

Public Perception of Female Sex Offenders and Severity/Dangerousness

Sex crimes committed by female offenders create an interesting dynamic in the field of criminal justice. Most often, the victims reporting a sexual offense are female and their perpetrators are male. This can lead a view that minimizes sex crimes perpetrated by females. Whilst research has been conducted on opinions and attitudes of professionals within the criminal justice system, the views of the general public in regard to female sex offenders have not been included. With an existing gap in the literature, this study seeks to understand the perception of female sex offenders and their level of danger through the lens of those who reside in Northern Virginia. The background of the problem will be presented along with a review of the literature. The selected methodology, presentation of data, and subsequent analysis will be followed by implications for future research.

Background

In August 2023, a court document revealed that a former female teacher in Virginia would not have to register as a sex offender as part of a plea deal made with the prosecution.¹ The option to eliminate the registry requirement for this female perpetrator begs the question of “why is she not required to register as a sex offender for committing a sex crime?” Unfortunately, high profile cases such as Debra LaFarve from Florida highlight the attractiveness of the female perpetrator while diminishing the criminal behavior. LaFarve’s own attorney capitalized on the appearance of his client and is quoted saying that she is “too pretty for prison.”² While female sex offenses may be overlooked or not taken seriously, the crimes still occur.

Such reporting has led to a minimization of female perpetrators and the perception that sex crimes are gendered with males being stereotyped as the offender.³ Gakhal and Brown

(2011) argued that if the gender of the offender is not specified, the implied assumption is that a male committed the crime.⁴ The focus of research in the field of criminal justice as it pertains to sex offenders has also been male centered.⁵ This includes existing literature that conceptualizes males as harmful and dangerous.⁶ Female offenders challenge this stereotype because their posed level of danger is often overlooked or minimized.⁷

With the focus on the male offender, literature in the field has not always included female sex offenders.⁸ Over the years, studies that have considered female sex offenders have mentioned that the public does not think that female perpetrated sex offenses occur as often as crimes perpetuated by males.⁹ Not only do females represent an under reported group, Shields and Cochran (2020) determined that females are not sentenced as harshly as their male counterparts.¹⁰ This gives the public the impression that female sex offenders are not as dangerous as male sex offenders and presents a gap in the current literature regarding the public perception of female sex offenders and their perceived level of danger.

Scholars have made an effort to address the problem by attempting to understand how different factors influence the perception of sex crimes. Hoggett, McCartan, and O'Sullivan (2019) considered a demographic characteristic associated with jobs in law enforcement.¹¹ The inclusion of rank and role of police officers was studied in regard to the perception of law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, the researchers did not introduce other demographic characteristics as part of the study.¹² Kerr, Tulley, and Völlm (2017) considered age and gender as demographic factors that could impact outcomes such as views of sex offenders; however, they did not include other demographic variables such as race or ethnicity in their study.¹³ With this in mind, including demographic variables and their potential impact on public perception will provide more information to the field and will contribute to the existing research.

Literature Review

Prevalence of Female Offenders

Historically, research on female sex offenders is limited in comparison to male offenders.¹⁴ In 2002, Vandiver and Walker made a claim sex crimes with female perpetrators have been minimized in the criminal justice field.¹⁵ Over a decade later, Cortini et al. (2016) supported this thought process through their own research noting that females perpetuate around two percent of the sex offenses reported to police.¹⁶ Friedman et al. (2023) affirmed the lack of research and available data regarding female offenders. Although males commit a majority of offending in the criminal justice system, Brown and Kloess (2020) determined that females are responsible for between five to ten percent of sex crimes in the United States.¹⁷ This is slightly less than the findings of other empirical studies that suggested the percentage of female sex offenders lies between five and twenty percent.¹⁸ However, the researchers have come to the same conclusion, that females are capable of committing sexual offenses.

