

Hidden Figures: Females as Sexual Perpetrators

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Abstract: Historically, the sexual offender population comprised men, which constituted a focal point of most sex offender research. However, there is often a common misconception concerning women offenders or perpetrators, as women are perceived as incapable of committing sexual offences. Researchers confirmed that not only are women capable of becoming sexual perpetrators, but they usually derive from specific classification schemas that elucidate women and these crimes. Victims of these heinous acts are on the rise and often are unreported and understudied, especially for older and disabled populations. Theoretically, behavioural and psychodynamic perspectives precisely depict how the role of societal perceptions affects the subconscious emotional and behavioural factors associated with sexual offenders. Demographic and motivation factors vary and may include perpetrators seeking love, dominance, and validation. This review aims to explore characteristics, assess the prevalence and analyse the consequences that arise when sexual assaults are identified, reported, and prosecuted as female perpetrators.

Keywords: Female sex offender, Male sex offenders, Typologies, Characteristics, and Behaviour, Intellectual disability, Autism, ADHD, Sexual victimization, Female perpetrator

Introduction

In the 1996 movie *A Time to Kill*, Matthew McConaughey's character, during his closing argument, asked the jurors to close their eyes as he described the horrific crime committed against a young Black girl (Schumacher, 1996). With tears streaming down his face, he delivered a powerful line: "Now imagine she is White"

(Schumacher, 1996). The goal of that powerful closing argument was to challenge the jurors to confront their own biases and assumptions. Similarly, if readers were asked to close their eyes and envision the perpetrator of a sexual assault against a student, they would imagine a male offender victimising a female. That assumption is valid on the surface as researchers noted that most prominent crime statistics (e., UCR, NCVS, and SRS) imply that men disproportionately commit crimes (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, as noted in other studies, Tozdan *et al.* (2019) revealed that child sexual assault stereotypes depict a male offender sexually abusing a female child. Nevertheless, the data does not tell the complete story nor explain the plethora of media reports and arrest records, which collectively show a troubling rise in cases involving females, particularly in school settings, engaging in inappropriate relationships with children.

Men have constituted most of the sexual offending population, and that is primarily due to men being the focus of sex offender research (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). There is often a common misconception that women are incapable of committing sexual offences. Research has shown that not only are women capable of becoming sexual perpetrators, but they usually derive from specific classification schemas that elucidate women and these crimes (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). Upon comparing male and female sexual predators, women reported a higher percentage of psychological issues, a history of victimisation (physical and sexual abuse), inadequate relationships with their parents, and suicide attempts. Contrarily, men were more likely to indulge in illicit substances during the commission of the offences. However, the demographic factors (age, educational level, ethnicity) of each offending gender were similar. Research suggests that informal pro-social relationships, such as those with spouses and close relatives, are more effective in reducing criminal offending than formal, less intimate relationships with pro-social individuals (West *et al.*, 2011).

Behaviourist and psychodynamic theoretical perspectives precisely depict how the subconscious mind addresses emotional and behavioural factors associated with sex offenders. Sexual offences against the elderly are another topic that will be explored within this paper. We will examine the type of perpetrators and victimology of these crimes. We will also explore the various misconceptions, such as the location and motivational influences surrounding elderly sexual abuse.

A dramatic difference exists when the offender is female, and the victim is

male, as the data and public records show that female offenders receive far less punishment when compared to their male counterparts. This strongly suggests that there is often a societal tendency to view the situation less seriously and reflects the existence of a dangerous double standard because the male victims of female offenders are often perceived as “lucky” or not truly harmed. This, in turn, leads to underreporting and inadequate responses.

Finally, as there is a dearth of literature on the subject, exploring the phenomenon of females as sexual predators or offenders is equally important to uncover the nature of occurrences, prevalence of perpetrators in general, particularly among female perpetrators, and the differences in outcomes that are established when these occurrences of sexual assault are manifested among this population, discovered and prosecuted.

