intimacy when they offend; and some women seek revenge or to punish the victim. A key motivation of female sexual abuse appears to be intimacy. The female who sexually abuses against a child may be attempting to obtain intimacy with the child or a co-defendant.

Women who only commit prostitution-related offenses, such as promoting prostitution of a minor, have higher recidivism rates, their criminal behavior is more consistent with general criminality, and they have more general antisocial features, than female sexual offenders who commit rape or sexual assault.

Sandler and Freeman (2009) found that the presence of a prior child abuse offenses of any type, including physical or sexual abuse, was related to sexual recidivism for females who sexually offend. This is not the case for males who sexually offend. Females who sexually offend tend to experience extensive levels of relationship abuse, tend to present with passive traits as well as with extreme dependency on men or male intimate partners (Eldridge & Saradijan, 2000)

Q: What factors should be considered when assessing and treating females who sexually offend?

A: In addition to assessing for violent and general criminal recidivism factors as measured by the Level of Services Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI), there is some research suggesting there are underlying dynamic risk factors associated with female sexual offending (Cortoni, 2016).

- Presence of inappropriate sexual interests and the role it played in the offense behavior
- History of abuse as a child and adult and the presence of any trauma related to the abuse, and resultant intimacy problems or inadequacies, and attachment styles
- Beliefs about sexual behavior, including the meaning and role of sex in a woman's life; beliefs about sexual activity, beliefs about sexual abuse; beliefs about gender roles, entitlement, or refusal to acknowledge harm caused by the abuse
- Presence of offense-supportive cognitions. Key differences in this area revolve around female's appraisal of males in relation to females. Gannon (Gannon et al, 2012 & Gannon & Rose, 2009) found that female sexual offenders appear to view sexual abuse as an entitlement for males and relatively harmless when perpetrated by a female, as well as viewing males as threatening and dangerous, and their own victims as sexually interested. May include gender role stereotyping in which males are viewed as powerful and women are viewed as powerless. This may be relevant for females who abuse with male co-defendants.
- Up to half of women who sexually offend co-offend with a male (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2011). It is important to determine if the female was coerced by the male or if she acted on her own and simply accompanied the male.

Q: What other factors need more research?

A: More research is needed in a number of areas pertaining to female sexual offending.

- Research about coping abilities and their relationship with female offending is needed. Some research indicates that women experience problems in their abilities to cope with stressful life events and regulate negative affect (Gannon, et al, 2008). Females tend to experience extreme stress, turbulence, and highly negative affect as a result of multiple caregiver responsibilities (i.e. looking after children and aging parents) and emotionally or physically abusive relationships.
- Research exploring sexualized coping is needed.
- Research exploring mental health factors is needed –for example, we know that incarcerated females tend to have more mental health needs when compared with incarcerated males.

Q: What sources were used to answer questions about females who sexually offend?

A: The following Reference List was used to answer the questions.

Reference List

- Cortoni, F. & Gannon, T. A. (2016). The assessment of female sexual offenders. In Craig, L. & Rettenberger, M. (Eds.), *Assessment of sexual offenders*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. (In press).
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- Wijkam, M., Bijleveld, & Hendriks, J. (2011). Female sex offenders: Specialists, generalists and once-only offenders. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 17(1), 34-45.