

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | POSTER

Minimisation and Denial Among Female Sexual Offenders

Marion Desfachelles, PhD Candidate
Franca Cortoni, PhD, CPsych
Frederic Ouellet, PhD
University of Montréal

Unlike man, there are few studies examining female sexual offenders' cognitions (Beech, Parrett, Ward & Fisher 2009; Gannon & Alleyne, 2013; Gannon, Rose & Ward, 2012; Kubik & Hecker, 2005). Yet, cognitions represent a key area of relevance for understanding female sexual offenders post offence strategies to absolve their offending behaviour (e.g., denial and minimisation). Not surprisingly, female, as their male counterparts tend to deny or minimize their sexual behaviour. However, Allen (1991) noticed that MSOs are more likely to admit their guilt than FSOs. In the same way, Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) observed that 45% of female sexual offenders (FSO) did not make any admission/denying the crime comparing to 26% of male sexual offenders (MSO). Deny can have different facets. For example, Faller (1995) reported that 68% of the FSO admitted to some abuse and 31.9% of the offenders denied the abuse. In their study, only 29.2% of FSO fully admitted the abuse.

Goal of present study was to investigate deny and minimization among female sexual offenders. Specifically, we were looking to:

1. Determine the number of female sexual offenders who denied or minimized their sexual offense(s);
2. Determine which mechanisms are used by them;
3. Observe if differences appear among women, depending on their offense characteristics (e.g., solo or co-offending).

Participants in this study were 30 women incarcerated in France for sexual offenses. Our sample included three women who hadn't directly abused children but had facilitated the offense or who could have known about it and yet did nothing to stop it. In these complicity involvement, French penal code states that "the accomplice of the offender will be punished as an author" (Art. 121-6). The remaining women had all been actively involved in the assault. Some women were serving sentences for rape, other for sexual assault or corruption of a minor. In France, a distinction is made between sexual aggression and rape, which are treated as two different crimes; sexual aggression is defined as sexual activities not involving penetration. Corruption of a minor is not clearly defined by the law but can be characterize as the fact to take advantage of the youth and the inexperience of a victim to initiate him/her into a vice, and to endeavor to make him a slave. Four of them assaulted an adult -women or men- and the rest of the sample committed their abuse against children. Women in our sample had received sentences varying from two years and a half to life sentence. Preliminary results show that almost our entire sample of FSO denied or minimized their offense. Deny could take two forms: either the woman denies the very existence of the abuse (e.g; "Kids lied about the sexual abuse") or she denies having participated in it (e.g; "I never did anything" or "I didn't know what's happened"). Or the other way, minimisation could also have different facets

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Friday November 8 | POSTER

by minimizing their responsibility (e.g; “I did it but it wasn’t my fault / I had no choice”) or the severity of the offense (e.g; “It just happened once”). To do so, our data shows several mechanisms. First, numerous women depreciate the investigation or the justice system. For example, in this category, we observe women who declare that the judge did not take into account all the evidences or that witness lied. Secondly, our data show that numerous women involved in co-offending situations used that context to minimize their sexual behaviour. Matthews, Mathews and Speltz (1989) suggested that some female sexual co-offenders could wrongly took responsibility for the deviant behavior of their accomplice. We found no difference among solo and co-offenders. Rather, female sexual co-offenders tend to deny or minimized their offense by rejecting the fault on their accomplice. To do so, women tend to depreciate the co-offender, contrasting their personality with their own. For example, some women noticed that the co-offender was deviant in other aspect of his sexually (e.g; zoophilia) or was a bad person (e.g; manipulator, alcoholic). In the other way, they present themselves as good (e.g; always helping people).

Marion DESFACHELLES, M.Sc. Criminology, is a doctoral student in criminology at the University of Montréal. She completed her master thesis with Franca CORTONI on the subject of female sexual co-offenders. Her research focuses on female offending and on sexual crimes and more specifically, the criminal trajectories of female sexual offenders. This project is supervised by Frederic OUELLET and Franca CORTONI.

Franca CORTONI, a clinical and forensic psychologist, is an Associate Professor at the School of Criminology of the University of Montréal and Research Fellow at the International Centre of Comparative Criminology. Since 1989, she has worked with and conducted research on male and female sexual offenders. She worked for several years within the Correctional Service of Canada before joining University of Montréal. Dr. Cortoni has published extensively and made numerous presentations at national and international conferences on sexual offender issues.

Frederic OUELLET is an assistant professor at the School of Criminology, University of Montréal and Research Fellow at the International Centre of Comparative Criminology. His work specializes in criminal career dimensions. His research interests include understanding turning points in criminal career trajectories. His recent works appeared in *Justice Quarterly*, the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* and *Global Crime*.