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Public Perceptions and Punishment of Sex Offenders

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology

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Public Perceptions and Punishment of Sex Offenders

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Table of Contents

Abstract	5
Introduction and Literature Review	6
Myth vs Reality	7
Familiarity with Sex Offenders	10
Punishment of Sex Offenders	11
Sentencing	12
Post Release Strategies.	14
The Current Study	16
Hypotheses	18
Method	18
Design	18
Participants	18
Procedure	19
Measures	20
Demographics Questionnaire	20
Vignettes	20
Sentencing	21
Post-Release Strategy Endorsement	21
Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders -21 (ATS-21)	22
Perceptions of Sex Offenders (PSO)	22
Results	23
Analytic Strategy	23
Relationship and Punishment, Perceptions, and Attitudes	23

Public Perceptions and Punishment of Sex Offenders	4
Familiarity with Individuals Convicted of Sex Offenses	24
Exploratory Free Response Results	24
Discussion.	25
Sentencing	27
Post-Release Strategy Endorsement	28
Perceptions and Attitudes	30
Familiarity as a Control	31
Free Response	32
Limitations	32
Future Directions	34
Conclusion and Implications	35
References	37
Tables	50
Table 1	50
Table 2	51
Table 3	52
Appendix A	53
Appendix B	55
Appendix C	56
Appendix D	57
Appendix E	58
Appendix F	61
Appendix G	65
Appendix H	67

Abstract

Previous research has examined negative public perceptions and attitudes towards sex offenders and, in turn, how sex offenders are punished. The present study aims to build on previous research by examining whether perceptions of sex offenders are impacted by the offender's relationship to the victim, and how victim perpetrator relationship may impact sentencing. Survey data from $n=119$ participants was examined. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three relationship conditions (i.e., stranger, acquaintance, or spouse) which was manipulated within a mock article vignette describing a rape incident. Subsequently, participants completed questionnaires regarding sentencing of the described perpetrator, as well as measures aimed at assessing perceptions and attitudes towards those who have committed a sex crime. Results suggested that there was no difference between attitudes and perceptions in relation to relationship between perpetrator and victim but that post-release punishment strategies were seen as more favorable in a stranger rape situation as opposed to a spousal rape. Moreover, sentence length did not significantly differ due to victim-perpetrator relationship. Familiarity with sexual assault via prior victimization and general attitudes towards those labeled offenders, however, was found to increase the length of prescribed sentence. Implications of this study are wide reaching as results offer insight into how stereotype application can impact public perception and punishment endorsement of sex offenders.

Keywords: sex offender, stereotype, public perception, sentencing

Public Perceptions and Punishment of Sex Offenders

Individuals who have committed sex crimes are among the most punished and highly stigmatized groups of criminals (Socia et al., 2019). In fact, individuals who have committed sex offenses receive greater punishment and restriction than almost any other offender group (Pickett et al., 2013). One explanation for such punishment is that sex offenders and sex crimes are cited as among the most feared and anxiety provoking criminals and crimes according to public opinion (Levenson et al., 2007). Not all perpetrators of sex crimes, however, are treated equally. The public has been found to make many inaccurate assumptions about those who commit sex offences including that they are likely to recidivate and that they are usually unknown to their victims prior to any criminal act (Rosselli & Jeglic, 2017). In practice, those who do not fit the typical “norm” or schema of a sex offender (i.e., male, stranger) (Constantinou & Butorac, 2023; Krahe et al., 2007), are less likely to receive harsher punishments (Craun & Theriot, 2009; Quinn et al., 2004; Rydberg et al., 2018). Based upon such assumptions, it is possible to presume that the societally accepted image of a ‘sex offender’, and thus someone who is to be feared rather than helped, is not representative of the breadth of people who do commit sex offenses. In fact, it is suggested that up to 80% of adult sex offences are committed by individuals known to the victim and thus are contrary to the societally perceived norm (Department of Justice et al., 2000). Therefore, it seems likely that judges, juries, and the general public are basing their opinions regarding offenders on extraneous demographic and contextual information (i.e., offender/crime demographics), that should not impact case outcomes, rather than the crime they are evaluating. These assumptions, made based upon extraneous information, may influence the outcome of many sexual assault cases in ways that are unjust (Ahola et al., 2010).

It is also possible that, if an individual convicted of a sexual offense (ICSO) does not match society's preconceived notion of who an offender is, in terms of stereotypical demographic, the public is less likely to see them as a possible culprit (Harper & Bartels, 2017). Consequently, it could be speculated that the public's response to cases in which offender characteristics do not match these preconceived notions may be consistently different than their responses to "typical offenders" (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006; Schiavone, & Jeglic, 2009). In response to such quandaries, this study aims to examine if the specific relationship between a victim and a perpetrator, prior to an assault, can impact the public perception of the crime and of the perpetrator. Furthermore, this study examines whether altered perceptions impact the public's opinion on sentencing and prescribed punishment for perpetrators.

Prior research has supported the notion relationship between the victim and perpetrator may influence sentence length (McCormick et al., 1998). While it seems as though not much has shifted in how the world perceived ICSOs, perceptions are vulnerable to change (Arrow et al., 2004), and this dynamic has yet to be reexamined within more recent years and by using experimental manipulation. Understanding the impact of perpetrator-victim relationship on sentence length, other punishment variables, and attitudes/perceptions may have important implications, as this information allows for a deeper understanding into how the public responds to and endorses punishment for those who are labeled as sex offenders. This understanding further informs how our justice system functions and provides insight into who may be convicted, perceived, and treated as an offender and who may not, representing crucial differences in how justice is carried out depending on specific crime conditions.

Myths versus the Reality of Sex Offenses

Myths about sexual victimization, sexual violence, and sex offenders are rampant throughout the media have undue influence, and ultimately contribute heavily to the development of public opinions (Zatkin et al., 2022). In their foundational study, Fedoroff and Moran (1997) noted that society's view of ICISOs has been widely reductive to the point that it is often believed that "all sex offenders are "the same". They also noted that the public, in general, is widely misinformed regarding the diversity of who commits sex crimes and the reasons such crimes are committed, while the literature notes that motivations for sexual assault are "unlimited" (Fedoroff & Moran, 1997). Moreover, researchers have posited that people are ill informed about prognosis and treatment of sex offenders; it is a social norm to believe that offenders cannot be "cured" or helped in any way, and that the public notification of sex offenders is an effective way to protect communities from recidivism (Fedoroff & Moran, 1997; Schiavone & Jeglic, 2009). While these statements either lack evidence or are blatantly untrue, many more recent studies show that they are still commonly held beliefs (Harper & Bartels, 2017; Olver & Barlow, 2010; Quinn et al., 2004).

It is also still a widely held misconception that sexual assault cannot occur between two married/partnered individuals (Pisconti, 2013). The pervasiveness of this myth is reflected by the sparse research on this topic. Despite this, limited data does suggest that 10% to 14% of married women experience marital rape (Martin et al., 2007). Historically, the public has been found to minimize seriousness and outcomes of marital rape (Monson et al., 1996). More recently, however, a forcible sexual encounter within a marriage has been found to be rated as more "moral" than other sexual assault scenarios and is related to stronger adherence to beliefs that an rape interaction "wasn't really rape", that the offender did not mean to commit the rape, and that the criminal act was a deviant event (i.e., Rape Myth Acceptance) (Ferro et al., 2008). These results are of

particular importance as the relationship between victim and perpetrator has been credited as the primary consideration in attribution of guilt and sentencing in one third of cases, according to some research (Banerjee & Rao, 2022) and because marital rape is so common (Department of Justice et al., 2000).

