

A descriptive profile of incarcerated sex offenders

A descriptive profile of incarcerated sex offenders by Jean Proulx, Luc Granger, Marc Ouimet and Jean-Pierre Guay¹

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Researchers have been collecting data on sex offenders at the Regional Reception Centre⁴ (RRC) since March 1995. (An article based on this research was presented in a previous issue of Forum.)⁵ This article gives a brief profile of the sex offenders who were received at the RRC in the first 18 months of the research project. At the time of writing, 199 subjects had agreed to take part in the study, and fewer than 10 subjects had refused to participate or had withdrawn from the study.

The collected data cover a diverse set of variables, including the personal characteristics of the offenders, their legal and correctional history, the circumstances of the offences and the characteristics of the victims. Each offender's personality profile is measured by a battery of psychometric tests, and the subjects' sexual preferences undergo phallometric evaluation. For the purposes of this article, however, a small number of variables that convey the general characteristics of the sex offenders and their offences have been selected.

Because a significant proportion of sex offenders are sentenced to less than two in prison, this study represents a sample of offenders who have committed some of the most serious sex offences. Offenders sentenced to a term of imprisonment are likely to be those who caused serious injury to the victim and those whose criminal record indicates persistent criminal activity. A second methodological caution is required: the analysis focuses on offenders entering the correctional system (flow statistics). The results would probably be quite different if a sample of sex offenders already incarcerated (stock statistics) had been studied since, generally, stock statistics produce a much bleaker picture because the "best" cases leave the system faster than the rest.

Characteristics of offenders

Sex offenders are not a homogeneous group of individuals.⁶ Table 1 gives the distribution of subjects in our sample for a set of variables. The figures in Table 1 show that 21% of the subjects are between the ages of 18 and 29. There are also a significant number of offenders who are 50 or older. The average age of sex offenders is 39.3, which is substantially older than the general offender population. The data on ethnic backgrounds show that the sample comprises 176 Caucasians,

Table 1

General Characteristics of Sex Offenders		
	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18–29 years	42	21.3
30–39 years	69	35.0
40–49 years	48	24.4
50 years or older	38	19.3
Total	197	
Education		
Primary	60	30.5
Secondary	119	60.4
Post-secondary	18	9.1
Total	197	
Intellectual performance		
Superior (111+)	9	6.0
Average (90–110)	58	38.4
Low (85–89)	60	39.7
Limited (71–84)	16	10.6
Deficient (50–70)	8	5.3
Total	151	
Length of sentence		
2 years to less than 3 years	57	28.9
3 years to less than 5 years	85	43.2
5 years to less than 10 years	41	20.8
10 years or longer	14	7.1
Total	197	

13 Aboriginal people, 8 Blacks and 1 Asian. The subjects' highest level of education was evaluated by the institution's training consultant. The figures in Table 1 show that 30.5% of the subjects completed primary school, 60.4% secondary school and 9.1% post-secondary studies. With regard to intellectual

performance as evaluated by the training consultant, 38.4% of the subjects are of average intelligence, 39.7% are considered as having weak cognitive performance and 11% have very Female limited cognitive ability. At the of the offence, 34.5% of the 1–12 subjects were employed. Some of the subjects students at the (3.2%), but the Relationship of offender to victim majority (61.4%) were unemployed or on welfare.⁷

Table 1 also shows that most of the sex offenders in the sample were a sentence of two to five years in prison (72.1%). Only 7.1% of the subjects drew a sentence of 10 years or longer. Other data show that one third of the subjects (33.2%) had been previously convicted of a sex offence. The 66 repeat sex offenders together faced 219 sex-related charges prior to their current incarceration. Further, 66.3% of the subjects had previously committed non-sex-related offences, with a total of 2,125 charges. Overall, 75.1% of the subjects in the sample have an official record of at least one offence as an adult. In addition, 106 of the 193 subjects (54.9%) have previously served a provincial sentence, and 27 (14.0%) served a federal sentence. The data from Motiuk and Belcourt for sex offender admissions in Canada show similar percentages: 56.3% served provincial sentences and 21.2% served federal sentences.⁸

Characteristics of Offences and Victims

The 199 sex offenders in the sample were convicted of committing at least one offence against 339 different victims. Table 2 presents the characteristics of the offences against all the victims. It then gives the characteristics of the last offence committed by the sex offenders in the sample.

Table 2

Characteristics of offences and victims		
	All assaults Number (%)	Last assault Number (%)
Sex of victim		
Male	87 (25.9)	32 (16.6)
Female	249 (74.1)	161 (83.4)
Total	336	193
Age of victim		
1-12	171 (51.4)	73 (37.8)
13–17	67 (20.1)	53 (27.5)
18 or older	95 (28.5)	67 (34.7)
Total	333	193

Relationship of offender to victim		
Father, stepfather	102 (30.4)	55 (27.8)
Spouse, ex-spouse	28 (8.3)	22 (11.1)
Friend, relative, guardian	69 (20.5)	34 (17.2)
Acquaintance, neighbour	91 (27.1)	57 (28.8)
No relationship	46 (13.7)	30 (15.2)
Total	336	198

Table 2 shows that 25.9% of the victims were male and that 16.6% of the offenders assaulted a male victim in their last sex offence. This last estimate is comparable to the finding by Motiuk and Belcourt,⁹ who estimated that 16.3% of the sex offenders admitted to federal penitentiaries had male victims. The difference between the two percentages (the two columns) is attributable to the fact that sex offenders with male victims have more victims on average than sex offenders with female victims. The distribution of victims' ages shows that more than 50% of the victims were under 13 years of age, 20.1% were adolescents and 28.5% were adults. Motiuk and Belcourt's distribution of victims' ages is similar to the distribution in the sample under discussion.