Literature Review

Female Sex Offenders: Typologies and Characteristics

Female sex offenders are vastly underrepresented in the population of sexual perpetrators. Female sex offender typologies and characteristics are essential for effective prevention and intervention strategies. One of the characteristics of female sex offenders is that they are likely to commit sexual offences against children (West *et al.*, 2011). This abuse is likely to occur with a familiar victim, such as a niece or a child. Moreover, they are less likely to use power and dominance for self-gratification and more likely to engage in a variety of sexual offences, including sexual touching, exposure, and fondling, as well as more insidious forms of child molestation (Christensen, 2018). Female sex offenders, unlike males, tend to offend out of anger (predatory offenders) to provide care and comfort to their primary victims (teacher/ student offenders), or they may simply be victims of their impulses (West *et al.*, 2011). Many female sex offenders have a history of experiencing trauma and abuse, which further contributes to their offending behaviour. Some research has noted that young girls are often given power over younger children, which has the potential to lead to role confusion at an early stage (West *et al.*, 2011).

Typologies

Because of the many typologies of female sexual perpetrators, it can be challenging to define and understand this population of perpetrators. However, these typologies

are often associated with various reasons why females commit sexual assault (West *et al.*, 2011).

- *Predatory Offenders*: Women who sexually offend for power, control, or dominance and are similar in many ways to male predatory offenders; they, too, manipulate or coerce their victims.
- *Heterosexual Noncompliant Offender*: Women who engage in sexual offences against male victims, in contexts that involve coercion, deception, or manipulation, often using their sexuality to exert dominance over their victims.
- *Homosexual Offender-Female*: Close to half of the offenders in this category have a same-sex victim, often boys. They might be sexually attracted to their victim, or they might be motivated by vengeance (e.g., after a sexual rejection by the victim) or anger.
- *Teacher/Student Offender*: Women in this category sexually exploit their pupils, who are in a position of subordination. Such cases are complicated because they often involve coercion, grooming, and exploitation.
- *Acquaintance Offender*: Female sex offenders often know their victims. Male perpetrators who sexually abuse children will also fit into such classifications, yet these typologies are usually based on an implicit belief that female perpetrators are different from men. Such typologies also tend to group cases, such as those of female sex offenders who prey on children, based on a pre-existing relationship that the perpetrator exploits, for example, a parent or a family friend who examines a child or sexually touches them (Muniz & Powers, 2021).

Characteristics

- *Age*: Female sex offenders are often older than male sex offenders, typically in their late 20s to early 40s (Giglio *et al.*, 2011).
- *Race*: Female sex offenders come from all races. Some are well-educated while others are less so (Giglio *et al.*, 2011).
- *Mental Health*: Nearly half of all female prisoners report mental health problems such as personality disorders, depression, and substance abuse issues that contribute to the offending itself.

- *Victimisation History*: Many FSOs have suffered from trauma or abuse, and it has been found that the tendency to repeat hurtful experiences might translate into their offending by replicating certain acts of victimisation.
- *Gender*: The motivations of female offenders often differ from those of male offenders. Some female offenders act out of an emotional need for love, attention, or validation, not simply to experience sexual satisfaction (Muniz & Powers, 2021).
- *Interpersonal relationships*: Women who sexually offend are often involved in abusive or otherwise harmful relationships. Their offending behaviour tends to be interpersonally based, and dynamics within their relationships may play a role (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024).

Motivations Behind Female Sexual Offending

Given the importance of prevention and rehabilitation, it is vital to be able to articulate why, just as with male sexual offenders, female sexual offending happens. Many different motivations have been identified, the first being emotional motivations. Some female offenders seek validation, love, or attention, and to receive this, they have sex with children or vulnerable victims because it is the only way they can (Christensen, 2018). Although fewer female offenders fit the traditional labels of the power-motivated perpetrator (e.g., they kill or torture), a small number commit sexual offences as a means of control over a victim, especially with coercive offending (West *et al.*, 2011). Second, there are social motivations; that is, female offenders may follow the direction of male partners or peer groups and commit offences they might not otherwise commit.

Does a Disparity Exist Among Male and Female Offenders?

