

# Crime Analysis Regarding Sex Offenders in Turkey: Psychological Profiling, Cognitive Distortions and Psychopathy Among Rapists



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## SUMMARY

**Aim:** In this study the characteristics offenders and victims that contribute to offender profiling are analyzed in cases of sexual assault. The analysis of sexual assaults are identifies the relationship between these characteristics and sex crimes by examining the elements which contribute to sex crimes including demographic characteristics, domestic and developmental conditions, forensic history, cognitive distortions and psychopathy.

**Methods:** The Interviewing Tool For Sex Crimes, Cognitive Distortions Question Tool About Rape, and Levenson Self Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP) were applied to 106 male convicts between the ages of 18-65 or a control group consisting of 100 males volunteers between the age range of 18-65 from 11 different closed prisons.

**Results:** The results of the cognitive distortions questionnaire score was significantly different among sex offenders compared to innocent individuals. The level of cognitive distortion is significantly greater among sex offenders. The first and the second psychopathy scores are significantly higher than the scores of comparison group, with the second testing revealing increased scores in comparison to the first among sex offenders.

**Conclusions:** The typology of most of sex offenders can be evaluated as opportunistic. This study serves as an initial point of reference for the necessary theoretical studies of risk assessment, common in the forensic psychology field not yet applied in Turkey.

**Key Words:** Cognitive distortions, psychological profiling, psychopathy, risk factors, crime analysis, rape

## INTRODUCTION

Sexual assaults attract attention as a contemporary problem, with studies conducted on both sex offenders and victims. Sexual assault is defined as an act of inserting an organ or any other object into another individual's body (Turkish Criminal Code 2005). Sexual assault is also defined in the USA as the act of inserting a penis, finger or object into another individual's vagina, anus or mouth without consent (Gannon *et al.* 2008). It is essential to define a criminal profile for the prevention of crime. However, since sex crime offenders do not compose a heterogeneous group of male convicts it is

not possible to constitute a single profile of convicted rapists (Barbaree *et al.* 1994, Knight and Prentky 1990). According to Marshall *et al.* (1990) and Scully (1990), certain similarities are apparent. It has been reported that male assaulters often commit sexual harassment, hold negative views of women including rape myths, have a high tolerance for violence, and engage in excessive identification with masculine behaviors. School absenteeism, low grades, irregular family history, and the absence of a regular hobby or occupation are common among sex offenders (Hudson and Ward 1997). Despite these commonalities, it is not possible to make a valid

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generalization regarding sex offenders due to their distinctive individual characteristics.

On the other hand, the best method for defining differences between criminals and non-criminals is to form a typology and classification including diagrams (Robertiello and Terry 2007). The four types of criminal were first defined by Groth (1979) and developed by Hazelwood and Burgess (1987), Knight and Prentky (1990) and Berger (2000) in the following years. Knight and Prentky (1990) classified criminals as opportunist, angry, or revengeful. Opportunist sex offenders commit their crimes due to the stimulant or sexual stimulant impulse. Owing to a lack of impulse control, most sex offenders do not plan their attack. Sex offenders in this group may have low or high social competence. In contrast, angry sex offenders take action out of aggression, hatred and anger. Even when the victim does not resist the attack, this kind of criminal may cause death or serious injury to the victim. The stimulus motivating revengeful sex offenders is a similar feeling of hatred. Revengeful aggressors may do bodily harm in order to humiliate the victims (Knight and Prentky 1990).

Among studies on the identification and definition of criminal offenders, the term profiling refers to the method of defining a potential sex offender's personality (Owen 2004). Profiling is one of the most important methods of identifying offenders (Beauregard 2010). It is supposed that certain personalities display similar attitudes and the analysis of these attitudes will be useful for the evaluation of crime and the identification of potential suspects (Cook and Hinman 1999, Davies 1992, Egger 1999, Knight *et al.* 1998, Owen 2004). Criminal profiles make important contributions to strategy development, counseling, information management, improved understanding of criminal phenomenon (Owen 2004), determining the frequency of criminal behavior, and criminal record keeping (Hodges 2005). However, problems in record keeping complicate the detection of criminal activity. According to Marshall and Barbaree (1990), sex offenders are ranked fourth in terms of recidivism rates compared to other offenders at a rate of 7-35%.

