

## Attitudes toward Sexual Offenders and Sexual Offending Against Children

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## Cognition

- Cognition supportive of sexual offending against children may play a role in the initiation and maintenance of sexual offending
  - (e.g., Abel et al., 1984; Beech et al., 2013; Gannon et al., 2006, 2007; Hall & Hirschmann, 1992; Helmus et al., 2012; Mann et al., 2010; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Ó Ciardha & Ward, 2013; Ward & Siegert, 2002)
- Call for **more precision and clarity** when examining the relationship between cognition and sexual offending
  - (e.g., Maruna & Mann, 2006; Nunes et al., 2013; Ó Ciardha & Ward, 2013)
- Some researchers have focused on the relationship between **attitudes and sexual offending**
  - (e.g., Nunes et al., 2012; Widman & Olson, 2012)

## Attitudes

**Attitudes:**  
Summary evaluations  
of a psychological  
object  
(e.g., Ajzen, 2001; Fazio, 2007)

- **Implicit attitudes:**  
Immediate automatically activated evaluations
- **Explicit attitudes:**  
Deliberative propositional evaluations

- Theory suggests attitudes (evaluations) towards behavior influence behaviour
  - Theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; 2001)
  - General aggression model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002)

## Attitudes

- Meta-analytic research suggests attitudes can be important determinants of behaviour (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006)
- Correlation between attitude and behaviour:  
 $r = .52$ , 95% CI [.49, .54],  $k = 128$
- Relationship moderated by a number of variables including accessibility and stability

## Attitudes and Violence

- Some research suggests implicit and explicit attitudes towards violence are associated with violent behaviour
  - Group differences between violent and non-violent participants (Eckhardt et al., 2012; Robertson & Murachver, 2004)
  - Implicit attitudes toward violence positively associated with risk of violent recidivism (post-treatment) (Polaschek et al., 2010)
  - Explicit attitudes toward violence distinct from violence cognition
    - Independently associated with past violent behaviour (Nunes et al., 2013)

## Attitudes and Sexual Offending

- Few studies to date have looked at the relationship between attitudes (evaluations) toward sexual offending and sexually aggressive behaviour
- Implicit and explicit attitudes toward rape are independently associated with past sexually aggressive behaviour (Nunes et al., 2013)
  - Student sample
- Implicit attitudes toward rape and rape-supportive cognition are independently associated with past sexually aggressive behaviour (Widman & Olson, 2012)
  - Student and community samples

## Purpose

- Are implicit and explicit attitudes toward sexual offenders related to sexual offending?
- Examine implicit and explicit attitudes toward **sexual offenders** in sexual offenders against children (SOC) and non-sexual offenders (NSO)



### Hypotheses:

- Implicit and explicit attitudes: SOC > NSO
- Implicit and explicit attitudes towards sexual offenders will independently discriminate between SOC and NSO

## Participants

- Participants recruited from a number of institutions in western Canada (e.g., Alberta Solicitor General's probation offices; Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre; Bowden Institution; Phoenix Program at Alberta Hospital Edmonton)
- 95 adult male SOC and NSO offenders
- Participants excluded for **grouped analyses** (not mutually exclusive):
  - Missing index offence  $n = 6$
  - NSO self-reported sexual offence  $n = 11$
  - NSO prior sex offence  $n = 4$
  - 10%+ fast RT trials on any IAT measure  $n = 6$
  - Reported cannot understand written English  $n = 2$

## Participants

### Grouped Analyses:

- SOC ( $n = 28$ ) – index sexual offence against a child
- NSO ( $n = 44$ ) – no self-reported or official sexual offences
- Participants excluded for **ungrouped analyses** (not mutually exclusive):
  - 10%+ fast RT trials on any IAT measure,  $n = 6$
  - Reported cannot understand written English,  $n = 2$

### Ungrouped Analyses:

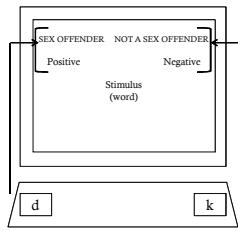
- SOC and NSO ( $N = 87$ )

% ( $n$ )	SOC	NSO
Age at Index $M$ ( $SD$ )	35.32 (12.62)	33.80 (10.41)
Age at Assessment $M$ ( $SD$ )*	41.30 (11.44)	34.89 (10.45)
Education		
Less than Grade 12	42.9% (12)	54.5% (24)
Grade 12	21.4% (6)	18.2% (8)
Ethnicity*		
White	82.1% (23)	50.0% (22)
Aboriginal	17.9% (5)	45.5% (20)
Other	0%	4.8% (2)
Marital Status		
Single	60.7% (17)	54.5% (24)
Married/ Common Law	25.0% (7)	34.1% (15)
Separated/ Divorced	14.3% (4)	11.4% (5)
In or Completed Treatment	96.4% (27)	--

