Associations between Denial, Identity, and Attitudes among Sexual Offenders against Children

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Introduction

- Denial has been commonly addressed in sexual offender treatment programs.
- However, relationship between denial and risk of sexual re-offending not consistent.
- There are many questions about the role and relevance of denial. [1] For example, some have speculated that denial may reflect an attempt to distance oneself from a sexual offender self-concept or identity.[2]

Objective

- Explore the extent to which denial is associated with identity and attitudes towards sexual offenders.

Methods

Participants

- 30 men charged with a sexual offense against a child.

Measures

- Denial and Minimization: Comprehensive Inventory of Denial – Sex Offender Version (CID-SO)[3]
  - Clinician scored measure. Higher scores indicate greater denial and minimization overall (total score) and in specific areas (clusters; see Table).
- Identification of Self as a Sexual Offender
  - Explicit: Self-report ratings of self as a sexual offender vs. not a sexual offender. Higher scores indicate more identification as a sexual offender.
  - Implicit: Implicit Association Test (IAT) measure.[4] Higher positive scores indicate more identification of self as a sexual offender.
- Evaluative Attitudes Towards Sexual Offenders
  - Explicit: Self-report ratings of sexual offenders as negative vs. positive. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards sexual offenders.
  - Implicit: IAT measure. Higher positive differences indicate more positive evaluations of sexual offenders.

Results

Spearman's Correlations

	Identity as a Sexual Offender		Attitudes towards Sexual Offenders		
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit	M (SD)
CID-SO total score	**-.36***	.06	-.11	-.08	11.73 (9.22)
Cluster A: Denial of sexually deviant behavior and arousal	**-.56****	-.20	-.13	**-.33**	2.97 (2.74)
Cluster B: Deny need for treatment and management of sex offending	**-.35**	.12	-.09	-.08	2.03 (2.27)
Cluster C: Deny responsibility	-.01	.16	-.08	.07	3.67 (2.63)
Cluster D: Minimize harm	**-.30**	.03	-.06	-.03	3.07 (2.91)
M (SD)	5.62 (1.28)	0.62 (0.54)	3.14 (1.23)	0.56 (0.43)	-

** $p = .001$, * $p < .05$, $|r| \geq .30$ in bold to facilitate interpretation.

Discussion

- Greater denial moderately associated with less explicit identification of self as a sexual offender, but generally not correlated with implicit identity.
- This discrepancy between explicit and implicit identity consistent with at least four possibilities:
  - The CID-SO and explicit identity measure assess something similar (e.g., denying being a sexual offender), and the implicit identity measure assesses something distinct.
  - Denial is partly motivated by explicit—but not implicit—identity.
  - More deceptive or otherwise biased responding on the explicit than the implicit measure.
  - The IAT measure did not accurately assess implicit identification of self as a sexual offender.

Discussion

Implications

- Consistent with notion that denial may function to consciously distance self from label of sexual offender.[2]

Limitations

- Small sample size limits confidence in the stability of results.
- Cross-sectional non-experimental design could not test predictive or causal relationships.

Future Directions

- More rigorous research (e.g., larger samples, more informative designs) should further examine
  - the constructs assessed by the CID-SO and other measures of denial;
  - the correlates of, motives for, and functions of denial; and
  - their relevance for risk of sexual recidivism.

References

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