Predicting the potential for criminal activity is the first step in risk evaluation, risk management and therapy decisions (Grubin 2004). Risk factors for sex offenders committing repeated assaults are evaluated in terms of two fundamental categories: sexual perversion and psychopathy (Hanson and Bussiere 1998, Roberts *et al.* 2002). In addition to exhibitionism, voyeurism, molestation, or sexual harassment, sexual assault includes both a sexual act and sexual satisfaction (Levenson and Morin 2006). Psychopathy includes interpersonal communication and related emotional and behavioral qualities (Hare 1999), but it is not related to anti-social personality disorder. Psychopathy is usually defined as a combination of personality traits defined by antisocial, narcissistic, histrionic and limited personality. The clinical structure

includes emotional, behavioral, antisocial elements, life style preference and difficult interpersonal relationships (Cooke and Michie 2001).

In addition, the risk factors related to the tendency of a sex offender to commit another crime are classified in two groups as static and dynamic factors. Fixed risk factors include continual qualities such as sexual arousal, cognitive distortions, and responsibility levels. Acute risk factors are modifiable variables such as substance abuse, social isolation, and negative emotions (Hanson and Harris 2001).

In the same vein, it is quite important to evaluate cognitive distortions in sex offenders. The content of the cognitive distortions also reflect the intensity of the psychopathology. Cognitive distortions provide valuable information for both the prevention of the crime and the criminal pattern (Murphy 1990). It is principally important to determine the levels of derision and denial.

In this study, variables such as demographic characteristics, domestic and developmental factors, alcohol and substance addiction, records of previous convictions, cognitive distortions and psychopathy are analyzed for their relationship to sexual assault. Risk assessment of sex offenders has not been previously investigated in the Turkish population. Therefore, this study is a preliminary characterization of the nature of sex offender and their criminal activity in Turkey.

## METHODS

### Subjects

The research group is composed of 106 volunteer male criminals between the age range of 18-65 ( $\bar{X} = 33,8$ ;  $SS = 10$ ) convicted of sexual assault and housed in the Ankara L1 and L2, Istanbul Ümraniye T, Çankırı, Kırşehir, Konya, Nevşehir, Adıyaman, Malatya, Elazığ and Mersin E type closed prisons. The research was conducted within the prison in which adult male sexual offenders were confined. The control group includes 100 volunteer adult males between the age range of 18-65 ( $\bar{X} = 31,5$ ;  $SS = 8,3$ ) working in private sector or in government with varying levels of education and no criminal record.

### Measures

**The Interviewing Tool For Sex Crimes:** An interview form including tests, open ended questions, and structured questions synthesized from data collected from academic journals regarding sexual assaults was prepared by the researchers in order to collect information about demographic characteristics, domestic and developmental qualities, criminal history, crime-specific details, and the social relations of the convicts.

**Cognitive Distortions Question Tool About Rape:** Utilizing data collected from academic journals regarding sexual assault, the researchers prepared a questionnaire including 17 structured questions synthesized from cognitive distortions about rape. Answers are scaled according to values 1-5 equivalent to the answers “strongly disagree” through “strongly agree”. A preliminary study was conducted by Tülü (2010) with this questionnaire, which was prepared without considering any previous scales for evaluating cognitive distortions in incidences of sexual assault. The coefficient of internal consistency is reported as 0.97 and second half-test correlation is 0.97 in the previous study. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated as 0.82 in test-retest study. Items in the questionnaire were retained depending on the results of item test correlation factor analysis, and evaluated as single factorial articles. The cognitive distortion score is indicated on a scale of 1 to 5, but inverse scoring from 1 to 5 was utilized for the graded questions according to the answer key. Therefore, the minimum score is 17 and the maximum score is 85. The reliability of the tool was evaluated using the cognitive distortions oriented to sexual assault crimes in cognitive distortions form (Tülü 2010).

**The Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP):** Primary psychopathy was evaluated using 16 unique questions, with 10 questions to evaluate secondary psychopathy, for a total of 26 questions. Individual questions were graded between values of 1 and 4, corresponding to the statements “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”. Standardization of this testing scale in the Turkish population was prepared by Engeler and Yargıç (2004). The internal correlation coefficient of primary pivotal psychopathy was 0.82 and internal correlation of secondary pivotal psychopathy was 0.63.