## Measures

### Implicit attitudes toward sexual offenders:

- IAT Methodology (Greenwald et al., 1998)
- Internal consistency:  $\alpha = .72$



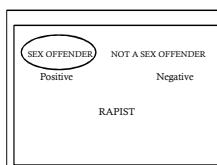
**IAT D score =**  

$$[\text{Sex Offender} + \text{Negative}] - [\text{Sex Offender} + \text{Positive}]$$

- More positive scores = more positive implicit attitudes toward sex offenders relative to non-sex offenders

## Measures

### Stimuli



**SEX OFFENDER:** RAPIST, RAPE, CHILD MOLESTER, MOLEST, SEX OFFENDER

**NOT A SEX OFFENDER:** THIEF, THEFT, ROBBER, DRUG DEALER, MURDERER



**Positive:** peace, good, smile, happy, paradise

**Negative:** rotten, poor, sickness, poison, bad

## Measures

- Explicit attitudes towards sexual offenders
  - Average of 5 SD scales (7 point Likert scales)
  - Internal consistency  $\alpha = .88$

	Mean	SD	Range
Negative to Positive	1.99	1.65	1 to 7
Unlikeable to Likeable	2.46	1.84	1 to 7
Unpleasant to Pleasant	2.56	1.76	1 to 7
Bad to Good	1.88	1.45	1 to 7
Unlovable to Loveable	2.47	1.69	1 to 7

## Measures

### Risk of Recidivism

- Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (SORAG) (Quinsey et al., 1998) – violent (including sexual) recidivism
  - Actuarial instrument
  - Good predictive validity (e.g., Harris et al., 2003; Quinsey et al., 2006)
  - Good interrater reliability (Quinsey et al., 2006)

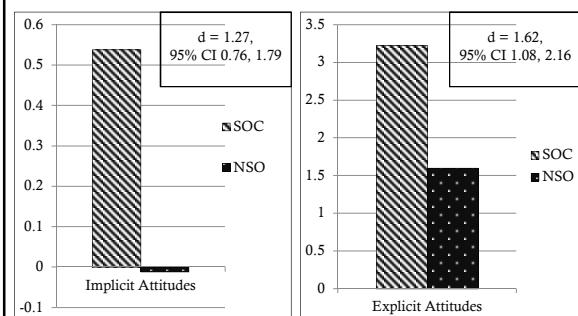
## Results: Pearson Correlations

	SOC (n = 28)		SOC and NSO (N = 87)	
	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit
Explicit Attitudes	.13	-	.22*	-
SORAG	-.11	.03	-	-
Number of Prior Sex Offences	-.12	-.01	.24 <sup>a*</sup>	.18 <sup>a</sup>
Number of Index Sex Offences	.04	.07	.41 <sup>a*</sup>	.54 <sup>a*</sup>

Note. <sup>a</sup> n = 81 due to missing data.

\*p < .05

## Results



## Results: Logistic Regression

	B	SE B	Odds Ratio	95% CI	p
<b>Block 1</b>					
Implicit Attitudes	0.324	0.084	1.382	1.174, 1.629	< .001
<b>Block 2</b>					
Implicit Attitudes	0.368	0.119	1.445	1.144, 1.824	.002
Explicit Attitudes	1.736	0.467	5.677	2.272, 14.185	< .001

Note. Block 1  $\chi^2 (1, N = 71) = 24.08, p < .001$ .

Block 2  $\chi^2 (1, N = 71) = 27.41, p < .001$ .

Block 2 Nagelkerke R square = .698.

## Summary

- Implicit and explicit attitudes toward sexual offenders have a small positive significant relationship –SOC and NSO
- Large significant group differences between SOC and NSO on implicit and explicit attitudes toward sexual offenders
- Implicit and explicit attitudes towards sexual offenders:
  - Independently differentiated groups
  - Complementary measures
- Implicit and explicit attitudes towards sexual offenders were not associated with risk of violent (including sexual) recidivism in SOC

## Discussion

- Implicit and explicit attitudes towards sexual offenders should be explored
- Attitudes toward sexual offenders vs. sexual offending
  - May not be attitudes towards committing sexual offences
  - Evaluations of a social group
- May reflect self-identity as a sex offender
  - Positive evaluations of social group - identify with that social group
  - May lead to behaviour consistent with identity (e.g., Maruna & Copes, 2005)

## Limitations

- Differences between attitudes toward sexual offenders vs. sexual offending
- More specific to SOC (e.g., sexual offending against children)
- Cross sectional data – can't determine causality
- Unknown construct validity of attitude measures

## Future Research

- Validate and explore implicit and explicit attitude measures
  - Different types of attitudes (sexual offenders, sexual offending)
  - Different types of implicit measures
- Examine attitudes in community men
- Relationship between attitudes and behaviour

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Thank you

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Questions?

More about our research  
Aggressive Cognition and Behaviour Research Lab  
<http://www.carleton.ca/acbrlab/>

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