Thus, it is evident that misinformed beliefs regarding offenders and characteristics of sexual offenses are commonplace. Studies using rape myth acceptance scales found that while most (80%) of perpetrators are often known to victims, with about 39% of rapes being committed by an acquaintance and 33% by a current or former partner, and that stranger rape scenarios are more unlikely (19.5%), most people think of stranger rape when they hear the phrase “sexual assault” (Department Of Justice et al., 2000; NSVRC, 2022, Zatzkin et al., 2022). Moreover, empirical evidence supports the notion that relationship between the victim and preparator has implications on how both jurors and police officers attribute blame in sexual assault scenarios. In situations where the perpetrator is seen as “typical” (i.e., a stranger), more blame for a sexual assault is placed on said perpetrator (Hine & Murphy, 2017). When the perpetrator becomes “closer” (i.e., acquaintance or partner/ex-partner) to the victim, less blame is placed on the perpetrator and more is attributed to the victim (Hine & Murphy, 2017; Krahe et al., 2007). Relationship between perpetrator and victim has also been found to contribute to the credibility of a victim’s testimony as sexual assault by a stranger was deemed more believable by the public, when compared to testimony about a known perpetrator (their father or a family friend) (Davies & Rogers, 2009).

Most relevant to the current study is a 1998 paper done by McCormick, exploring the sentence length and perpetrator victim relationship from clinical files of an incarcerated

population. Stranger, acquaintance, and partner rapists in this study were found to be demographically similar, but a disparity was seen in sentence length. Sentence was significantly longer for those who sexually assaulted a stranger as opposed to those who assaulted acquaintances and partners/ex-partners (McCormick et al., 1998). However, this study is now over 25 years old, and it is unclear if these types of stereotypes based upon victim-perpetrator relationships still exist.

Familiarity with Sex Offenders

As myths about sex crimes and those who commit them are often founded upon misconceptions, it is understood and supported by research that familiarity with ICSOs reduce misconceptions (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). Along with a more realistic view of ICSOs, then, comes more nuanced, empathetic, and accepting perceptions and attitudes (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). Familiarity with ICSOs can come from a range of experiences, from experiencing a sex crime, to reading extensive amounts of literature on sex crimes. Ferguson and Ireland (2006) found that, not only were attitudes towards ICSOs more positive for those whose occupation involved working closely with said individuals (i.e., forensic counselors), but that these more positive attitudes were present in those who personally experienced a sex crime and those who knew someone who was sexually assaulted. Moreover, Spoo et al., (2018) found that victims of sexual assault had more positive views of offenders and more strongly endorsed mandated treatment. Knowledge about sex offenders also predicted positive attitudes regardless of victim status (Spoo et al., 2018).

While often seen as counterintuitive, individuals with a history of sexual assault are more likely to depict ICSOs as people who have the capacity to change and label them as “normal” people (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006; Fortney et al., 2009). Theoretically, this is explained by

professionals' knowledge about ISCO rehabilitation capabilities and intimate knowledge about the system (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006). Moreover, case workers and victims alike frequently know ISCOs and their own perpetrators intimately, and thus are able to empathize with them, rather than employ the schematized concept of "sex offender" when referring to individuals who have committed a sex crime (Nelson et al., 2002; Spoo et al., 2018). Because familiarity has evident correlations regarding how ISCOs are perceived, uncovering the dynamic between perception, punishment, and familiarity is paramount, as this may offer insight into how to dismantle stereotypes and adherence to myths regarding ISCOs and sexual assault.

Punishment of Sex Offenders

Establishing an effective and socially endorsed, standard sex offense punishment has been cited as one of the top concerns regarding law and social public policy (Edwards & Hensley 2001; National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) 2009; Ragusa-Salerno & Zgoba 2012; Zgoba & Mitchell, 2021). Attention is frequently attributed to sex crime policy and punishment as sex offenses often generate what some have called 'moral panic' (Lytle, 2019), and offenders are seen as posing an outsized risk to public safety (Fox, 2013; Pickett et al., 2013; Sample & Bray, 2003). In response to intense and pervasive fear, punishment of sex offenders can be seen as comparatively harsh in America, relative to other legal systems (Jones & Newburn, 2013; Terry, 2015). America also appears to be particularly punitive to ISCOs depicted by the introduction of mandatory sentences aimed at ensuring that those who are found guilty of a sex offence are liable to be imprisoned for a mandatory length of time (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007).

As society and the media play into negative perceptions and irrational fears regarding sex offenders, narratives that are the most in line with said fears, and thus the most gruesome, are also

often given the most media coverage resulting in inaccurate representations of sex offenders becoming the most prevalent and available in the minds of the public. Thus, many researchers conclude that criminal sentencing has begun to act as an important component within the cyclical nature of punishing sex offenders (Rydberg et al., 2018). This is to say that sentences have become harsher in response to increased fear that the public feels towards convicted offenders, that are inaccurately based on increased availability of fear confirming media. In this way, it is likely that perception influences both the public's opinion on sentencing length and endorsement of post release strategies for individuals convicted of sexual offenses (Kernsmith et al., 2009).

Sentencing

Criminal sentencing for sex offenses can be seen as a two-pronged system; the first of which being sentencing and incarceration with post-release punishment and policies (such as notification measures) acting as the other (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007; Comartain et al., 2009). Sexual assault cases often use the aid of mandatory sentences that serve the purpose of alleviating the fears of the public and politicians, but also prevent sex offense cases, which are often complex and difficult to appraise, from consuming too much of the courts time (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). They are also intended to serve the function of ensuring consistency in sentencing in sexual assault cases (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). What little research has been done on mandatory sentencing, however, puts forth that such laws are not interpreted in the same way between cases and jurisdictions, and thus, their purpose as a regulatory measure is diminished (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). Mandatory sentences have also not been found to have any impact on recidivism rates, further reducing their effectiveness and purpose (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007).

Despite societal interest in ICSOs and their punishment, and possibly because of misconceptions regarding the effectiveness and consistency of mandatory sentencing, little empirical research has been done examining sentencing, especially regarding incarceration length. Research in this area typically examines how differential characteristics of offenders alter sentencing recommendations, but findings pose conflicting conclusions. For example, Champion (1988) and Kingsnorth et al. (1999) found that punishment for those whose victims were children tended to be harsher, while Levesque (2000) found that perpetrator relationship was not likely to correlate to differences in punishment in child abuse situations. Levesque's 2000 study did, confirm the idea that perpetrator's characteristics are more likely to impact sentencing than the victim's characteristics, while more recent papers posit that perpetrator characteristics are only seen as relevant when a described victim's behavior is stereotypical (Franiuk et al., 2020). Some researchers state that offense-based characteristics, such as victim age and previous charges to the perpetrator influence sentence severity (Amirault & Beauregard, 2014). A more recent study done by Hilinski-Rosick and colleagues (2014), however, found that offender-characteristics (i.e., age, race, appearance of the offender, etc.) had no relationship to sentencing at all, and that case-characteristics (e.g., relationship to the victim, heightened violence, etc.) were the driving force behind differences in sentence length.