### **Procedure**

All procedures were approved by the Ethics committee of the research university. The official permission of The Ministry of Justice General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses Improvement Branch Responsible for Adult Magistracy and the statement of research intent was provided to the relevant prison administrators. Prior to participation in the study all subjects with documented convictions for sexual assault were informed about the study both orally and through written documentation. Informed consent was provided by all study participants. The research was conducted under the supervision of psychological social service workers and the researcher. The order of form and research scale questioning varied between individual interviews, though all questioning was completed in a single session. In the control group, the participants were informed with orally and through a written document and informed consent was provided by all participants. Social demographics such as age, education level, and occupation have an important influence on psychopathy, and

the control group subjects were matched with the experimental group according to education level.

## **RESULTS**

### **I. Findings Concerning Demographic Variables**

Findings concerning demographic variables are given in Table 1. We observed that 67.9% of sexual offenders are within the age range of 18-35, and 41.5% of offenders are primary school graduates. Additionally, 46.2% are single and 61.2% of these individuals indicated single marital status without having any emotional relationship with a mature woman at the time of the crime. It is understood that 39.6% of the participants have a regular job and 29.2% have a history of alcohol abuse and 18.9% have a history of drug abuse.

### **II. Findings concerning domestic and developmental factors**

Findings concerning domestic and developmental factors are given in Table 2. When parental education level is evaluated, 69.8% of sex offenders have a mother who did not graduate from primary school and while 43.4% of their fathers are primary school graduates. 62.3% of the participants are the first individuals to be sentenced to prison among their family members. 68.9% of the sex offenders find themselves to be physically attractive and 79.2% reported that their first sexual intercourse experience occurred with a stranger.

### **III. Findings concerning record of previous convictions**

Findings concerning records of previous convictions are given in Table 3. Sex offenders show antisocial behavioral patterns; for example 35.8% of the sexual assault convicts report committing to beat someone to death during adolescence, 26.4% have committed a theft, and 21.7% have a record of truancy. 19.8% sex offenders were arrested at least at once because of crimes against property such as theft and 13.2% have been convicted of crimes against property.

### **IV. Findings Concerning Sex Crimes**

Findings concerning prior records of sex crimes are given in Table 4. 97.2% of sex offenders have committed sexual assault, while 2.8% have committed serial sexual assault. 33% of the sex offenders have been sentenced to 6-10 years of punishment. 48.1% of convicts committed sexual assault in the evening and 72.6% of the convicts committed their crime without planning. 56.6% of the sex offenders reported that the crime motivation was sexual arousal. 57.5% of offenders offered to take the victim out to another place and 18.9% directed the victim to their own home.

Findings concerning victims are given in Table 5. 91.5% of the victims are female and 57.5% of the sex offenders are a

stranger to the victim. 42.5% of sex offenders saw their victims in an open space. 50% of the sex assaulters considered the victim's manner of dressing to be interesting and 19.8% of them identified their victims suddenly.

Characteristics of the event are given in Table 6. 35.8% of the sex offenders and 17% of the victims were drunk and 13.2% of the sex offenders and 8.5% of the victims used drugs at the time of crime. 11.3% of the sex offenders did physical harm to the victims. 18.9% of the offenders stated that they used a sharp object and 50% of these offenders in this group stated that they used a knife against their victims. 26.4% of the sex offenders stated that they threatened their victims as a reaction to the victim's resistance.

Findings concerning the crime scene are given in Table 7. 26.4% of the sex offenders commit their crimes in a deserted place and 27.4% prefer crime scenes that they familiar with previously. 31.1% of crime scene was within approximately 2-5 km of the offenders' place of residence and 43.4% of the sex offenders arrived there on foot.

## V. Findings Concerning Related Variables

Mean value and standard deviation value of findings about age-related variables are given in Table 8.

Cognitive distortions concerning rape questionnaire mean value, standard deviation value and t-value are given in Table 9 for the sex offenders and crime-free individuals. According to the t-test results of independent groups, there is a significant difference between sex offenders and non-offenders in terms of the cognitive distortions concerning rape. The cognitive distortion levels ( $\bar{X}=46,55$ ;  $SD=10,76$ ) are considerably higher among sex offenders than crime free individuals ( $\bar{X}=37,16$ ;  $SD=6,77$ ) ( $t=7,54$ ;  $*p<.05$ ).