Studies and statistics indicate that child sexual abuse is an underreported crime, regardless of whether the offender is male or female (Tozdan *et al.*, 2019). However, as previously mentioned, research suggests that there is no significant disparity between male and female sex offenders when the victim is a child (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). This is particularly evident in school settings, where women commit 43% of child sexual abuse incidents (Duggan *et al.*, 2016).

In Louisiana, school employees are legally required to report sexual offences or abuse committed by the child's parent or any other individual (La Children Code

Art 609). Given this legal framework, one might naturally expect similar report, arrest, and conviction rates for male and female sex offenders. On the contrary, the data suggest otherwise, revealing a significant disparity.

Specifically, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (or FBI) reported that women made up approximately 10% of those detailed for non-rape sex offences and 1% of those arrested for rape. There is a difference in convictions as well, according to one group of writers who inscribed that although arrest rates for females involved in sex crimes are unified across the nation, conviction rates vary by jurisdiction and range from 1% to 6% nationwide. Additionally, studies show that adolescent female offenders are responsible for 3% of occurrences of forceful rape and 5% of other violent sex offences, based on juvenile arrest statistics. According to other research, although a vast number of female sex offenders' age ranges fluctuate between their 20s and 30s, the onset of their sexual assaulting behaviour with children began at an earlier age (Anderson *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, researchers corroborate the notion that a double standard between male and female sex offenders exists, which is why the disparity in arrest and conviction rates is particularly concerning. Consequently, the sum of women who sexually abuse children is far greater than statistical data from arrest and conviction reports highlight, which further signifies that there are apparent, yet profound reasons for the discrepancies and why they are concerning.

A Case of Abuse of Trust in Education: The Story of a School Counsellor's Betrayal

One case that sheds light on the troubling issue of trust abuse in education involves a school counsellor who crossed professional boundaries with a student under her care (*U.S. v. Hargrave*, 2012). The counsellor, who taught at a private school in South Louisiana, began counselling a troubled 14-year-old female student in the spring of 2009 (*U.S. v. Hargrave*, 2012). A few months later, their relationship took an inappropriate turn when the counsellor initiated explicit conversations and eventually engaged in sexual activities with the student (*U.S. v. Hargrave*, 2012). The case culminated in a significant prison sentence, years of supervised release, and a large restitution payment to the victim (*U.S. v. Hargrave*, 2012). The frequency of male and female sex offenders who target children is comparable, according to data and reports that support this incidence (Anderson *et al.*, 2020).

Why are Sexual Assaults Committed by Females Viewed Differently?

Dr Joe Sullivan, who has worked for nearly thirty years with juvenile sex offenders, once remarked “there is almost a perception that boys should be happy or grateful, or certainly not experiencing sexual contact with females as abusive” (Lewis, 2015). His statement highlights a prevailing and universally accepted view, which undoubtedly has an impact on the low number of female sex offenders arrested and ultimately convicted of their crimes. To be clear, individuals who commit sexual offences are viewed far more negatively than those who commit non-sexual offences; however, studies suggest that attitudes toward female sexual offenders tend to be more lenient (Brown & Kloess, 2023). This is partly because that type of behaviour “is perceived to be more foreign, and awareness and knowledge around it are limited” (Brown & Kloess, 2023). The result of the lenient view was summed up by Brown and Kloess, who noted that ‘the general public, [based upon a lenient view] therefore, endorses gender stereotypes, and consequently minimises sexual offences committed against children by females – they are considered less harmful, and, at times, even glorified when they involve underage male victims’.

The results of this accepted societal view are especially damning because sexual assaults committed by female offenders and sexual assaults committed by male offenders are equally dangerous. Indeed, females, especially in the school setting, who engage in sexual relationships with their students, regardless of gender, exploit their position of authority and trust. In the case of boys, the power imbalance and the emotional manipulation often involved are overlooked, and this can lead to significant psychological harm, including confusion, guilt, shame, and difficulty in forming healthy relationships later in life.

