

POSTER

The Neuropsychology of Adolescent Sex Offenders

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Background. Very few neuropsychological studies have been published so far with adolescent sex offenders (ASO). The main goal of this investigation was to test the hypothesis that selected cognitive, intellectual, and social measures would help discriminating between subgroups of ASO. These evaluations could help better describe, understand, and predict sexual offending among adolescents.

Methods. ASO of children (n=25), ASO of peers or adults (n=14), non sex juvenile delinquents (n = 23), and non-delinquent adolescents recruited in underprivileged neighborhoods (n = 29) were individually assessed with the following measures: two subtests of the WAIS-IV (Vocabulary and Block Design); three computerized neuropsychological tasks (the Iowa Gambling task, the Wisconsin Card Sorting task, and the Stop-it task); two questionnaires of self-perceived interpersonal skills (the revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale and the Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised), and one personal history checklist. Participants were all males born in Canada (aged 12-18; M = 15.4).

Results. First, ASO obtained significantly lower scores at the Vocabulary subtest and similar scores at the Bloc Design subtest than non ASO. Second, non-delinquents obtained significantly better scores than sex and non sex offenders at the Iowa Gambling task. Three subgroups progressively learned to improve their advantageous vs. disadvantageous ratio across trials at the Gambling task with the notable exception of ASO of children, which in fact obtained significantly poorer results over time. ASO of children also obtained significantly less correct responses and significantly more errors than nonsexual delinquents at the Wisconsin task. At the Stop-it task, the non sex delinquents had a mean reaction time more than one standard deviation lower than that of non-delinquents. Contrarily to expectations, the groups did not differ on self-perceived social skills. They also began to masturbate at a similar age (M=11.9 y.o.), and they all practice masturbation at a similar frequency (M = 2.4 per week).

Conclusion. These preliminary results suggest that neuropsychological evaluation might help to better define subgroups of ASO. ASO of children seem to be characterized with deficits of higher-order executive functions (e.g. deduction), whereas ASO of peers or adults might present neuropsychological profiles similar to that of general juvenile delinquents (i.e. impulsivity and other lower-order executive dysfunctions). As both subgroups of ASO reported having good social skills, future studies should use more objective measures to verify these data.