Sentencing has also been found to differ between crimes, depicting how perceptions regarding sex offenses and ICSOs can alter sentencing behavior. In general, it was also found that bond setting was higher for those who have committed sex offenses as opposed to other crimes of serious natures (Beattley et al., 2014). Support for the supposition that sentencing is strongly related to the nature of a crime rather than its seriousness is found in similar studies, where seriousness of offense and presence of a prior record were seen as the most salient feature related to punishment

(Kautt & Mueller-Johnson 2009). This is one trend that has been somewhat consistent as foundational studies also found that violent cases have historically been punished with longer custody in prison or jail and longer sentences (Kingsnorth et al. 1999).

Post-release Strategies

A variety of post-release strategies, or methods to control, monitor, and reduce recidivism have been implemented in an effort to prevent sexual recidivism, despite limited evidence supporting their value (Calkins et al., 2014). These strategies include post sentence civil commitment, community notification, as well as monitoring and supervision (Calkins et al., 2014; Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). Civil commitment, or involuntary hospitalization, has been introduced as a method used to protect the community after an offender's maximum criminal sentence has expired (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). While civil commitment is generally intended to be used for those who are mentally ill and cannot properly care for themselves, this strategy is also often enacted on those who are deemed sexually violent predators as they express the desire to reoffend while in prison and is thus aimed at protecting the public rather than punishing the offender (Levenson, 2003). Community notification laws, the most well-known of which is Megan's Law, alternatively allow for the release of sex offenders into the community. The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), however, also requires that information about those convicted of sex offenses, such as their name, criminal history, and residence is released to the community, and that said individuals have residency restrictions, based upon their status as an offender (Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking, 2023). More recently, individual monitoring of those convicted of sex offenders is expanding past community notification laws, due to technological advances in Global Positioning System (GPS). While not

yet fully actualized, the physical monitoring of sex offenders has become more commonplace (Russell, 2005). Each of these post release strategies is not without flaws. They are each often seen as a financial burden, inadequate at reducing recidivism, and are under researched (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). Moreover, stress induced by the application of such strategies may be credited with increasing recidivism rates (Schram & Milloy, 1995; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b).

Despite the overwhelming focus on offender punishment and reduction in recidivism, represented by the breadth of sentencing strategies used by the court, there is little evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of these policies (Ragusa-Salerno & Zgoba, 2015). In fact, in a meta-analysis examining sex offender registration notification (SORN) policies yielded no evidence to suggest that such policies impact recidivism (Zgoba & Mitchell, 2021). Moreover, when Ragusa-Salerno and Zogba (2015) analyzed the four main themes in punishment legislature- sexual offender registration and notification, civil commitment, residence restrictions, and risk designation- they found that, not only are laws in these areas ineffective, but they often do not pertain to the wide scope of sex offenders (Ragusa-Salerno & Zgoba, 2015). Janus (2019), more recently, echoes a similar sentiment as he implores lawmakers and citizens alike to reduce their focus on recidivism. He further highlights that much of lawmaking regarding sex offenders is predicated on myths and thus are ineffective and damaging (Janus, 2019). Therefore, it has been theorized that society's view of sex offenders as homogeneous, extremely dangerous, and untreatable, has unduly impacted legislation and led to the use of ineffective measures of prevention and protection, that only serve to quell the fears of the masses (Farkas & Stichman, 2002). Without a more realistic understanding of sex offenders and their crimes, it is unlikely that legislation, punishment, or treatment will be as effective as is necessary to reduce the undue harm that sex offenses cause (Farkas & Stichman, 2002).

The Current Study

While many studies have examined how demographic information may impact perception of an individual being convicted of a sex crime, less is known about how offense-related factors, such as relationship between victim and perpetrator, can influence public perception. In order to address outstanding questions regarding the application of stereotypical beliefs of sex offenders and punishment, this study will examine public perceptions of and attitudes towards sex offenders, as well as examine if relationship type has any impact on participants' opinions regarding sentencing length and post release policy use. Thus, if a crime's context and familiarity with ICSOs have an impact on attitude and perception of a described offender, and if altered attitudes and perceptions have any impact on opinions regarding sentencing and post release strategy implementation are examined.

To do so, this study will incorporate methods and theory from two previously completed studies, the first by Ferguson and Ireland (2006) the second by Socia and colleagues (2019). The earlier study done by Ferguson and Ireland examined attitudes towards ICSOs and hypothesized that attitude would change with victim-perpetrator relationship and based upon participants occupational familiarity with ICSOs. Results did support the notion that familiarity (both personal and occupational) increased positive attitudes towards ISCOs and found that victim-perpetrator relationship did impact attitude. This study did not, however, examine perceptions, sentencing, or post-release strategy endorsement.

Socia et al.'s 2019 study, alternatively, examined differing punitive attitudes towards offenders based upon victim age and perpetrator relationship, but focused more on differences

within the sexual assault of children. Results found that perpetrators who were strangers to the child victim yielded the highest post-release strategy endorsement and that participants were generally more punitive when the victim of a sexual assault was a younger child. The current study uses measures about sentencing and post-release endorsement from Social et al. but expands on the research by interrogating three different relationships in adult sexual assault scenarios and by incorporating attitude and perception measures aimed at further examining if these factors differ depending upon the public's analysis of different sexual assault scenarios.

By bridging the aforementioned studies, the current study aims to examine how the relationship between the perpetrator and victim has any impact on public attitudes, perceptions, and punishment. While prior research has supported this claim in victim-perpetrator relationships where the victim was a child, little is known about punishment, perception, and attitude in response to sexual assaults that are perpetrated on adults. Moreover, this study will use both punishment and perception and attitude measures, where many studies look at either practical or perceptual outcomes. In this way, the current study examined if punishment and perceptions and attitudes changed in tandem or if participants responded differentially in some factors and not others when faced with different victim-perpetrator relationships. As such this study explored if the relationship between the perpetrator and victim has any impact on the perception and punishment of rape. The relationship types will vary from stereotypical but infrequent (stranger rape) to more common rape scenarios (date/acquaintance rape and spousal rape).

Based upon the previous research, it is hypothesized that sentencing will be harsher in cases of stranger rape as opposed to those conditions involving known perpetrators. Specifically:

H1- the stranger condition will result in the strongest punishment support and most negative attitudes and perceptions,

H2- acquaintance and married conditions will result in less negative perceptions and attitudes and less strict punishment endorsement compared to the stranger condition,

H3- if a participant responds positively the familiarity with sex offenders question, their results will be indicative of more positive attitudes, perceptions, and more lenient punishment, compared to those who answer no to these questions, on all of the scales and in all conditions.

Methods

Design

The present study is a between subject's design consisting of one factor with three levels (stranger, acquaintance, and spouse). Participants were randomly assigned one of the three conditions. Dependent variables consisted of four measures aimed at assessing sentence length, post-release strategy endorsement, Attitudes towards Sex Offenders (ATS-21), and Perception of Sex Offenders (PSO).