Societal Implications

Female sex offenders mention many issues and challenges to the public and in the courts. One of these is what we, the public, see – and what the courts see – when women commit sexual offences. Female sex offenders are often perceived differently by the public than male sexual offenders. Female sexual offenders can be viewed by many as either ‘deviant mothers’ or ‘seductresses’ (Muniz & Powers, 2021). This has implications for our understanding of female offenders and our treatment and reactions to their victims. Research has shown that many female sexual offenders are disbelieved when they speak out about the sexual crimes they have suffered.

This can lead to a perpetuation of the myth that women cannot be sexual offenders and can make it harder for victims of sexual abuse committed by women to report their abuse. Often, these cases are underpunished, with short sentences or a lack of conviction by the courts, prompting the justice system to step in and hold the offender accountable for their wrongdoing (West *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, female offenders have less access to rehabilitation programs for sexual offences, which leads us back to the conclusion of the misrepresentation of female sex offenders, and due to the lack of access to treatment, this behaviour continues to lack the research needed for treatment and knowledge advancement.

Sexual Assaults Against the Elderly

Sexual assault of the elderly is a neglected area of study (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021; Jeary, 2005; Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008) and a topic that many do not want to discuss (Jeary, 2004). With limited research on the topic, it is no surprise that the judicial outcomes of elderly sexual assaults are even less researched. Sexual assault was seen as a rarity in early studies (Growth, 1978; Ball *et al.*, 1992), but as the elderly population increases, the number of sexual assault cases will increase (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021; Safarik *et al.*, 2002). Chopin & Beauregard (2021) note that elder sexual assault is on the rise and becoming more violent. We must examine the topic to determine not only who, what, where, and when of attacks, but also to scrutinise the outcome of the attacks. Of the perpetrators that are reported, how many are prosecuted and sentenced? It is also important to determine if there are any differences in how the judicial system treats male and female perpetrators or if other disparities exist.

The Perpetrators

Most reported sexual perpetrators were male (Burgess *et al.*, 2008; Jeary, 2004, 2005; Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 1991; Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008). Studies by Davis and Brody (1979), Groth (1978), and Pinto *et al.* (2014) reported that 100% of the perpetrators were male, whereas Baker *et al.* (2009) found that 77% were male and 23% were female. Roberto *et al.* (2007) noted that 88.2% of the perpetrators who assaulted male victims were male.

The age of the perpetrators ranged from teenagers to older individuals (16–96 years) and they were predominantly White (Baker *et al.*, 2009). Most had some form

of psychiatric illness, substance abuse issues, criminal behaviour, and/or financial dependence on the victim (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2008). Although many victims knew the assailant or had previously encountered them, opportunistic perpetrators were more likely to be strangers (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021). Experimental offenders, on the other hand, were typically younger and were usually not strangers (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021). Although most perpetrators were male, female perpetrators also existed and were often underreported (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2008).

The Victims

Reported victims were most likely female (Ball & Fowler, 2008; Bows & Westmarland, 2017; Roberto & Teaster, 2005). Roberto *et al.* (2007) reported that men were equally victimised as women, but male victimisation was less likely to be reported. Both male and female victims existed, and male victims should not be overlooked (Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008). Victims could live independently alone or in residential settings and were often perceived as frail, in poor health, or mentally and/or physically disabled (Bows, 2018).

The Location

Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.* (2008) found that employees in residential settings most frequently perpetrated abuse against elderly individuals, followed closely by other residents, family members, and visitors to the facility. Chopin and Beauregard (2021), along with Burgess *et al.* (2007), found that victims were more often attacked in their own homes (Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008), and that assaults usually took place during the late evening or early morning hours (Jeary, 2005).

The Motivation

Chopin and Beauregard (2021) found four primary motivators: “experimentation (n = 44; 34.38%), opportunistic (n = 38; 29.69%), sexual (n = 33; 25.78%), and vindictive (n = 13; 10.15%).” Jeary (2005) found that many assaults were financially motivated. Common scenarios reported that perpetrators under the influence entered the home to burglarise an older woman and then acted on the opportunity. Residential care facilities with inadequate staffing created another opportunistic situation in which victims were often unable to report the incident (Lee-Treweek, 1994). Jeary (2005) also noted that some encounters were motivated by sexual inadequacy.