Primary and secondary psychopathy mean values, standard deviation values and t test values of the two groups are given in 10. There is a considerable difference between sex offenders and non-offenders according to the t test score of independent groups. The primary psychopathy levels among sex offenders ( $\bar{X}=2.1$ ;  $SD=0.53$ ) are considerably higher than primary psychopathy levels among non-offenders. ( $\bar{X}=1.86$ ;  $SD=0.45$ ) ( $t=3.46$ ;  $p<.05$ ). There is also considerable difference in secondary psychopathy between sex offenders and non-offenders. Secondary psychopathy levels among sex offenders ( $\bar{X}=2.59$ ;  $SD=0.52$ ) are considerably higher than secondary psychopathy levels in non-offenders ( $\bar{X}=2.26$ ;  $SD=0.38$ ) ( $t=5.1$ ;  $*p<.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the crime, offender and victim characteristics which together provide criminal profiling data were determined by an analysis of sexual assaults that incorporated

demographic variables, domestic and developmental factors, record of previous convictions, cognitive distortions, and victim characteristics.

67.9% of the study group is composed of individuals within the age range of 18-35. This finding indicates that the majority of the sex assault convicts are relatively young individuals. Similarly, in his study of 326 convicts and prisoners Görgülü (2009) states that individuals between the age range of 18-35 compose the majority (80.4%) of convicted criminals. Half of the sex offender group is primary school graduates. Environmental conditions such as being unable to pay for education and being obliged to work at an early age may prevent these individuals from continuing their education. In her study of 225 convicts and prisoners, Peker (2008) reports that primary school graduates account for the majority of convicted criminals (45.8%). The education level of the individuals in the study group is generally low. Additionally, school absenteeism and discontinuity rates are high in the study group. The ability to attend school is regarded as a positive variable contributing to continued education. We observed that 37.7% of the individuals in the study group have irregular jobs while 19.8% are unemployed. Unemployment can be considered an important factor in determining criminal behavior. Sex offenders in general are engaged in unskilled work, reflecting low socio-economic level. This finding is similar to Hudson and Ward's previous study (1997). Poor access to education and the absence of a regular job or profession seems to aggravate criminal behavior. When alcohol use was evaluated among sex offenders, we observed that 29.2% abuse alcohol and 18.9% are addicted to drugs. According to Langevin and Lang (1990), drug addiction is less common among sex offenders than alcoholism. In this regard, the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse observed in this study is similar to the literature. Marshall (1989) suggests that sex offenders develop insecure attachment patterns in accordance with not being able to cope with problems in their lives as a result of the continuous feelings of deficiency. Alcoholism (Testa 2002), the use of drugs, or both (Motiuk 1998) can be considered as an important risk factor in determining the tendency towards recidivism among sex offenders. Though theoretical findings explaining the relationship between alcohol and crime have yielded varying results, most researchers claim that sex convicts who have been drinking before the time of crime are more likely to act out violently than other criminals. Intoxication may also directly cause a person commit a crime (Abbey *et al.* 2003). Use of alcohol before the time of the crime is more common among sex offenders than among other criminals (Abracen *et al.* 2000). When the use of alcohol prior to the crime was evaluated in our study, 35.8% of sex offenders reported being intoxicated during the incident. In his study, Testa (2002) asserts that the incidence of intoxication among sex offenders at the time of the incident

varies between 13% and 63%. This indicates that the rate alcohol use among sex offenders varies widely.

On the other hand, when we evaluated the incidence of intoxication among victims at the time of the crime, we observed that 17% of sexual assault victims were intoxicated. The incidence of intoxication of the victim was approximately half this rate when the assailant was also intoxicated, indicating that it was unusual for both victim and assaulter to be intoxicated at the time of the incident.

When we examined the proximity of the sex offender to the victim, 57.5% of sex offenders were a stranger to their victims at the time of the incident. The incidence of both the victim and the sex offender being intoxicated before the time of incident is much higher than the incidence of sexual assault among women and men who do not know each other (Testa, 2002). Intoxication in the victim results in both cognitive distortions and lack of control over the motor movements (Abbey *et al.* 2001). This inhibition makes it easier for the victim to be the target of a sexual crime.