Participants

Participants were recruited from a nationwide sample collected through the online survey platform, Prolific. Inclusion criteria required that participants be 18 years of age and older, living in the United States, and have basic English literacy. All included participants were jury-eligible, although this was not a requirement due to survey platform restrictions. A g-power analysis indicated that 82 participants were needed for power of .80. Originally, 174 participants were

collected, but after attention checks and incomplete responders were removed, and study aims were redefined, 119 participants data were eligible for analysis ($n=119$), resulting in an observed power of .93. The mean age of participants was 35.72 years old (ranging from 19 to 69). Participants were mostly White (63.9%), but other ethnicities were also represented (Black/African American: 15.1%; Hispanic: 9.2%; Asian/Pacific Islander: 7.6%). Approximately 3.4% percent of individuals also self-identified as mixed and one individual responded that they would “rather not say” their ethnicity. Participants were 47.9% male, 49.6% female, and 1.7% nonbinary, with one participant refusing to disclose their self-identified gender. As it is relevant to the study, a question regarding experience with ICSOs was also asked. Of the 119 participants, 23 had experienced some form of sexual assault and two chose not to disclose their experience.

Procedure

Participants were recruited for the study through Prolific, an online research platform that gathers data from diverse participants. Those who completed the survey were compensated \$4.00 for their time. An advertisement briefly describing the project interests - “participants needed for a survey regarding perception, attitudes, and punishment of sex offenders”- and inclusion criteria- “In order to participate, individuals must: 1) be age 18 or older 2) be able to reach and write in English, 3) reside in the United States”- was listed on Prolific. Participants who decided to partake in the study, were redirected to an online Qualtrics via a link. Before beginning the survey, participants completed an inclusion-criteria check by re-answering the same eligibility questions. They were then prompted to read an informed consent form and asked to click “I consent” if they agreed to participate in the study.

Following informed consent, participants completed demographic information and a question asking about their personal experience with sexual assault. They then read the experimental vignette and completed a series of four measures. The vignette consisted of one of three mock articles detailing the events of a crime: a rape involving one of three different perpetrators (e.g., a stranger, an acquaintance, or a partner). Directly following the article, participants were asked attention-check questions to ensure that they understood the article, then responded to a question regarding their opinion on an appropriate sentence for the described offender. This sentencing question was accompanied by a scale adapted from a prior study (Socia et al., 2019), asking about participants' endorsement of other post-release strategies. Participants then completed the Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders scale (ATS-21) and the Perception of Sex Offenders scale (PSO). After surveys were completed, a debriefing form with a completion code was displayed on the screen. Participants then entered the code into Prolific to be reimbursed for their time. This procedure lasted 9 minutes and 30 seconds on average.

Measures

Demographics (Appendix A). Forced choice questions about regarding race/ethnicity, gender identity, and age, were asked. General demographic questionnaires were followed by a familiarity-with-sex-offenders question (Appendix B) in which participants specified certain elements of their knowledge of sex offenders as a result of personal sexual abuse history.

Vignettes (Appendix G). Vignettes were created for this study by referencing the structure and language of several news articles and modifying them to fix experimental conditions. As such, the vignettes used were “mock articles” and first introduce the conviction of Alan Barker. Then, the articles describe both the setting of the crime (outdoors, in a park) and introduce how the police

were notified of the rape (an eyewitness overhearing crying). Within this section of the article, the manipulation also takes place as the victim is described as Barker's wife, date, or a stranger. The article then states that the victim sustained no long-term bodily injury and further explains her relationship with Barker, either highlighting their status as spouses (i.e., 6 years long marriage), acquaintances (i.e., have been on a couple of dates), or strangers (i.e., had never interacted before). The article also explains that Barker is a 35-year-old man who has no prior criminal record and ends with a police statement about sensitivity towards rape cases.

Sentencing (Appendix C). The sentencing measure was adapted from Social et al. (2019) and instructed the participants to prescribe the described offender a fitting sentence. Participants were told that this offense typically yields a 10-year sentence (used to “standardized the expected sentence outcome across all treatment conditions and respondents”) but that they could issue a punishment of 1-19 years in prison (Socia et al., 2019). They responded to this question on a 1 through 19 unit sliding scale. The question was presented as follows; “You will now be asked your opinion on an appropriate sentence to impose on Alan Barker. The average sentence length for an individual convicted of this type of crime and with no prior criminal record is 10 years in prison, although any sentence between 1 and 19 years in prison is allowable.”

Post-Release Strategy (Appendix D). The post-release strategy questionnaire is a measure comprised of eight items adapted from Socia et al.'s (2019) study on endorsement of punitive measures in response to sex offenses. Participants were asked to what degree they supported eight different post-release strategies from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” by utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Items assessed a range post-release strategies by answering the question “do you believe the described offender should...” with corresponding post release strategies as

follows: “register their home address with local law enforcement”, “release their home and work information to the public”, “ be subject to lifetime electronic monitoring via a Global Positioning Unit (GPS)”, “ be prohibited living within 500 feet of a k-12 school or daycare”, “take mandatory sex offender treatment classes” , “receive chemical castration”, “ be banned from online social networking sites”, and “be banned from online internet use entirely.” The Cronbach’s alpha of all eight items was .85.

Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders (Appendix E). The Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders scale (ATS-21, Hogue, 1993) is a measure comprised of 21 items. The ATS-21 utilizes a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” It aims to examine attitudes towards sex offenders on three factors; trust (e.g., There are some sex offenders I would trust with my life), intent (e.g., Sex offenders are always trying to get something out of somebody (r)), and social distance (e.g., Sex offenders are no better or worse than other people). The Cronbach’s alpha of all 21 items was .92.

Perception of Sex Offenders (Appendix F). The Perception of Sex Offenders Scale (PSO, Church et al., 2018; Harper & Houge, 2015b) is a 20-item measure that is used in supplement with the ATS scale and measures an individual's perception and attitude towards sex offenders utilizing a six-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” It examines three factors; sentencing and management (e.g., People who commit sex offenses should lose their civil rights (e.g., voting, privacy), risk perception (e.g. Only a few sex offenders are dangerous (r)), and stereotype endorsement (e.g. Most sex offenders are unmarried men). It also ends with a free response question “What type of sex offender were you thinking of?” The Cronbach’s alpha of all 20 items was .88.

Results

Analytic Strategy

Data was prepared in excel and analyzed in SPSS. Free response data was coded in Qualtrics and analyzed in excel. First, preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between victim-perpetrator relationship and sentencing, attitudes, and perceptions. Moreover, average sentence length was compared to the 10-year average that was provided in the sentencing prompt in order to interpret if participants were frequently prescribing more or less than what they were told was typical. Second, these relationships were reexamined controlling for familiarity with ICSOs. Third, free response themes were coded into themes and analyzed for frequency. Fourth, a multiple linear regression was employed to examine the impact of attitudes, perceptions, sexual abuse history, and victim-perpetrator relationship variables on sentencing length.