When this occurred, it often triggered excessive violence and could result in the death of the victim. Jeary (2005) found that one-third of the offenders committed sexual assault for sexual gratification. In some cases, perpetrators acted out sexual fantasies involving the rape of a mother or grandmother, or were motivated by a need for power, control, revenge, or dominance (Jeary, 2005). Overall, Jeary (2005) found that sex offenders were usually not strangers, while Chopin and Beauregard (2021) reported that elderly individuals were targeted because they were alone and vulnerable.

Outcome

Sexual assault of the elderly is understudied and underreported (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021). When victims live in a residential care facility, the offenders are less likely to be prosecuted (Jeary, 2005). When Adult Protective Services (APS) made reports, the victims typically resided in their own homes, perpetrators were more likely to be family members, and less likely to be prosecuted (Burgess *et al.*, 2008). With reports to the criminal justice system (CJS), perpetrators were more challenging to identify; however, once identified, they were more likely to be arrested, prosecuted, and convicted (Burgess *et al.*, 2008). Roberto *et al.* (2007) found that 58.8% of the cases reported by Adult Protective Services were investigated by other agencies, such as law enforcement; however, none of the perpetrators was prosecuted. When in residential facilities, victims are often moved to other facilities or receive more supervision after the allegations of sexual abuse (Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008). In the Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.* (2008) study, 32% of the offenders were put on leave, 24% were terminated, and 30% were reassigned.

In a study conducted by Jeary (2005), one-third of the perpetrators were prosecuted, and most were sentenced to prison. In the Pinto *et al.* (2014) study, of the eight prosecuted male perpetrators, one was acquitted, one was sentenced to 14 months of probation, while six were sentenced to three to twelve years in prison. Burgess *et al.* (2008) reported that of the 180 known offenders, thirty-six went to trial, where seventeen were convicted, eleven pleaded guilty, and eight were acquitted. In the Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.* (2008) study, only one male staff member was arrested, while three of the female sexual perpetrators were not arrested. Female perpetrators do exist, but are less likely to be reported; if reported, females are less likely to be confirmed and less likely to be found guilty (Ramsey-Klawnsnik *et al.*, 2008).

Victimisation of Individuals with Disabilities

Despite the widespread prevalence of sexual assault victimisation and substantial literature on the topic, researchers confirm an increasing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that individuals with disabilities are at a heightened risk of experiencing sexual assault compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Basiley *et al.*, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2010; Casteel *et al.*, 2008; Cohen *et al.*, 2006; Cotter, 2018; Grossman & Lundy, 2008; Harrell, 2007; Haydon *et al.*, 2011; Khalifeh *et al.*, 2013; Krnjacki *et al.*, 2016; Mailhot-Amborski *et al.*, 2022; Martin *et al.*, 2006; Mitra *et al.*, 2016; Nixon *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, it has been established by more recent research that individuals with specific disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are more vulnerable to maltreatment than individuals without ASD (Douglas & Sedgewick, 2024). Furthermore, a recent study confirmed what researchers had suspected: that individuals with hidden disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), were more likely than individuals without ADHD to experience unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault (Libster *et al.*, 2024). In contrast to the general population of individuals with various disabilities, a meta-analysis conducted for an adult sample showed that individuals with intellectual disabilities had a higher rate of sexual violence in their communities (Codina & Pereda, 2022; Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Another meta-analysis study examining the prevalence of victimisation among individuals with ASD found that 84% of respondents had been sexually abused in more than one category, 16% had been abused as children, and 40% had been sexually abused (Douglas & Sedgewick, 2024; Trundle *et al.*, 2023). Finally, it is equally important to investigate this phenomenon to explore the nature of occurrences, the general prevalence of perpetrators, especially among female perpetrators, and the variations in outcomes established when these occurrences of sexual assault are manifested among this population, discovered, and prosecuted due to the scarcity of literature.

Sexual Assault Against Individuals with Disabilities

Among other pressing matters requiring greater attention is sexual assault or victimisation against individuals with disabilities.

