MENTAL ILLNESS AND SEXUAL OFFENDING

Problematic Sexual Interests in Individuals with Schizophrenia:  
A Pilot Study of Prevalence, Characteristics and Comorbidity

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Research on paraphilia has predominantly focused on adjudicated individuals within the forensic or correctional settings. However, we have observed problematic sexual interest or behaviour in individuals with major mental illness in the civil psychiatric realm. Specifically, schizophrenia is known to share some biological basis (e.g. low intellectual quotient) with paraphilias, such as pedophilia. Unfortunately, very little is known about the co-occurrence of these disorders as individual’s being assessed and treated for schizophrenia are rarely asked about problematic sexual interests and behaviours. A retrospective file review will be performed to determine the relationship, co-occurrence, and shared factors and course of the paraphilia relative to the characteristics and course of the psychotic symptoms and identify group differences between individuals presenting with comorbid paraphilias and schizophrenia or psychosis. The sample will consist of both inpatient and outpatients from the Forensic Psychiatry units and the schizophrenia units at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Hamilton, Ontario who have received a diagnosis of either schizophrenia or a psychotic disorder. Data relating to their psychiatric history, present psychiatric state, and any presence of a paraphilia will be coded from patient files. Possible factors correlated with the course and characteristics of their presentation (e.g. IQ, history of brain injury, developmental problems) will also be investigated. Improving our understanding of the prevalence, relationship and correlates of this issue will improve the accuracy and design of future more comprehensive empirical study, and eventually see improved response and care, thereby reducing hospitalization/detention and the associated costs to healthcare.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- To better understand the nature of problematic sexual behaviour and its relationship to major mental illness.
- To share the characteristics and course of paraphilia relative to the characteristics and course of the psychotic symptoms.
- To review neurodevelopmental factors that may be shared between the two illnesses.
- To inform possible relevant factors in the assessment of paraphilia and mental illness.
- To inform future research questions about major mental illness and psychosis.
Little direct research considers the characteristics or risk factors of sex offenders declared not criminally responsible (NCR). Though published in 2013, the most recent study to specifically examine this population considers a sample from 2000-2005, resulting in our most recent understanding of this unique population being at least eleven years old (Crocker, Seto, Nicholls, & Cote, 2013). Results from this study found sex offenders declared not criminally responsible frequently have higher rates of previous offences, and higher rates of stranger victims, all of which have been shown to predict recidivism (Hanson & Thornton, 2000). Indeed, compared to other violent NCR offenders, sex offenders declared NCR had higher rates of both violent and non-violent recidivism. Yet, sex offenders declared NCR had the lowest rates of detention in a forensic mental health setting upon being declared NCR, and had the highest rates of absolute discharge at the end up follow up. If sex offenders have the highest rate of re-offence among offenders declared NCR, yet are being discharged before other groups, this suggests there is a disconnect between how forensic mental health care providers assess the risk of sex offenders declared NCR, and the reality of the risk and needs of this population. To better assess and care for individuals found at this intersection of sexual violence and mental health, we must understand both their characteristics as persons declared NCR, and as persons committing sexual violence.

This presentation will describe the preliminary results of a study examining the trajectories, outcomes, and risk factors in sex offenders declared NCR. This study’s sample will include sex offenders declared NCR from across Canada, who were given their NCR disposition between 2006 and 2012, with a three year follow-up period to 2015. Legal reports documenting participants’ mental statuses and criminal histories are publicly available in Canada and will be collected through an online database. The participants’ first NCR index sexual offence in the study period will be used, with preceding and subsequent offences or NCR designations being considered as criminal history or recidivism, respectively. The study will take place in two parts.

First, we will examine the primary diagnoses, initial dispositions, length of time under purview of review boards, previous convictions, and instances of recidivism in this population. This will provide an understanding of the characteristics of this population. We also hypothesize that sex offenders declared NCR will display risk related characteristics similar to the findings of Crocker et al. (2013).

Second, we will examine how risk is currently assessed in sex offenders declared NCR, as well as how consideration of known risk factors for recidivism in sexual offenders can improve estimation of the risk of sex offenders declared NCR. We hypothesize that sex offenders declared NCR will present with risk factors for re-offense, and consideration of
these risk factors will predict their risk for recidivism. Risk factors will be coded from all available information in the collected legal documents. Risk factors to be considered include previous convictions, previous sexual offences, age at time of offence, having unrelated victims, having stranger victims, and having male victims. Such factors are considered in the well-established actuarial risk assessment, the Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 2000).

Should these factors improve the prediction of risk to reoffend in sex offenders declared NCR, this will provide support for use of sexual offence specific risk assessment measures when assessing risk for review boards. Shared risk factors between sex offenders declared NCR and sex offenders generally will also provide impetus for provision of treatment targeted at the criminogenic needs of sex offenders declared NCR. In these ways, consideration of risk factors will help care providers in the forensic mental health system better understand and treat sex offenders declared NCR. Better assessment and treatment will in turn help sex offenders declared NCR to progress more efficiently through the forensic system, reduce their risk to re-enter the criminal justice or forensic systems. This will allow them to live meaningful lives, while maintaining public safety.

References
Crocker, A.G., Seto, M.C., Nicholls, T.L., & Cote, G. (2013). Description and processing of individuals found Not Criminally Responsible on Account of Mental Disorder accused of “serious violent offences.” Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice, Canada.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- Understand the characteristics of sex offenders declared NCR
- Improve understanding of the trajectory and outcomes of sex offenders declared NCR in the forensic mental health system.
- Facilitate understanding on the characteristics and risk factors most related to reoffending in this population
- Examine the utility of considering traditional risk factors and utilizing traditional risk assessments in this population
- Facilitate discussion of how understanding risk in sex offenders declared NCR can better inform rehabilitation practices.