Motivations & pathways into offending in autism

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Session contents

Brief tour of previous literature
- Prevalence & crime types
- Pathways
- Motivations

Three studies:
- Risk factors for offending
- Nature of offending in ASD & ASD specific risk factors
- Sexual offending in ASD
Prevalence

• 1.5% - 48%
  • Screening tools
  • Psychiatric hospitals
  • Single establishments
  • Self-reported crime

• Studies with comparison groups actually found same number of offences or fewer

• Most autistic people are law abiding
Types of crimes

- Few studies include control groups
- Those that have report:
  - More crimes against the person
  - Less property, driving & drugs offences
Reasons for offending

• Previously suggested:
  • Special interests and associated preoccupations
  • Concrete thinking
  • Diminished Theory of Mind with associated social skills difficulties
  • Inability to consider the consequences of actions

• Typically obtained from professional reports, case studies or series of case studies
Most rigorous study to date (Helverschou et al., 2015)

• The reported reasons for offending include:
  • Idiosyncratic rationalisations & explanations (75%)
  • Obsessions & special interests (67%)
  • Social naivety (58%)
  • Revenge (33%)
  • Social misunderstandings (31%)
Self-reported Reasons for offending

- Obsessions & special interests
  - Obsessional in pursuit of desired outcome
  - Special interests
  - Heightened vulnerability to exploitation by others
  - Tendency to misread emotion or behaviours of others
  - Difficulty to stop & think prior to acting
  - Social skills difficulties

- Social cognition
  - Bullying
  - Family conflict
  - Social rejection
  - Change of domicile
  - Job loss
  - Mental health difficulties
  - Emotional expression difficulties

- Disequilibrium
  - Emotional
    - Stress
    - Revenge
Self reported motivations for offending by autistic sexual offenders
Previous Research

Reasons for sexual offending

- Social Cognition
  - Theory of Mind
  - Social skills difficulties
- Awareness & understanding regarding sexual issues
- Compulsive thinking & sexual frustration
- Exploitation & abuse
Rationale

• Interventions specific to behaviours
• Most ASD offender literature looks across offences
• Case studies, psychiatric forensic reports or clinicians experience inform knowledge to date
• Variable recidivism rates in ASD interventions
Aim

To provide an in depth understanding of the motivations for sexual offending as described by the autistic offenders themselves, as a crucial step to informing interventions and reducing recidivism.
Sample

- 9 male autistic sexual offenders
- 4 prisons & 2 probation services
- Mean age = 30
- Mean age at diagnosis = 13
- All single
- Prison (n=6); Rental (n=2); Parent (n=1)
- Education:
  - UG degree (n=3)
  - Diploma (n=1)
  - A Level (n=2)
  - None (n=1)
Offences

- Downloading & possession of indecent images (n=4)
- Sexual assault (n=3)
- Indecent assault (n=2)
- Taking & distributing indecent images (n=1)
- Causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity (n=1)
- Arranging & facilitating a child sex offence (n=1)
Results

Self-reported reasons for sexual offending:
- Social difficulties (n = 6)
  - Feeling different to others (n = 3)
  - Loneliness (n = 1)
  - Social skills difficulties (n = 6)
- Misunderstanding (n = 7)
  - Consequences (n = 4)
  - Lack of perspective (n = 6)
  - Misbelief what’s available online (n = 2)
  - Reasoning (n = 5)
  - Rules (n = 5)
  - Seriousness (n = 6)
- Sex and relationship difficulties (n = 7)
  - Lack of sexual experience (n = 2)
  - Wanting sexual experience (n = 3)
  - Misunderstanding consent (n = 3)
  - Lack of appropriate relationships (n = 6)
  - Transgressive relationships (n = 3)
- Inadequate control (n = 7)
  - Getting carried away (n = 3)
  - Loss of control (n = 2)
  - Immaturity (n = 5)
  - Excuses (n = 4)
- Disequilibrium (n = 8)
  - Significant life event (n = 3)
  - Instability (n = 4)
  - Lack of professional support (n = 5)
  - Lack of familial support (n = 1)
  - Substance (n = 4)
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Summary

• Five main motivations
• All offenders referred to more than one theme
• Most frequently reported sub-themes:
  • Social skills difficulties
  • Lack of perspective
  • Misunderstanding the seriousness of their behaviours
  • Lack of appropriate relationships
• Highlights importance to involve offender and consider wide range of motivations
Any questions?

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