



Comparison of intellectually disabled offenders with a combined history of sexual offenses and other offenses versus intellectually disabled offenders without a history of sexual offenses on dynamic client and environmental factors



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ABSTRACT

Sexually offensive behavior is prevalent among individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and many sex offenders also commit other offenses such as vandalism or assault. We examined the differences between sex offenders with ID and a history of combined sex and other types of offenses (mixed sex offenders) versus offenders with no history of sexual offenses (non-sex offenders). Dynamic client and environmental factors were measured using the Adult Behaviour Checklist (ABCL) and the Risk Inventarization Scale on Sexually Offensive Behavior of Clients with intellectual disabilities (RISC-V). Item, subscale, and total scores were then compared for the two groups. Most of the comparisons did not reveal significant differences between the two groups. The findings call for a general theory of offending behavior to explain the absence of differences between the mixed sex offenders and non-sex offenders with ID.

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1. Introduction

Individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) are at greater risk of developing psychopathology and challenging behavior compared to individuals without ID (Emerson, Robertson, & Wood, 2005; Matson & Shoemaker, 2011). Criminal offenses like vandalism or assault are also shown among individuals with ID (Holland & Persson, 2011). And although individuals with ID are not reported to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system, some differences between individuals with and without ID have been found to exist according to the type of offenses conducted, risk of re-offending, and prior corrections. Simpson and Hogg (2001a) have suggested that offenders within the borderline intelligence range have higher rates of sexual offending, criminal damage, and burglary compared to the general population. Holland and Persson (2011) state that individuals with ID are more at risk for re-offending and have also had more prior community correction orders than

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individuals without ID. Furthermore, many of the sexual offenses of individuals with ID go unreported or, if reported, do not have further consequences (Brown & Stein, 1997; Brown & Thompson, 1997; Murphy, 2007).

In research as well as clinical practice, sex offenders are often considered a separate group of offenders (Doyle, 2004; Lindsay et al., 2012). The group of sex offenders is nevertheless quite heterogeneous due to the co-occurrence of intellectual disabilities, psychopathologies, challenging behavior, and/or criminal behavior. Very little is known about the contribution of these problems – either separately or in combination – to the occurrence of sexual offenses, which makes it difficult to assess and treat the heterogeneous group of sex offenders in general and those known to have ID in particular. Identification of those characteristics that distinguish sex offenders with ID from sex offenders without ID, non-offenders with ID, and non-sex offenders with ID can thus provide much-needed guidance for the assessment and treatment of these different groups of people.

In research aimed at typifying sex offenders with ID, two approaches can be distinguished: a within-groups approach and a between-groups approach. The first approach focuses on the identification of the characteristics of the group of sex offenders with ID. The second approach compares characteristics of sex offenders with ID to different control groups (e.g., sex offenders without ID, non-offenders with ID) in order to differentiate between the groups. Though these two approaches seem clear, comparisons of studies are complicated because most do not distinguish between sex offenders, non-sex offenders, and mixed sex offenders, with the former defined as sex offenders who have only committed sexual offenses, the next defined as offenders who have only committed non-sexual offenses, and the latter defined as sex offenders who have committed sexual offenses and other offenses.

Studies exploring the within-group characteristics of sex offenders with ID investigate the characteristics of the sex offenders, recidivism rates, response to treatment (e.g., Day, 1994; Lindsay et al., 2006), and the diversity of offending pathways (e.g., Langdon, Maxted, Murphy, & SOTSEC-ID group, 2007). Via administration of the Questionnaire on Attitudes Consistent with Sexual Offenses (QASCO) to a population of sex offenders with ID, Lindsay et al. (2006) compared different groups of sex offenders in two studies. In the first study they compared two groups: sex offenders of adults versus sex offenders of children. In the second study they compared three groups: sex offenders of adults, sex offenders of children, and exhibitionists. In both studies, higher levels of attitudes consistent with sex offending in the area of rape were found for the sex offenders of adults as opposed to the sex offenders of children and exhibitionists. In contrast, greater cognitive distortions related to offenses of children were found for sex offenders of children compared to sex offenders of adults and exhibitionists.

The second – between-groups – approach aims to identify the unique characteristics of sex offenders with ID relative to a) sex offenders without ID, b) non-offenders with ID, and c) non-sex offenders with ID. Various perpetrator, victim, abuse, and offense characteristics have been examined in studies attempting to illuminate the specific contribution of intellectual disability to sexual offenses by comparing sex offenders with and without ID (e.g., Almond & Giles, 2008; Brown & Stein, 1997; Fortune & Lambie, 2004; Hayes, 2009; Keeling, Rose, & Beech, 2006; Rice, Harris, Lang, & Chaplin, 2008; van Vugt et al., 2011). Hayes (2009) compared a group of 20 sex offenders with ID with a group of 20 sex offenders without ID and found the former to be more likely to have been the victim of physical abuse during childhood, which was then found to be associated with a greater likelihood of threats and violence during the sex offense. Sex offenders with ID also showed more frequent diagnoses of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in addition to a greater incidence of aggressive behavior when compared to those without ID. In research by Keeling et al. (2006), however, examination of the offense pathways for sex offenders with and without ID in terms of self-regulation showed similar pathways: the two groups of sex offenders exhibited the same types of offense pathways with equal frequencies (i.e., avoidant-passive, avoidant-active, approach-automatic, and approach-elicited pathways). The evidence regarding unique characteristics of sex offenders with ID is thus not conclusive.

Comparison of sex offenders with ID to non-offenders with ID has shown significant differences with regard to: personality characteristics, neuropsychological profiles, and sexual knowledge (Lindsay & Lees, 2003; Lunsky, Frijters, Griffiths, Watson, & Willington, 2007; Michie, Lindsay, Martin & Grieve, 2006; Murray et al., 2001; Nijman, Merckelbach, & Cima, 2009; Parry & Lindsay, 2003; Ralfs & Beail, 2012). Significantly *greater* sexual knowledge was found in cohorts of sex offenders with ID ($n = 17$, $n = 16$) when compared to cohorts of non-offenders with ID ($n = 20$, $n = 15$) (Michie et al., 2006). Lunsky et al. (2007) reported a similar pattern of findings for the commitment of serious sexual offenses (e.g., rape or forced sexual assaults) but not for the commitment of less serious sexual offenses (e.g., public masturbation or inappropriate touching). In contrast, no differences in empathy have been reported (Ralfs & Beail, 2012), but significantly *lower* levels of anxiety, depression, and impulsive behavior have been reported for sex offenders with ID relative to non-offenders with ID (Lindsay & Lees, 2003; Parry & Lindsay, 2003). And when Murray et al. (2001) compared the neuropsychological profiles of sex offenders with ID to non-offenders with ID, the latter showed higher verbal IQ scores than the former but no significant differences in the performance IQ scores were found.

Finally, when sex offenders with ID are compared to non-sex offenders with ID, significant differences were found. For example, the personal and re-offending characteristics of sex offenders with ID differ significantly from that of non-sex offenders with ID (Lindsay et al., 2012; Lindsay et al., 2004). Lindsay et al. (2012) compared 477 offenders with ID, based on their most recently reported offense (sexual or non-sexual), on referral patterns, previous offending behavior, legal status, psychiatric disturbances, and adversity in childhood. Referrals to maximum security services were found to originate more often from a court for the sex offenders with ID and more often from secondary health care for the non-sex offenders with an ID. More of the sex offenders with ID had a court injunction (e.g., probation or community service) at the time of referral to a maximum security service and fewer had referral for aggression, damage to property, substance abuse, or fire setting when compared to the non-sex offenders with ID; the sex offenders with ID also had

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