Relationship and Punishment, Attitudes, and Perceptions

In order to analyze responses, four separate ANOVAs, followed by Tukey's HSD post hoc tests, were used, examining how each condition influenced sentencing and attitudes about those who sexually offend. The mean scores and standard deviations of the punishment variables, ATS-21, and PSO scales are displayed in Table 1. Of note is the mean and standard deviation of the sentence length variable, which have been separated into rape condition means. Means for acquaintance and stranger rape conditions were above the recommended 10 years on average, and while not significantly different, did demonstrate the trend of strangers being given longer sentences, followed by acquaintances, and then spouses. The ANOVAs demonstrated no significant difference between relationship type and attitudes (ATS: $F(2, 116) = 1.239, p = .293$,

$\eta^2=.017$) and perceptions (PSO: $F(2, 116) = 1.150, p = .320, \eta^2=.027$). There was also no significant difference in how participants sentenced the perpetrator, ($F(2, 116) = 1.69, p = .189, \eta^2=.252$). Finally, the stranger and spousal conditions did impact how participants responded to the post-release strategy questionnaire, as post release strategies were more strongly endorsed for strangers ($F(2, 116) = 4.250, p = .017, \eta^2=.453$). Tukey's HSD indicated that the mean score of post-release endorsement for stranger rape ($M=2.35, SD=.653$) differed significantly from spousal rape ($M=2.87, SD=.935$) with a significance of .019.

Subsequently, a multiple linear regression was run in order to analyze the degree to which perceptions, familiarity, and relationship type predicted sentence length. The overall regression was statistically significant ($R^2 = .273, F(4, 114) = 10.703, p < .001$). Further, it was found that attitudes regarding ICSOs (ATS_21) significantly positively predicted sentence length ($\beta = .116, p = .033$) while perception ($\beta = -.06, p = .237$), stimuli ($\beta = .718, p = .158$), and sexual assault history ($\beta = -1.582, p = .096$) did not, meaning that when attitudes were more positive as a whole, sentence length was lower, and vice-versa.

Familiarity with Individuals Convicted of Sex Offenses

An ANCOVA aimed at examining the covariance of familiarity with ICSOs (via prior sexual assault victimization) on each of the aforementioned relationships was run. History of sexual abuse was found to significantly alter outcomes negatively between victim-perpetrator relationship and sentence length ($F(2, 115) = 3709, p = .027$). No effect was found for familiarity on post-release strategy endorsement, attitude, or perception scales. (see Table 2 and 3 for means and standard deviations).

Exploratory Free Response Descriptions

A review of the final question in the PSO scale was conducted to look for general themes in responses for 116 participants who answered the questions (three participants abstained). In the preliminary overview, it was evident that many participants did have a developed schema of a “sex offender” and were able to describe said individual. Common themes that were examined were age (young, middle-aged, and old), appearance (including specifications of ugly, fat/skinny, and unkempt), race, and gender. Mention of specific individuals including participants disclosing a description of their own abuser/victimizer were also noted. A large majority mentioned that said sex offender was male (79.3%; n=92), and they were white (57.8%; n=67). Many people also included other physical descriptors such as ugly (3.4%; n=5) or average looking (9.5%; n=11), unclean/unshaven (5.2%; n=6), or overweight (i.e., Fat or chubby) (7%; n=8). Moreover, this individual was described overwhelmingly as middle aged (47.4%; n=55), while only a few identified a young man (19%; n=22). Finally, several people either acknowledged that there is no “typical sex offender” (5.2%, n=6) or commented that they were thinking of either a specific individual (e.g., Harvey Weinstein, a relative) (10.3%, n=12) or their own victimizer (.1%; n=1). Finally, 3.5% (n=4) of participants also explicitly mentioned that they were thinking of the individual from the vignette.

Discussion

This study examined the effect of victim-perpetrator relationship on four sentencing and perception outcomes - sentence length, post-release strategy endorsement, attitude, and perceptions of ICSOs. Overall, while the victim-perpetrator relationship had little effect on participants attitudes and perceptions towards ICSOs as a whole, opinions on punishment somewhat reflected our hypotheses. Generally, data suggest that post-releases strategy was

supported more strongly for strangers, but that generally, few differences were observed between groups. These findings, however, still offer important contributions to the literature on sentencing and perception of sex offenses and ICSOs.

This study's findings are supported by the literature that suggests that the public has an unrealistic view of who a someone who commits a sex offense typically is (Socia & Harris, 2016). Furthermore, the disparity that is seen between each condition and endorsement of punishment reflect the idea that society tends to view and punish those who are convicted or tried of sex crimes more harshly, when they apply the typical schema of a sex offender. Consequently, punishment for who the public thinks of as atypical or less egregious offender (e.g., partner rape), is less harsh and these individuals are seen as both less dangerous and less likely to recidivate. This reflects not only society's joint perception regarding the mythicized evil offender, but also supports the notion that partner rape is viewed with less fear than stranger rape (Kernsmith et al., 2009). As stranger rape is more associated with said mythicized offender, it is seen as 'valid', substantiated, and feared, despite this occurrence being less likely than other rape situations.

Depicted results have wide ranging implications regarding policy, practice, and the sex offender literature in general. Primarily, these findings may alert the court system to issues with how sexual assault cases are tried and punished. Because stranger rape was punished more harshly than spousal rape, it is possible that jurors are not making decisions based solely upon the crime depicted. Rather, they are informing their opinions on punishment based upon their perceived morality of the individual they are assessing. Moreover, the general public that drives public policy is also privy to such misconceptions and may be responding and reacting to a stereotype of crime rather than to the crime itself. This assessment of morality is tied to the evaluator's preconceived

idea of an offender. Therefore, it is possible that the public is more intolerant of offenders that are seen as more immoral, or those who more closely match their stereotypes of sex offenders.

These results suggest that those who do not fit the typical model of a sex offender may be systematically receiving more lenient punishments, while those who do match the schema receive harsher punishments and that endorsement of post-release policies often occurs with a stigmatized sex offender in mind. This is particularly problematic as the public conception of the typical sex offender, as discussed, is largely based on myth and most sex crimes are stereotypically atypical. Due to the relevance of these results in court proceedings, these findings help provide valuable context to legal arguments, juror evaluations, and court decisions. Results also may imply that inaccurate stereotypes are fueling public policy and punishment endorsement in ways that the public may think are beneficial and used quell fear about sexual assault but may be targeting more rare cases of this crime (i.e., stranger assault). Moreover, these findings are relevant to the literature in general as they support the understanding that extenuating factors such as context, victim-perpetrator relationship, and individual response to a crime may have an impact on how a sexual assault case is interpreted and how a perpetrator is perceived and punished.

Sentencing

Hypotheses positing that sentence length would be predictably shorter as the condition described increasingly “atypical” victim-perpetrator relationships was not supported. While we did not find significant differences in sentence length between experimental conditions, mean sentence length did increase with each condition, as we expected, albeit not significantly. The non-significant nature of these results may be related of the use of short manipulation vignettes that do not adequately mimic the level of detail that real world cases often present and are judged by. Prior

research still does support the proposed hypothesis, and results should not be interpreted as contradictory to literature that suggests that those who are convicted of raping a stranger typically receive longer sentences than those who are convicted of raping an acquaintance or spouse/partner (Hine & Murphy, 2017; Krahe et al., 2007). The outcome of the current study, while not significant, may still imply that participants may perceive the act of rape as having different moral underpinnings based upon the victim and perpetrators relationship (Beatty et al., 2014). As mean changes do reflect the stated hypotheses, it is possible that, while very subtle, there still is a difference in how participants sentence ICSOs, depending on their relationship to the victim, and that, with more participants and more involved manipulation, this difference may be significant.