Another factor that increases the risk of criminal activity is cognitive distortion (Ward and Keenan 1999). There are many studies that indicate that maladaptive beliefs and attitudes and cognitive distortions are related to sexual assault (Hanson and Scott 1995, Lanyon 1986, Marshall and Barbaree 1988, Pollock and Hashmall 1991, Schwartz and Masters 1983, Stermac and Segal 1989, Travin *et al.* 1986). There is a significant difference between sex offenders and non-offenders in terms of cognitive distortions regarding rape. This finding shows results that are similar to other reports in the literature. Schweighofer (1993) also detected a meaningful difference between sex offenders and non-offenders in terms of cognitive distortions regarding rape. Sex offenders have more cognitive distortions than non-offenders when considering rape as a crime (Hanson *et al.* 1994, Marshall *et al.* 2003, Stermac and Segal 1989). Cognitive distortions include reactions such as rationalization, accusation, denial, excuses, and the observed difference between sex offenders and non-offenders is not an unexpected result. Cognitive distortions, which play an important role in the treatment of recidivism among sex offenders, provide theoretical clues for the determination of treatment methods (Marshall *et al.* 1995). Hanson and Scott (1995) also report that cognitive distortions are associated with the tendency towards recidivism over a period of five years.

As another factor contributing to criminal behavior, psychopathy is a popular topic of study among criminal research groups. Psychopathy is correlated with numerous negative results (Hare 1996, Hare *et al.* 2000, Hart 1998, Salekin *et al.* 1996). Psychopathy is also an important factor in the tendency towards recidivism (Hare 1999). There is a significant difference in terms of primary and secondary psychopathy levels between sex offenders and non-offenders. It has been reported that psychopathic individuals display enhanced risk-taking

attitudes compared to other individuals (Hare 1996, 1999). It is apparent that individuals with primary and secondary psychopathy qualities are much more likely to commit crime than other individuals. According to Hemphill *et al.* (1998), when compared with the other criminals, psychopathic individuals have triple the incidence of recidivism and the risk of future criminal activity, including violent crime, is increased four times.

The frequency of psychopathic individuals among offenders compared to individuals confined in high security prisons indicates that psychopathy is a very important risk factor that should be addressed (Hare 1999). In this context, psychopathy can be considered as a strong predictor of violence, especially when it is evaluated with other risk factors for sexual assault. Psychological profiles may identify opportunistic sex offenders who commit sexual assault without planning and only for sexual satisfaction. The sex offenders in this group can be identified as individuals who have low social competence (Knight and Prentky 1990). Many sex offenders threaten and intimidate their victims for the sexual satisfaction, and these individuals can be classified as selfish sex offenders according to the classification of Hazelwood and Burgess (1987).

An overall evaluation of the study indicates that the use of alcohol and drugs at the time of the crime, including both the sex offender's and victim's use of drugs or alcohol, and the cognitive distortions of the offender and psychopathic qualities are important risk factors. Individuals who have committed sexual offenses can be arrested and sent to prison. Though this punishment may instill some feelings of trust and peace in the offender, it is temporary and only valid during the time span of incarceration. Currently, rehabilitation is being considered for many kinds of criminal behavior. Effective treatment methods are employed in the USA and Canada that reduce the incidence of recidivism among sex offenders. Different methods are effective in addressing different types of sexual offenders. Studies indicate positive results demonstrating the effectiveness of theoretically based comprehensive and crime-oriented treatments (Greenfeld 1997).

Though the re-evaluation of risk factors for recidivism is applied in many countries, it is new in Turkey and should be urgently employed in our country. Most studies in forensic psychology are carried out using records of previous convictions, and the recording of convictions should be legal and compulsory. A database containing information regarding convicted criminals should be created in order to provide data for future studies.

In conclusion, this study group is limited to 106 male sex offenders between the age of 18-65 in Ankara Sincan L1 and L2 Type, İstanbul Ümraniye T Type, Çankırı, Kırşehir, Konya, Nevşehir, Adıyaman, Malatya, Elazığ and Mersin E Type closed prisons from 2009 to 2010. The most important limitation of this kind of study is the sincerity and cooperation of

the participants during the self-assessment questions. To date, it has not been possible to address this limitation due to the absence of alternative methods of investigation. Our current theoretical knowledge is often based on the results of previous studies. The methodological limitations of these studies can complicate the interpretation of results.

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