

Experiences and cognitions of individuals who commit rape

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Outline

- The importance of language
- Cognitive distortions, offence-supportive beliefs and phenomenological research
- Research study: A qualitative analysis of adult males who have sexually offended against elderly female victims
- Final thoughts (and beliefs). Outline of the role of service users in forensic research, as well as the work of the Safer Living Foundation charity in reducing sexual crime

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Language: Note to self.....

Offenders Prisoners Sex Offenders

Labelling Stereotyping Dehumanising

IDSOS MIDSOS IPCSOS

**Sex offender
Person
Individual
Human being
who has
committed a
sexual
offence**

02-UK 11:58 100%

Ender Wiggin
@enderphile1 **FOLLOWS YOU**

Sexually attracted to children through no choice of mine, but choose not to act on it because I know it would be wrong. Pedophile ≠ molester

Undetermined bit.ly/enderblog

225 FOLLOWING 438 FOLLOWERS

TWEETS TWEETS & REPLIES MEDIA LIKES

★ Pinned Tweet

Ender Wiggin @enderphile1 · 16/12/2015
Believe it or not, there are pedophiles who never harm kids. Pedophile ≠ molester.



The Non-Offending Pedophile –
Pedophiles about pedophilia
medium.com

178 124 100

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Cognitions of adult rapists

Thoughts

Attributions

Beliefs

Experiences

Attitudes

Behaviour

Reflections

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SARN treatment areas

- *Change from distorted thinking to offence-supportive beliefs*
- *Adversarial sexual attitudes*: the offender views males as the dominant partner in a heterosexual relationship and females as submissive
- *Sexual entitlement*: the egocentric belief that a man has an unconditional right to sex
- *Child abuse supportive beliefs*: beliefs which either justify sexual activity with children or minimise the seriousness of it
- *Women are deceitful beliefs*: beliefs that women are deceitful, corruptive or exploitative

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Attributions

- When people are asked why they did (or didn't do) a certain thing (how come you are late for this lecture?), their answer usually involves a causal attribution – that is, they explain their behaviour by attributing a cause, or a reason, or explanation to it (Buss, 1978).
- Attribution is the process of giving reasons for why things happen
- Fritz Heider (1958) proposed we try to understand others' behaviour as naïve scientists, governed by three principles:
- (1) as individuals we look for causes or reasons as to why other people do things;
- (2) in looking for causes, we attempt to find stable and enduring traits in others and the world around us; and
- (3) in attributing causality, we either assign it to an internal (dispositional) cause or an external (situational) cause.

To err is human..... To excuse also human

- Human beings come up with post hoc excuses and justifications when they do something that is perceived to be offensive (Snyder & Higgins, 1988).
- Not surprising that perpetrators invoke excuses and justifications when accounting for offending behaviour
- In almost every instance, people will excuse offensive behaviour by relating it to external, unstable and specific causes, rather than taking personal responsibility for their actions.
- 'I'm sorry but.....it wasn't my fault'!
- Cognitive dissonance
- Cognitive distortions

Beliefs

- Beliefs are thoughts we hold about ourselves and the world around us which we purport to be true (Nisbett & Ross, 1980)
- Beliefs may be rational (accepted for good reasons) or irrational (Baron, 2000)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjuNuglev8M&feature=related>
- A belief can have varying effects – influence behaviour by influencing actions, being analogous to a map by which they steer (Ramsey, 1931). We may add, amend, delete etc
- One's beliefs about sex and relationships will inform decisions about sexual behaviour
- Irrational or mistaken beliefs about sex and relationships impacts (causes?) sexual dysfunction

Sub-groups of sexual offences

‘If you’d had my life, you’d have done it too’: exploring the experiences of adult males who rape elderly females

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Consent

Pemberton's research (2011) on convicted adult rapists: 18 adult men + focus group

- Participants could identify a number of ways in which refusal was communicated (or knowing when 'sex is not on the cards')
- Range of normative refusals including illness, tiredness, having to get up early for work. Predominantly non verbal ('passion killers', a 'touch', a 'cup of tea', including facial expressions, gestures).
- Adult rapists were very good at outlining these ways – and also highlighting potential difficulties in eg 'new' relationships with miscommunication, or through lack of public education (about what consent is), or even changes to the law (marital rape).