A multiple linear regression further informs this relationship as attitudes towards offenders were seen to account for a sizable amount of the variation in sentence lengths. Such results support the theory that perspective regarding ICSOs can impact how an individual chooses to punish them. Thus, while attitudes were not found to be altered significantly by the experimental condition, present differences in attitudes still did inform sentence length. These results are in line with prior research stating that more negative attitudes towards ICSOs are often accompanied by preferences for harsher punishments (Harper & Hogue, 2016).

Post-Release Strategy

The difference between the stranger and spouse condition supported the hypotheses that more “typical” offenders would receive harsher punishment endorsement and have implications regarding how the public perceives spousal rape as opposed to stranger rape. While there were no differences in perceptions and attitudes towards sex offenders based upon condition, it is evident that the relationship between perpetrator and victim does impact the sexual assault is perceived.

Because post-release strategies are aimed at reducing recidivism and are more strongly endorsed in stranger rape scenarios, it is likely that the public views these individuals as more in need of punishment, more dangerous, and more likely to reoffend (Kernsmith et al., 2009). Research has found that increased fear of specific sex offenses/offenders is related to how strongly the public endorses sex offender registration. Results suggest that fear, and thus, registration endorsement was lowest for spousal/statutory rape and higher for pedophilia and incest (Kernsmith et al., 2009). This study corroborates the notion founded by prior research, that differential fear of ICOS powers post-release policy endorsement.

While spousal sexual assault was seen to be negatively correlated with risk for recidivism (Grann & Wedin, 2002), risk of reoffending for ICSOs, in general, is lower than for other crimes (Gleb & Council, 2007). Foundational studies, however, have posited that, while one of the strongest predictors of reoffending is prior convictions of other crimes (of which the vignette offender had none), other known predictors could be if the perpetrator is a stranger and has never been married (Hanson and Bussière, 1998). Therefore, while it is possible that the public is operating upon stereotypical notions regarding the threat level and “dangerousness” of specific ICSOs, it is also possible that these stereotypes have a foundation in truth or are taught rather than developed intrinsically. While comparatively little is known about the dangerousness and rates of recidivism for marital rape, it is known that this specific crime accounts for a significant portion of rape statistics (Martin et al., 2007). Therefore, although it is difficult to make any definitive conclusions about if perceived differences in dangerousness are substantiated or based upon stereotype endorsement as hypothesized, it is problematic that this variant of rape is not evaluated or punished in a congruent way when compared to more stereotypical rape cases.

Perceptions and Attitudes

Contrary to the noted hypotheses, there were no statistically significant differences between victim-perpetrator relationship vignettes on neither attitudes nor perceptions of ICSOs. While this is not what was expected, these results can be interpreted in ways that are still informative regarding perceptions of sex crimes. Although the hypotheses stated that there would be differences in perceptions and attitudes based upon the perpetrator and victim relationship, these hypotheses were predicated on the belief that relationship would be the main schema employed when participants were responding to vignettes. Upon further consideration, it seems plausible that, because the mock articles state that, first, the perpetrator has been convicted, and second, that he was convicted of rape, participants were applying a more general “rape” schema when answering perception and attitude questions, rather than focusing on schematic differences implied by specific relationships. This is to say that in a more ambiguous situations/vignettes where the participant is either a juror themselves or they are not told information about a judicial decision, perceptions, and attitudes regarding the crime itself may be altered (i.e., the crime is not seen as rape in “atypical” conditions).

Ambiguous situations in terms of sexual assault, as defined by police officers, are situations in which the actors are intoxicated, acquaintances, or are/were in a current/former relationship (Venema, 2016). Moreover, other research has indicated that the public may have a more difficult time identifying rape when said act does not follow a “rape script” but rather fits better with an alternative “sexual script” (Littleton & Axsom, 2003). Therefore, it is likely that if participants were not expressly told that the case, they read was indeed a rape case, they may have assumed otherwise. This may then alter how participants responded to both sentencing and perception scales

despite the crime being the same in all conditions. Instead of providing more insight into how the public may perceive a crime based upon relationships, these results offered a deeper understanding into how sexual assault cases are interpreted based upon given label and how ambiguity may factor into analyses of a crime.

Familiarity as a Control

The hypothesis that familiarity with ICSOs through prior victimization would impact the relationship between victim-perpetrator relationship and punishment was supported, albeit not in the projected way. While familiarity had no effect on attitudes, perceptions, or post-release policy endorsement, participants who had been sexually assaulted were more likely to sentence perpetrators to longer sentences overall. As sexual assault history impacted the way in which participants responded to the sentence-length question, it is possible to assume that, while overt attitudes and perceptions are not inherently altered, familiarity with ICSOs may change how jurors attribute punishment to specific cases. While it is possible that these participants were less likely to be affected by schematic alterations that were a result of different relationships, it is also possible that these results are indicative of a general trend in which previously victimized persons feel as though prescribing longer incarceration sentences is a meaningful way of punishing someone who has committed a sex offense.

While contradictory to research stating that sexual assault abuse history usually inspired more sympathetic view and responses to ISCO sentencing (Nelson et al., 2002; Spoo et al., 2018), this result may have implications on said individuals' perceptions of post-release strategies. Such results may suggest that victims of sex crimes view sentence length increases as a more suitable retribution for rape compared to other strategies. In fact, while Spoo et al. did find evidence that

those with a sexual abuse history had more positive attitudes about ICSOs and that they were likely to be supportive of mandated treatment, previously victimized individuals were less also likely to be supportive of community notification laws. Therefore, it is possible that longer sentence length are seen as a more adequate punishment and is thus supported more strongly by prior victims of sexual assault. Moreover, such outcomes could be the result of a more modern attribution of blame, and thus punishment, to the offender in sexual assault in all scenarios (Kotanes & Kronstedt, 2019). It is unclear, based upon our results, if familiarity leads to less adherence to misconceptions regarding ICSOs.

Free-Response

A brief analysis of thematic responding to the final PSO question, “What type of sex offender were you thinking of?” yielded high acknowledgement of many founded stereotypes of ICSOs within age, race, and gender themes (Quinn et al., 2004). Such results indicate that, while perceptions and attitudes can be nuanced, stereotypes surrounding age, gender, and race of ICSOs are still actively contribute to the public’s mental representation of a “sex offender”. Moreover, while a handful of people explicitly described someone who was not a stranger, the majority of responses described individuals in terms of stereotype and implied that they were strangers/fictionalized versions of “sex offenders” who they did not know personally. These results also support the notion that education regarding sex offenses and ICSOs is needed (Harper et al., 2017).

Limitations

While this study is informative regarding how the public may perceive and punish those who are convicted of a sexual assault, there are several limitations that should be addressed. First,

this study examines only one context within a sexual assault scenario, the relationship between perpetrator and victim. While our results do show that this relationship is important to how the perpetrator is perceived and punished, each sexual assault case is individual. Therefore, interfering elements that may alter perception of both the perpetrator and victims will be present in each case. Different elements such as specific relationship type, age of perpetrator and victim, crime setting, and unique circumstances about the crime, among many other factors, may have different amounts of influence on different people's perception.

