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### **Females Who Sexually Offend**

#### **A Fresh Look at Female Sexual Offending**

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Over the last several decades, sexual offending typically has been considered to be a pattern of behavior largely exclusive to men. Moreover, a review of the available scholarly literature on sexual offending clearly indicated that research efforts almost exclusively have focused on male offenders. Some authors, in fact, have suggested female sex offenders have been outright ignored by the research community (Grayston & De Luca, 1999). McLeod (2015) suggested that through this failure to recognize women as potential sexual offenders, we have enabled female sex offenders to avoid detection, prosecution, and appropriate interventions (i.e., predatory offender registration, participation in sex offender treatment programming, restricting victim access, etc.). It is hypothesized that some of this tendency to ignore female sex offenders may be attributable to a lack of awareness of the specific characteristics of female sex offenders (e.g., offending behaviors, victim types, and background characteristics) that differ from their male counterparts. Indeed, recent research has suggested female sex offenders are prominently different relative to male sexual offenders (McLeod, 2015).

Previous research indicated between 15 to 20% of sexual offenses are perpetrated by females (Faller and Coulburn, 1995). Perhaps explaining the lack of attention given to female sex offenders by the research community, data published by the United States government indicated only about 1% of incarcerated sexual offenders are female (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). On an international scale, data has indicated approximately 5% of all sex offenders are female (Cortoni, 2009). Relatedly, others (Finkelhor, 1984; Johnson & Shrier, 1987) have suggested the female sex offender population is not large enough to warrant research.

A relative dearth of research, however, does not indicate that it is unimportant to research female sex offenders. Undoubtedly, sexual victimization can significantly impact victims, and it would appear reasonable to assume those victimized by females may be impacted differently. Whether 15 to 20% or 1 to 5% of all sexual offending, by studying the offending behaviors, personal characteristics, and victim profiles of female sex offenders,

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sex offender identification and treatment will be more successful. Perhaps just as importantly, through a greater understanding of female sex offending, victims may be more able and willing to report and seek aid.

Of the research efforts that have examined female sex offenders, previous studies have attempted to study the variations in offense context, offending patterns, and victim characteristics of female sex offenders (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). Of concern, these typologies (e.g., Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004) either are based on large samples but with features that explain little about the victim, the background characteristics, and the biopsychosocial problems of the female sex offenders or are based on small, but in-depth clinical samples (e.g., Faller, 1995; Mathews, Matthews, & Speltz, 1991), thereby making the results ungeneralizable.

In order to enhance the current available body of research, the presenters examined offender, offense, and victim characteristics in a cohort of 117 adult female sex offenders comprising all female sex offenders who were incarcerated at the Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee (MCF-SHK) and who were subjected to an End of Confinement Review Committee (ECRC) between 1997 and 2017. This effort adds to the literature of previous studies in that it examines a comparatively large, incarcerated group of female sex offenders, and, through their incarcerations and related documentation (e.g., Pre-Sentence Investigations, Criminal Complaints, Psychosexual Evaluations, Psychological Evaluations, etc.), rich and in-depth information relating to offender, offense, and victim characteristics was available for the presenters' review.

Using bivariate analysis, some significant differences were noted between solo offenders and those with male accomplices (e.g., co-offenders were much more likely to offend against female victims [89.7%] and present with histories of emotional/physical abuse [87.2%] and divorce [56.4%]). Bivariate analysis also identified some significant differences between those offenders who had and had not sexually recidivated (e.g., the vast majority of recidivists [81.8%] offended against female victims relative to non-recidivists [45.3%]). Relevant findings will be reviewed, and the presenters will discuss possible implications for theory and assessment. Additionally, salient, de-identified case studies of recidivists will be presented and discussed.

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### **Learning Goals:**

- Provide an engaging review of how female sex offending has been considered over time.
- 2) Discuss notable findings from an in-depth review of 117 incarcerated female sex offenders, including offender characteristics, offending behaviors, and victim profiles.
- 3) Present de-identified case studies of recidivists, as well as solo and co-offenders, in order to vividly demonstrate results indicated by bivariate analysis.