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Consent

- Sarah: Ok erm::: .h just going back to:::: there
- were these questions on consent?
- Michael:Yeah↑
- Sarah: Bu::t it is kind of difficult to talk about
- when obviously you know you have talked
- about planning out your(.)attack 0.8 erm
- >so consent was never going to be anything
- that would be negotiated?<
- (0.7)
- Michael:No↓ unfortunately not(.)°no↓°

Extract from Pemberton (2011)

Research study

‘If you’d had my life, you’d have done it too’: exploring the experiences of adult males who rape elderly females

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Research: Introduction

- Literature and coverage of consent is useful but irrelevant here
- Research on CSA, adult rape but limited research w elderly victims
- Not just a research gap, but a clinical need
- Older people are less likely than younger groups to suffer serious personal crime – however a number of crimes that more prone to: burglary and financial abuse
- These offences both focus on vulnerability of elderly – sex offences could do but are lower in prevalence
- Comparatively high proportion of rapes against the elderly result in the victim's death

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Method & Analysis

- Sample pool = 20 adult men in treatment prison
- 6 agreed to participate (-1 for risk) = 5
- Participants were aged between 20 and 46 years (Mean = 30.1)
- Victims were aged between 55 and 70 (Mean = 63.0).
- 3 were acq., 1 nephew, 1 stranger
- All in victim's home (victim lived alone in each case)
- All rape (1P had 2 elderly victims), 2 included murder (largest age gaps).
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was chosen method of analysis
- Ethics

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Results: 1. Life's been really tough

- All participants stated they had suffered a tough start to life, and not been given a fair chance because of problems and difficulties in childhood, which continued and/or impacted upon their adult lives.
- Tough childhood,
- Tough adult life
- Life is not what they wanted it to be

Consider experiences / beliefs and attributions -> behaviour

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Results: 2. I'm not bad, I did what anyone would do

This represents how participants protected themselves from the negative feelings relating to their actions, typically utilising the mantra of 'if you had had my life, you would have ended up doing the same thing'.

- If you had had my life, you would have ended up doing the same thing
- I'm a nice person really.
- Anyone would have done what I did in the situation.
- It wasn't 'me'...I wasn't in my right mind/I didn't know better.

Results: 3. Other people haven't helped me or have made things worse

Participants described problematic relationships and placed blame on others - the victim led them on, or that mothers, family, partners or authorities let them down.

- Mum/family haven't been there for me.
- Partners/women have let me down or played me (including victims).
- Peers and the public have led me astray or not supported me.
- Authority and government have treated me badly and not helped me.

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Results: 4. Coping and pleasure

Alcohol and sex were something to do for amusement / to manage emotions. Participants described restricted lives. With limited options, sex and alcohol were viewed as more obtainable than other possibilities, to pass time or as a way of coping with problems. Participants also reported problems with money; 'luxuries' were seen as unavailable: sex and alcohol were used to fill the gap.

- Sex can be with anyone, it's a physical release.
- Alcohol is something to do and a way to cope.

Some thoughts (beliefs....)

- We need to understand people's experiences, their interpretations of their experiences, their attributions and beliefs.
- Qualitative methods, such as IPA, can help us understand how experiences have created a person's belief map
- Treatment helps to unravel attribution and beliefs
- Useful to focus on sub-groups to explore commonalities (elderly victims, peer bullying study, collecting behaviour)
- Very useful to get help from service users themselves eg Whatton & NTU Service User Research & Evaluation Group (prison and community groups)

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Acknowledgments

- This presentation is based on a paper by Murphy and Winder (2016) ‘If you’d had my life, you’d have done it too’: exploring the experiences of adult males who rape elderly females’
- The PhD work of Dr Sarah Pemberton (Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Birmingham City University) is also included.
- Many thanks to both Sarah and Rosanna and to all the participants involved in the studies.

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SLF

- www.saferlivingfoundation.org



Charity set up to run projects that prevent further victims of sexual harm – currently raising funds for a prevention project and drop in centre on Just giving

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SLF: Projects

- **Prison & Community-based Circles of Support and Accountability**
- **Prevention project**
- **Young People's Circles project**
- **Transitions and Release project**
- **Three-quarters House project**
- **Drop-In Centre**

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