Other limitations center around how the data was collected. Because this study was an internet-based survey, all results were self-reported, meaning that they may be subject to participant biases (i.e., social desirability), miscommunication errors, and general attention and effort problems. Furthermore, due to the setting, the experimental variable was manipulated using only a short mock article, especially compared to real life rape cases, which are usually lengthy. It is possible that this manipulation was ineffective due to its length and medium. As described in the discussion, the mock articles also explicitly stated that a rape occurred and presented a closed case. Moreover, the case was more realistic in some scenarios (stranger) than others (acquaintance/spousal), as the described time took place outside during the day rather in a shared space, where sexual assaults between more familiar individuals are more likely to take place (Culberston & Kooiman, 2001). Therefore, participants were likely to operate on their perceptions of the crime of rape as opposed to focusing exclusively on the implications of the relationship variable and were more likely to respond less strongly to more schematically abnormal conditions (acquaintance/spousal). This could explain why hypothesized controls had few and contradictory effects on outcomes. Although the gathered results asked about how participants would respond to the described perpetrator, participants were not primed as a juror. This may have an impact on

how punishment was administered and may not be fully generalizable to how jurors would respond to a similar case in court. Question order may have biased responses as history of sexual assault questions were asked before the experiment. Finally, participants were not asked if they have ever been convicted of a sexual offense, thus this data was unavailable for analysis and could lead to both a selection bias in participation and different measurement outcomes.

Future Directions

Future research should reexamine the current questions in a more ambiguous situation, and with more extensive and involved experimental conditions as to more adequately reflect stimuli that the public interprets and forms perceptions and judgements on in the real world. Moreover, a study where participants are primed as jurors would be better applicable to the legal system. Other notable future directions involve examining what other factors have an impact in perception of sexual assault perpetrators and cases. Examples of possibly related factors range from more specific relationships (i.e., length of marital or dating relationship), and elaboration upon demographic information (race, age, gender, sex etc.) of the victim and perpetrator (Ferguson & Ireland, 2006; Socia et al., 2021). Surface level analysis of described offenders supported the notion that many stereotypes about sex offenders often incorporate these demographic characteristics. Therefore, information about the offender's demographic information as well as history and crime context may be relevant.

Other notable elements that may be added to a similar study in order to develop enhanced depth would be adding both blame ratings (i.e., blame attributed victim and perpetrator) (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011), as well as a question or scale examining dangerousness or fear of different types of offenders (Kernsmith et al., 2009). Finally, a useful way to examine the application of results

garnered in this study would also be to examine recent real-world cases retroactively (see McCormick et al., 1998). Studies could be conducted using a collection of closed cases and coded for different elements and outcomes. This strategy could provide a more solid understanding about how complex cases are processed without the sterility of a lab setting, confirm suspected results, and inform further experimental research.

Conclusion and Implications

There are societally expected stereotypical views perpetuating the theory that rape is perpetrated by a stranger on an unknown victim. This view is not substantiated in the literature and is thought to be a general misconception. This study has examined how a representative sample of the public responded to cases that either matched or differed from the prescribed stereotype of a sex crime. We found that, while relationship between the victim and perpetrator did not inherently alter participants perceptions and attitudes towards offenders, the public representatives did seem to be less punitive to those who did not fit the stranger stereotype (i.e., spousal rape). Notable findings also suggest that while the public may have consistent views about how they feel about “rape” or “rapists”, they may be more hesitant in applying this term when a sex crime does not fit a preordained “rape script” and that those who have experiences sexual assault may view longer sentences for ICSOs as a more effective punitive measure.

Results from this study demonstrate how external variables, such as relationship and use of language that is accompanied by overt connotations (i.e., “rape”), may influence how jurors made up of the public, and even legal actors interpret crimes and make decisions regarding punishment. This study highlights the cognitive heuristics and reliance on moral reasoning that the

public may use when interpreting sex offense cases, and when sentencing and individuals convicted of a sex crime.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Sentencing Length, Post-Release Punishment Endorsement, ATS, and PSO scales by condition.

<u>Measure</u>	Stranger (n=33)		Acquaintance (n=45)		Spouse (n=45)		Totals (N=119)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Sentence Length	12.097	5.11	10.932	5.04	9.977	4.60	9.60	5.327
Post-Release Punishment Endorsement	2.35	.653	2.50	.783	2.87	.935	2.94	1.03
ATS-21	57.06	13.25	52.80	13.09	52.66	13.11	53.84	13.23
PSO	43.16	16.54	47.34	12.84	47.80	12.87	45.62	14.43

*note: mean scores on both the ATS-21 and PSO scales are typical when compared to results of other studies

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Sexual Assault History.

<u>Scale</u>	No Sexual Assault History (n=94)		Sexual Assault History (n=23)	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Sentence Length	10.7	4.826	12.30	4.98
Post-release policy endorsement	2.65	.81	2.31	.90
ATS-21	53.07	12.77	57.35	15.16
PSO	47.47	13.21	42.13	16.73

Table 3. Analysis of Covariance for all measures by Sexual Abuse History as a Covariant.

		ANCOVA					
Scales		SS	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>	η^2
Sentence Length ¹							
	Corrected Model	251.89	3	83.97	3.56	.015	.087
	Sexual Assault History	170.33	2	85.16	3.71	.027*	.061
Post-release policy endorsement ²							
	Corrected Model	9.12	3	3.04	4.74	.004	.110
	Sexual Assault History	3.77	2	1.88	2.94	.057	.049
ATS-21 ³							
	Corrected Model	714.93	3	238.31	1.38	.254	.035
	Sexual Assault History	400.34	2	200.17	1.15	.319	.020
PSO ⁴							
	Corrected Model	949.37	3	316.45	1.64	.184	.041
	Sexual Assault History	594.73	2	297.36	1.54	.219	.026

*¹ R squared=.087 (Adjusted R Squared = .063)² R squared=.110 (Adjusted R Squared = .087)³ R squared=.032 (Adjusted R Squared = .009)⁴ R squared=.041 (Adjusted R Squared = .016)

Appendix A

Please respond to the following demographic questions after providing your Prolific ID:

1. What is your prolific ID

Text box free response

2. Are you a US citizen?

Yes, no, prefer not to say

3. What is your country of residence?

U.S., other, prefer not to say

4. Please state your gender.

Text box free response, prefer not to say

5. How old are you?

Text box free response, prefer not to say

6. State your ethnicity

Text box free response, prefer not to say

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school, College, Associate degree, Bachelor's degree, Masters degree, Doctorate, Other (Please specify), prefer not to say

8. What is your current relationship status?

Single, In a casual relationship, In a serious, committed relationship, Unmarried but cohabiting, Married, Widowed, Divorced/separated, Other (please specify), prefer not to say

9. Religion

Christian/Catholic, Christian/Non-Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Other _____, prefer not to say

10. What kind of area were you raised in?

Rural, small town, suburban, urban, Other _____, prefer not to say

11. Political orientation:

very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, very liberal, Other _____, prefer not to say

Appendix B

Please respond to the following questions about your personal experience with sex offenders and sex offender literature:

1. Have you been the victim of sexual abuse?

Yes, No, Prefer not to Answer

2. Do you work with sex offenders in a professional capacity (ie. law enforcement, counseling, etc.)

Yes, No, Prefer not to Answer

3. How familiar are you with research on sex offenders on a scale from 0-10 (with 0 being no familiarity and 10 being very familiar)

Appendix C

You will now be asked your opinion on an appropriate sentence to impose on Alan Barker. The average sentence length for an individual convicted of this type of crime and with no prior criminal record is 10 years in prison, although any sentence between 1 and 19 years in prison is allowable.