**Terrel Backes, Psy.D., LP** is a licensed psychologist who has worked for the Minnesota Department of Corrections since 2012. He initially worked for several years in the psychiatric unit of the MCF-OPH, Minnesota's lone "super-max" prison, before later transitioning to the MN-DOC's Risk Assessment/Community Notification Unit. There, he completes risk level recommendation reports and Sexual Psychopathic Personality/Sexually Dangerous Person Review reports. His professional interests include neuropsychological assessment, violence risk assessment, community reintegration and risk assessment of Life Sentenced Offenders, the interplay of structured professional judgment and actuarial measures, and statistical analysis (e.g., machine learning and logistical regression).

**Michèle Murphy, MA, LPC** is a Program Director at the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC). In this capacity, she manages the community notification program, supervises RA/CN Unit staff who analyze and synthesize material for use in community notification events, serves as a Chairperson on an End of Confinement Review Committee (ECRC), and manages the clinical aspects of the statewide Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) Program and its related trainings. In her former roles, she scored numerous actuarial

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instruments, completed risk assessment recommendation reports and life-sentence evaluations, spoke to large community groups about level 3 predatory offenders, presided over community education and professional trainings and maintained effective public relations for the department. Prior to working for the Department of Corrections, she worked in the positions of therapist, psychometrist, and program manager.

**Brian Heinsohn, MA, LPC** is a licensed professional counselor who has worked for the Minnesota Department of Corrections since 1998. He worked as a therapist in the sex offender treatment program at MCF- Lino Lakes for six years before transferring to the Risk Assessment/Community Notification Unit in 2004. His duties in the RA/CN unit have included completing risk level recommendation reports for end of confinement review committees at a number of institutions, completing actuarial instruments including the Static-99, RRASOR, MnSOST-R and MNSOST-3.1, and making sex offender treatment recommendations. He currently supervises the RA/CN unit psychologists and provides trainings on dynamic risk assessment and is a certified Static-99R, Stable-2007, Acute-2007 trainer.

### **Sexual Homicide Involving Female "Perpetrators": Definitional, Conceptual and Typological Issues**

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Although research is emerging on female sexual offenders, there has been very little research on female sexual homicide offenders. Females are rare amongst those accused of sexual homicide, but understanding the characteristics of these females and their role in committing sexual homicide is crucial to determine how society should respond to such cases. Most research so far has defined sexual homicide in the same way for both male and female perpetrators, without consideration of specific issues in relation to how females may be involved in such offences.

This paper is based on research undertaken in Scotland using a national police homicide database of over 4,000 homicides since the 1960s. Within this database were 220 sexual homicides, of which 9 involved a female accused. These females were compared to female non-sexual homicide accused and male sexual homicide accused using data on victims, crimes and accused. The individual cases were also looked at in detail to prepare anonymised case vignettes to explore the cases.

Most of the female sexual homicide accused (6) committed their offences with at least one male accomplice. Those that did not were women who retaliated against men who had

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tried to sexually assault them, except for one case. Only one of the nine females remained convicted of the homicide after being processed by the police, prosecution, courts and appeal courts. This was due to mitigating circumstances, such as being coerced by a male or reacting to an abusive male victim. There were significant differences between these cases and female non-sexual homicide and male sexual homicide cases.

These findings question whether females play any active role in committing sexual homicides and raise issues as to what role is played by females who are accused of sexual homicide, what definition is appropriate for sexual homicides involving females, and how society should respond to women who are accused of sexual homicide.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Outline the limited literature on female perpetrators of sexual homicide
- Describe females accused of sexual homicide in Scotland over the last 50 years and compare them with female non-sexual homicide and male sexual homicide perpetrators.
- Discuss the role of female perpetrators in sexual homicides, definitional and conceptual issues, and their implications for societal response to such cases.

**Dr Rajan Darjee** is a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at the Victorian Institute of Forensic mental Health (Forensicare) and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University, Melbourne, Australia. Before 2018 he worked as a forensic psychiatrist in Scotland for over 15 years. He specialises in the assessment, treatment and management of sexual offenders with personality disorders and paraphilias. He has worked in prisons, secure hospitals and the community. He has written over 60 papers, books and book chapters. He has played a role in the development and implementation of national policies for the management of sexual offenders and mentally disordered offenders. He has extensive experience working as an expert witness, particularly assessing risk in sexual offenders for sentencing, release and community management.