According to compound studies conducted, individuals with disabilities have a greater probability than non-disabled individuals to have encountered sexual violence due to significant factors including lack of physical defences, social

isolations, communication barriers that could hinder their abilities or comfortability to disclose the sexual abuse, reliance on others for necessary intimate hygienic care, and lack of sexual education (Baron *et al.*, 2010; Briggs, 2016; Hollomotz, 2009; Mailhot-Amborski *et al.*, 2022). These factors may contribute to a range of adverse childhood experiences that can significantly impact their development in vital areas well into adulthood. Hence, the next section of the literature review explores the salient influences or nature of sexual assault by female offenders and victims with disabilities, perceptions of the public, and the substantiality and social construction of prosecution for female sex offenders and justice for victims with disabilities.

Salient Influence of Female Sex Offenders

The salient influences of female sex offenders and victims with disabilities are complex and vary. Sexual abusers, violators, or perpetrators have been heavily researched over time, especially male sexual offenders (Comartin *et al.*, 2018); sexual offences committed by women are thought to be unreported, according to researchers (Centre for Sex Offender Management [CSOM], 2007; Shield & Cochran, 2020; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). The influences behind these types of behaviours and crimes are complex and often multifaceted, particularly in terms of the perpetrator's motivations and the nature of the victims involved. An individual's physical, mental, emotional, and reproductive health may be negatively impacted both immediately and over time by sexual victimisation, which is a severe societal issue (Alhassan *et al.*, 2024). Despite making up just 2% of officially recorded sex crimes, female perpetrators were reported in 12% of cases, according to a meta-analysis of police and victimisation data from twelve countries, including the United States (Cortoni *et al.*, 2017; Shield & Cochran, 2020). Formulaically speaking, sexual assault, particularly involving children, is often depicted as a male offender sexually abusing a female victim. However, with the expansion of research in this field since the 1980s (Stathopoulos, 2014), empirical studies have increasingly shown that women are also responsible for a proportion of child sexual offences (Cortoni *et al.*, 2010; Faller *et al.*, 1995; Finkelhor *et al.*, 1990; Gannon & Rose, 2008; Peter, 2009; Tozdan *et al.*, 2019). And, when women do perpetrate sex crimes, they and their offences are perceived as less threatening or harmful compared to those committed by men (Denov, 2003; Denov & Cortoni, 2006; Mellor & Deering, 2010; Shield & Cochran, 2020)

The faces of the abused may very well vary as salient influences may ignite or hinder one's perceptions of the abuser/perpetrator or victim. Women account for 1–20% of sex crimes, depending on the nature (Shield & Cochran, 2020). Stigmas are often stronger when the perpetrator is a female, as men are unconsciously depicted to be labeled as the perpetrator of sexual assault (Porson *et al.*, 2023). Irrespective of the perpetrator's gender, sexual abuse is an underreported crime, especially related to vulnerable populations such as children (Dreßing *et al.*, 2018; Tozdan *et al.*, 2019), yet perceptions of victims are interesting and may vary. Additionally, a study conducted in 2017 by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) revealed that 30.8% of men in the United States (US) reported having been victims of sexual violence (Leemis *et al.*, 2022; Poirson *et al.*, 2023). Recent studies suggest that females who commit sex crimes are seen as less dangerous than males (Denov, 2003; Denov & Cortoni, 2006; Mellor & Deering, 2010; Shield & Cochran, 2020).

Sexual Victimization of Individuals with Disabilities

The importance of understanding the sexual victimisation of special population groups is vital, especially concerning female sexual perpetrators. Victims of sexual assault find it challenging to adapt and deal with life circumstances due to emotional damage incurred (Alhassan *et al.*, 2024; Maich *et al.*, 2020; Weiss & Fardella, 2018). The feasibility of assessing the combined prevalence of risk of sexual abuse due to a lack of studies; nevertheless, more recent studies affirmed that sexual victimisation is common among those with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Byrne, 2018; Codina & Pereda, 2022; Fister *et al.*, 2016).