What do you believe is an appropriate sentence for Alan Barker?

Participants will be presented with a sliding scale from 1-19 in order to answer this question.

Appendix D

Please provide your level of support for post-release policy regarding **the offender you read about in the previous article**:

1. registering home address with local law enforcement
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
2. releasing home and work information to the public
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
3. lifetime electronic monitoring via a Global Positioning Unit (GPS)
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
4. prohibit living within 500 feet of a k-12 school or daycare
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
5. mandatory sex offender treatment classes
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
6. chemical castration
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
7. banning from online social networking sites
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
8. banning from online internet use entirely
Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Appendix E

Please respond to each of the following items using the scale provided. Please be as honest as possible in your responding. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Sex offenders are different from other people (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

2. Most sex offenders are victims of circumstances and deserve help

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

3. Sex offenders have feelings like the rest of us

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

4. It is not wise to trust a sex offender too far (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

5. I think I would like a lot of sex offenders

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

6. Give a sex offender an inch and they take a mile (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

7. Sex offenders need affection and praise just like anybody else

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

8. Trying to rehabilitate sex offenders is a waste of time and money (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

9. Sex offenders are no better or worse than other people

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

10. You have to be constantly on your guard with sex offenders (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

11. If you give a sex offender your respect, he'll give you the same

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

12. Sex offenders only think about themselves (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

13. There are some sex offenders I would trust with my life

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

14. Most sex offenders are too lazy to earn an honest living (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

15. I wouldn't mind living next door to a treated sex offender

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

16. Sex offenders are just plain mean at heart (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

17. Sex offenders are always trying to get something out of somebody (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

18. Sex offenders are immoral (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

19. I would like associating with some sex offenders

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

20. Sex offenders respect only brute force (r)

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

21. If sex offenders do well in prison/hospital, they should be let out on parole

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Appendix F

Please respond to each of the following items using the scale provided. Please be as honest as possible in your responding. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. With support and therapy, someone who committed a sexual offence can learn to change their behaviour.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

2. People who commit sex offences should lose their civil rights (e.g. voting, privacy).

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

3. The death penalty should be reintroduced for sex offenders.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

4. People are far too on edge about the risks posed by sex offenders.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

5. More sex offenders should be given sentences in the community.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

6. Sex offenders prefer to stay home alone rather than be around lots of people.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

7. Most sex offenders do not have close friends.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

8. Sex offenders have difficulty making friends, even if they try real hard.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

9. The prison sentences sex offenders receive are much too long when compared to the sentence lengths of other crimes.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

10. People who commit sex offences should be subject to harsh restrictions on their liberty for the rest of their lives.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

11. Trying to rehabilitate a sex offender is a waste of time.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

12. Sex offenders should wear tracking devices so their location can be pinpointed at any time.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

13. Only a few sex offenders are dangerous.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

14. Most sex offenders are unmarried men.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

15. It's not if a sex offender commits another crime, it's when.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

16. Most sex offenders keep to themselves.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

17. Sex offenders should have all their details announced to local communities.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

18. Convicted sex offenders should never be released from prison.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

19. Sex offenders will almost always commit further offences.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

20. Some sex offenders should be allowed to work in schools.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

What type of sex offender were you thinking of? _____

Appendix G

Please read the following article (¼) as if you were reading it in the newspaper. After reading it you will be asked a few questions to ensure that you comprehended the article.:

On Tuesday night, August 30th, 35-year-old Alan Barker was convicted of rape.

Police were notified of the rape, first, by a couple walking through the park that the assault occurred in. Reportedly, after hearing the sounds of a crying woman, one witness decided to alert authorities about their concerns. After the investigation, it was determined that the victim, Barker's wife, had been raped by her husband in the park.

The victim sustained no long-term bodily injury. She is 30 years old and has been in a relationship with Barker for over 6 years.

Barker has no history of sexual abuse and no prior criminal record. The assault occurred around 10:30 pm on the evening of July 10th.

In response to the crime, NYPD stated "We always try to treat assault cases with the utmost sensitivity, this is especially true of such an investigation."

On Tuesday night, August 30th, 35-year-old Alan Barker was convicted of rape.

Police were notified of the rape, first, by a couple walking through the park that the assault occurred in. Reportedly, after hearing the sounds of a crying woman, one witness decided to alert authorities about their concerns. After the investigation, it was determined that the victim, a woman Barker had earlier been on a date with, had been raped by her acquaintance in the park.

The victim sustained no long-term bodily injury. She is 30 years old and had been on a couple dates with Barker in the past.

Barker has no history of sexual abuse and no prior criminal record. The assault occurred around 10:30 pm on the evening of July 10th.

In response to the crime, NYPD stated "We always try to treat assault cases with the utmost sensitivity, this is especially true of such an investigation."

On Tuesday night, August 30th, 35-year-old Alan Barker was convicted of rape.

Police were notified of the rape, first, by a couple walking through the park that the assault occurred in. Reportedly, after hearing the sounds of a crying woman, one witness decided to alert authorities about their concerns. After the investigation, it was determined that the victim, a woman who had been walking home alone, had been raped by the stranger in the park.

The victim sustained no long-term bodily injury. She is 30 years old and informed police she did not know Barker prior to the rape.

Barker has no history of sexual abuse and no prior criminal record. The assault occurred around 10:30 pm on the evening of July 10th.

In response to the crime, NYPD stated “We always try to treat assault cases with the utmost sensitivity, this is especially true of such an investigation.”

On Tuesday night, August 30th, 35-year-old Alan Barker was convicted of burglary.

Police were notified of the crime, first, by neighbors living across from the home that was burglarized. Reportedly, after hearing the sound of breaking glass, one witness decided to alert authorities about their concerns. After the investigation, it was determined that Barker had broken into the house with the intention to steal jewelry and checks from the home.

No one sustained bodily injury in relation to the break-in. The house belongs to a family who was unfamiliar with Barker prior to the burglary.

Barker has no prior criminal record. The break-in occurred around 10:30 pm on the evening of July 10th.

In response to the crime, NYPD stated “We always try to treat assault cases with the utmost sensitivity, this is especially true of such an investigation.”

Appendix H

Please answer the following questions about the article you read:

1. Where did the crime take place? *

Park, house, bank, none of the above

2. What was the relationship between perpetrator and victim? *

Wife, acquaintance, stranger, none of the above

3. What crime occurred? *

Rape, burglary, homicide, none of the above

4. What time did the crime occur?

9:30am, 12pm, 10:30pm, 3:15am

5. What day was the criminal convicted?

July 10th, August 30th, May 15th, November 9th