

Community Attitudes Towards Youth and International Perspectives

Canadian Students' Responses to Juvenile and Adult Sexual Offenders: Attitudes and Support for Registration

Brandon Sparks, MA
University of Saskatchewan

Introduction: Canada has had a long history of youth criminal justice reform which has largely evolved in reflection of our increased understanding of adolescent development, the formative role of one's environment, and one's receptivity to treatment. Yet the 1980's fostered a new perspective on crime, focusing on the so-called crisis of "juvenile superpredators," which resulted in public fear and an increased desire to return to more retributive approaches. Juvenile sexual offenders (JSOs), who already belong to the most stigmatized offender group (Rogers & Ferguson, 2011), have quite likely fallen victim most to this punitive zeitgeist. For instance, some studies have found that JSOs elicit more fear than some types of adult sexual offenders (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009). Greene and Evelo (2013) have found support for considerably long prison sentences, while Salerno and colleagues (2010) have reported considerable support for the registration of JSOs, which became a legal requirement in the United States in 2006 as a part of the Adam Walsh Act (AWA). While there is no equivalent to the AWA in Canada, there is some evidence suggesting that Canadians would support such a measure with adult sexual offenders (Kelly, 2013). With respect to JSOs, there has been little done to gauge the Canadian response. Yet, with 1,784 youth being charged for sexual offenses in 2017 alone, understanding public responses to these individuals is of paramount importance to supporting the reintegration process and the promotion of an offense-free lifestyle.

Methods: A sample of 376 individuals from the University of Saskatchewan were recruited. These individuals were presented with or asked to depict a vignette involving a JSO followed by series of measures assessing their attitudes (via the ATS-21) toward the offender group, recommendations for sentencing and registration, their level of dehumanization, stereotype endorsement, and moral outrage. Participants also followed a similar procedure with respect to adult sexual offenders, who acted as a comparison group.

Results: Results indicated that Canadians did respond to JSOs more favourably than they did their adult counterparts. However, responses to JSOs were still negative, with average sentence recommendations being 12-times greater than the median sentence length handed out in Canadian courts (Miladinovic, 2016). Further, over 90% of respondents

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endorsed some form of registration for JSOs, although there were important distinctions between juvenile and adult sexual offenders vis-à-vis the type of registration recommended. The harsh response to JSOs (with respect to the current legal practice) may be related to the extremely high recidivism estimates given by participants, one-third of whom believed that the three-year recidivism rate was over 50%. Indeed, mediation analyses implicated these overestimates in the relationship between attitudes, sentencing, and support for registration.

Discussion: The results of the study demonstrate that there exists a strong appeal in applying punitive responses to JSO as well as to their adult counterparts, and that this trend is not restricted to the United States despite differences in the respective countries' legal practices. In other words, the relatively short sentences paired with a lack of registration that is employed by Canadian courts is at odds with the Canadian public. However, it appears that participants' lack of knowledge with respect to recidivism rates is driving some of these retributive motives. Therefore, despite the visceral reaction some may have to sexual offenses and their perpetrators, an educational campaign may be particularly salient in getting Canadians on board with current legal practices.

Learning Goals:

- To facilitate an understanding of the attitudes that are held toward juvenile sexual offenders and how they may be an impediment to reintegration
- To understand what these attitudes influence and the detrimental effects that juvenile sexual offenders could face
- To discuss how to engage the public in supporting evidence-based practice versus retributive practices

Brandon Sparks, MA is a PhD in the Department of Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Wormith. His research interests encompass a variety of topics with respect to both juvenile and adult sexual offenders, including policies, risk assessments, and societal attitudes. Additional research areas include trust in police, societal responses to crime, and healthy relationships. He has previously done work with the New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety working on a project to reduce the rate of child sexual abuse in the province and is currently a member of ATSA's Public Policy Committee.

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Attitudes Towards Adolescents with Sexual Behavior Problems in Turkey: Implications for Treatment and Prevention

Paul Hoard, PhD, LCPC
MidAmerica Nazarene University
Selen Demirtas-Zorbaz, PhD
Ordu University
Sule Bastemur, PhD
Ordu University

While the construct of attitudes towards individuals with histories of sexual abuse is one that has begun to see a growing body of literature, it remains in its infancy. What has emerged from the literature is an emphasis on the importance of the attitudes held by treatment providers in impacting treatment outcomes. Moreover, when the construct is unpacked and analyzed in more developmental and culturally specific manners, the available data grows ever thinner. Specifically, the strong majority of research on the topic exists in more Western cultural contexts and is primarily focused on adults. This presentation addresses these issues by providing and synthesizing original research on the topic of attitudes towards adolescents with sexual behavior problems in the context of the nation of Turkey. The presenters will first review the quantitative results from surveys conducted with mental health professionals and employees in the justice system concerning attitudes towards “sexual offenders”. Next the qualitative data from in-depth interviews with mental health professionals involved in counseling adolescents with sexual behavior problems will be discussed. These results will be woven together to produce a more robust understanding of adolescent sexual offending behavior in this specific cultural context. From this understanding, preliminary suggestions for developing more culturally specific and sensitive intervention and prevention approaches to addressing adolescent sexual offending behavior in Turkey will be presented.

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Learning Goals:

- Participants will be able to articulate the results from original quantitative and qualitative research regarding attitudes towards adolescents with sexual behavior problems in Turkey.
- Participants will develop an understanding of the unique cultural beliefs and assumptions surrounding adolescent sexual offending behavior and how these impact perceptions of these adolescents as well as treatment.
- Participants will engage with culturally specific intervention and prevention practices to address adolescent sexual offending in Turkey.

Paul R. Hoard, PhD, LCPC, CSAYC is a licensed clinical professional counselor (Kansas, Missouri, Indiana) with a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision from Regent University where he conducted his dissertation research on juveniles with sexual behavior problems in secure care. He is a clinical member of ATSA has received specialized training and credentialing in working with adolescents with sexual behavior problems. He has worked clinically with juveniles with sexual behavior problems since 2010. Dr. Hoard has conducted research and provided mental health counseling as well as clinical supervision in the USA, Ukraine, and Turkey. He was recently appointed by the State of Kansas Secretary of Corrections to the State's Multi-Disciplinary Team, responsible for evaluating potential sexually violent predators. Currently, he holds a position as an assistant professor in the counselor education department of MidAmerica Nazarene University where he also provides outpatient mental health counseling and clinical supervision services. Dr. Hoard has spoken and presented at conferences internationally on the topics of maladaptive sexual behavior, military sexual trauma, and mental health counseling.

Selen Demirtas-Zorbaz, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education at Ordu University, Turkey. She earned her master's degree in 2011 and PhD in 2016 in the area of counselling and guidance. She also worked as a secretary of education in the Turkish Counselling and Guidance Association from 2010 to 2013. She earned a scholarship from the Turkish Council of Higher Education to study at Eastern Michigan University, USA as a visiting scholar between 2013 – 2014. Her main research interests include school climate, school adjustment, child counseling, child problem behavior.

Sule Bastemur, PhD is an Assistant Professor Dr. of Counselor Education at Ordu University, Turkey. She has a bachelor degree in Counseling and Guidance Program. She worked as a school counselor at public/private schools and a children's special education and rehabilitation center. She had a master degree at Counseling and Counselor Education at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. She got her PhD degree at Counseling Psychology at Istanbul University. She is a member of Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association. She has delivered many conferences in different countries and published many articles. She voluntarily provided group counseling with adolescent juveniles. She is giving Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Life Span Development and

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Adjustment Problems, Group Counseling, Multicultural Counseling courses. She is also advisor of postgraduate students.