Study results revealed that adults with autism were more likely to experience social problems, including financial difficulties, homelessness, and domestic abuse, than other individuals with disabilities (Douglas & Sedgewick, 2024; Griffiths *et al.*, 2019); yet, few qualitative studies have investigated the lived experiences of these social problems, including sexual assault or victimisation. Additionally, compared to adolescents without impairments, students with intellectual disabilities are four to ten times more likely to experience sexual assault (Alhassan *et al.*, 2024; Vitaliano *et al.*, 2003). Another study found that although the risk of sexual violence and assault victimisation among individuals with ID is evident, it is notably exacerbated by comorbid conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

(Latvala *et al.*, 2023). These factors have contributed to the need for more research, especially related to female sexual offenders.

Social Construction and Perceptions of Female Sex Offenders and Victimization of Individuals with Disabilities

The perceptions of female sex offenders and victimisation of individuals with disabilities are significant to the nature of sexual abuse, victimisation, and perpetrators. Consequently, the prevalence of sexual violence victimisation was significantly higher for both men and women with disabilities than for adults without disabilities, according to the American Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (ABRFSS) (Mitra *et al.*, 2016; Smith, 2008; Mailhot-Ambroski *et al.*, 2022). These social perceptions, the nature of sexual abuse/assault/violence cases, and judicial consequences in the form of prosecutions for female offenders are alarming, varying, and misconstrued or misunderstood. Social views of females as sexually passive or incapable of causing sexual damage may contribute to the underreporting of female-perpetrated sexual abuse, according to studies conducted (Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Denov, 2003; Denov & Cortoni, 2006; Shield & Cochran, 2020). Some studies conducted have found that gender plays a significant role in judicial penalty decisions for sex offenders (Denov, 2001; Mellor & Deering, 2010; Shield & Cochran, 2020), yet other studies conducted suggest that female sex offenders are often less studied as the limited accessibility of data and sample sizes may affect their exclusion from empirical studies (Amirault & Beaugard, 2014; Shield & Cochran, 2020). Nevertheless, the perceptions of female sexual offenders are often perceived as less threatening, discounted, or misunderstood. Even more so, according to a recent study's findings, females who engage in sexual offences employ a range of self, environmental, and child-grooming practices or behaviours (Steely-Smith *et al.*, 2024). Still, according to a small number of research studies, female sex offenders are more likely to be excluded from official conviction and sentence statistics (Shield & Cochran, 2020) and diverted away from official sanctions (Vandiver & Walker, 2002). Finally, studies conducted have demonstrated that a level of professional minimising towards female-perpetrated child sexual assault exists (Mellor & Deering, 2010; Tozdan *et al.*, 2019), thus making this phenomenon important to study.

Conclusion

The scarcity of existing literature underscores the necessity of investigating female sexual predators. This research aimed to examine the characteristics, assess the prevalence, and analyse the consequences of sexual assaults committed by female offenders as identified, reported, and prosecuted within the criminal justice system. The studies on sex offenders have been dominated by male subjects, who form most of this population (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). Women are thought to be incapable of sexual immorality. However, research indicates that women can commit sexual offences and fall into certain classification groups (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). Women are more likely than men to have psychiatric disorders, physical and sexual abuse, poor parent-child attachment, and suicide attempts. They found that men were also more likely to use drugs when they committed crimes. Demographic characteristics such as age, education, and race were remarkably similar between the two genders of offenders. Female sex offenders start their criminal careers in their young-to-mid-20s (West *et al.*, 2011). Behaviourist and psychodynamic theories show the underlying workings of the subconscious mind behind sex offenders.

The data and public records show that women disproportionately receive less punitive actions than men if the offender is female and the victim male. This indicates that society often regards the situation with less gravity and reveals a detrimental double standard, as male victims of female offenders are typically perceived as not genuinely harmed, which results in a lack of accurate reporting and inadequate responses.

Authors Note

This manuscript has not been published or submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christian Specks, Social Work Department, University of Louisiana at Monroe, 700 University Avenue, Strauss Hall - Room 226, Monroe, LA. Email: specks@ulm.edu

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