A study of the distribution of the relationship degree between the offender and the victim shows that between the offender was the victim's father (biological the core father, adoptive father, stepfather or mother's research spouse) in 30.4% of the sex offences. The classification offender was an acquaintance of the victim research (e.g., neighbour) in 27.1% of cases, a friend, relative or guardian in 20.5% of cases, and the victim's spouse or ex-spouse in 8.3% of all offences. The offender was a complete stranger in only 13.7% of the sex offences. These results confirm the view that sex offences are usually that sex offences committed by someone close to or known by the victim. The family are usually setting appears to be especially committed by conducive to this type of crime.

Other results show that a weapon (firearm, knife or blunt object) to or known by was used in approximately 20% of the victim. The offences. It appears that no force was used in 15.6% of the offences; minimal force was used in 48.8% appears to be of cases; and moderate or excessive force was used in 35.6% of the sex offences. Descriptions of the conducive to this offences show that the offender type of crime in 61.6% of the offences. Use of soft drugs was mentioned in 11.5% of the cases and hard drugs in 18.6% of the cases.

Classification of Offenders by Characteristics of Victim and Relationship

We focused on two main characteristics to classify the subjects: age and gender of the victim. These two variables, coupled with degree of violence and family relationship the offender and the victim, formed set of variables used by Gebhard's team to classify offenders.¹⁰ Gebhard's is especially useful in this for analysing the differing circumstances of the offences for each group of sex offenders. Table 3 shows, for the last offence, the distribution of subjects by gender of the victim (the variable which defines

heterosexual and homosexual offenders) and age of the victim (pedophiles assaulted victims under the age of 13, hebephiles assaulted victims between the ages of 13 and 17, and rapists assaulted adult victims). The table shows the relationship between the offender and the victim. It should be noted that this table pertains to the sample of subjects, not the offences. The percentages are thus based on 193 subjects (there are six missing values).

The data in Table 3 illustrate the relative size of each group of offenders. The two largest groups are heterosexual rapists and heterosexual pedophiles. The most interesting data describe the relationship between the offender and the victim for each subgroup. Homosexual pedophiles are evenly distributed between the three types of relationship, whereas homosexual hebephiles are more often strangers. The correlation is the same for female victims. Pedophile offenders are usually a member of the victim's family, whereas hebephiles and rapists are often strangers or acquaintances of the victim.

Table 3

Classification of Offenders by Characteristics of Victims and Relationship				
		Relationship between offender and victim		
Classification of offender	Number	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
Pedophile-homosexual	15 (7.8)	6	4	5
Hebephile-homosexual	15 (7.8)	0	5	10
Rapist-homosexual	2 (1.0)	0	1	1
Pedophile-heterosexual	58 (30.1)	38	17	3
Hebephile-heterosexual	38 (19.7)	11	14	13
Rapist-heterosexual	65 (33.7)	24	16	25

Discussion

Generally, the sex offenders in this sample present a well-established criminal profile and deficient social integration (education, employment, use of alcohol and drugs). Most offenders assaulted a person they knew, either a member of their family or an acquaintance. The results presented in this article tend to show that the sex offenders in the RRC sample are comparable with data from Motiuk and Belcourt that characterizes incarcerated offenders in Canada. An initial segment of the sample, roughly 275 subjects, will be the focus of numerous analyses. The subjects will be tracked upon release in order to identify the factors related to potential recidivism.

criminométriques, psychométriques et phallométriques” [Prospective study of recidivism among sex offenders: criminometric, psychometric and phallometric predictors] conducted at the Regional Reception Centre.

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4. The RRC is a federal penitentiary whose mission is to accommodate Quebec offenders sentenced to a prison term of two years or longer.

5. J. Proulx, L. Granger, M. Ouimet, A. McKibben, C. Perreault and M. St-Yves, “Improving prediction of sex offender recidivism: A proposed study,” *Forum on Corrections Research*, 8, 2 (1996): 13–15.

6. L. A. Bard, D. L. Carter, D. D. Cerce, R. A. Knight, R. Rosenberg and B. Schneider, “A descriptive study of rapists and child molesters: Developmental, clinical, and criminal characteristics,” *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 5, 2 (1987): 203–220.

7. For more details about the personal characteristics of Quebec sex offenders, see C. Earls, J. Aubut, J. Laberge, L. Bouchard, L. G. Castonguay and A. McKibben, “Étude descriptive des délinquants sexuels” [Descriptive Study of Sex Offenders], *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, 10, 2 (1989).

8. L. Motiuk and R. Belcourt, “Profiling the Canadian federal sex offender population, *Forum on Corrections Research*, 8, 2 (1996): 3–7.

9. Motiuk and Belcourt, “Profiling the Canadian federal sex offender population.”

10. P. H. Gebhard, J. H. Gagnon, W. B. Pomeroy and C. V. Christenson, *Sex Offenders* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).