Contrary to previous beliefs, females are capable of committing the same type of sexual crimes as their male counterparts.¹⁹ This includes crimes that are similar in severity and types of sex crimes such as rape and sexual assault.²⁰ Such information negates the societal view of female offenders, which considers females, specifically female sex offenders, to be harmless.²¹ Viewing female offenders as harmless feeds into the double standard that has been developed around the treatment of female sex offenders in the criminal justice system.²² Additionally, research is limited regarding the prevalence of female sex offenders because of the terminology or definitions that are used. Alterations in definition of sexual abuse and identification/classification of specific crimes will influence the data that is collected in a study as well as the results.²³

One of the major issues standing in the way of understanding the prevalence of female sex offenders is due to under reporting.²⁴ Denoy (2001) suggested there is a culture of denial when it comes to reporting female offenders and their crimes.²⁵ Victims are less likely to report sex crimes if the perpetrator was a female.²⁶ Additional research determined that when reports are made, professionals do not necessarily take the crime seriously or disregard the crime in its entirety.²⁷ While there are complexities when it comes to reporting crime, the gender of the perpetrator is influential in whether or not a victim makes a report to the police.²⁸ Additional research determined that the criminal justice system hesitates to identify men as victims.²⁹ Such antiquated notions influence male reporting of crime. Thus, there is an issue with not only under reporting of female perpetrated crimes, but those that are reported are minimized.³⁰

Media Depiction of Sex Offenders

Male and female sex offenders are portrayed differently in the media. Such depictions can influence public opinion as the media plays an instrumental role on how such offenders are portrayed.³¹ Media outlets act as one of the primary sources of information regarding sex offenders.³² The role of the media in disseminating information has not changed in the last decade as various sources still control the narrative about crime and criminal behavior.³³ Lowe and Willis (2022) determined that the media would often focus on high profile cases, yet they may be a small representation of the type of sex crime being committed.³⁴ Unfortunately, as the media plays a role in the circulation of information, the media can pose as a powerful tool in influencing public opinion of specific crimes or types of offenders.

Contrary to how male offenders are depicted, females are not necessarily portrayed as monsters in the media. Instead of being presented as villains, research has suggested that the media glamorizes female sex offenders.³⁵ Historically, sex crimes committed by female

perpetrators have been romanticized.³⁶ Females are often depicted as innocent or not capable of sexual aggression.³⁷ Though dated, there are two high profile cases where the gender of the perpetrator overshadowed the crime, those of Mary Kay Letourneau and Debra LaFave.³⁸

The narrative that the media dictates about female sex offenders has contributed to a lack of public understanding regarding the danger posed by female sex offenders. More importantly, media portrayals contribute to an inaccurate representation of female sex offenders.³⁹

Christensen (2017) also conducted qualitative research considering public opinion on sex offenders, specifically how females are portrayed in the media in comparison to their male counterparts.⁴⁰ Unlike the research from Zack et al. (2016), the work of Christensen (2017) did not show the same themes of romanticism in the portrayal of female sex offenders in Western print media.⁴¹ This study did call for additional research to compare perceptions of male and female offenders.

Perception of Danger

One aspect of interest is the perceived level of danger a female sex offender poses to society. Often the level of danger to self-and/or others are taken into consideration during sentencing.⁴² Gibbs and Bense (2022) noted that there is a gap in research concerning the level of danger posed by society, as the focus has remained gender-specific toward male offenders.⁴³ With male sex offenders being the center of attention, women are potentially seen as less culpable. Moreover, females are less likely to use physical force against their victims. Instead, female offenders often consider themselves to be in relationships with their victims, thus altering the narrative of the female offender and their perceived level of danger.⁴⁴

This is not a new concern as early research from Denov (2003) suggested that traditional views of women as passive and harmless have found their way into the criminal justice system

by means of reporting practices and responses, such as sentencing.⁴⁵ Such views are supported by a study from Shields & Cochran (2020), which determined that judges view females as posing less of a danger to society.⁴⁶ A review of the research shows that little change in opinion or attitude toward females and their perceptions of danger have changed.

Instead, research is consistent with male offenders as more likely to be viewed as a danger or threat.⁴⁷ Zack et al., (2016) confirmed this bias by determining there is a double standard for the way different genders are treated during the sentencing phase.⁴⁸ The study determined that the general public does not view female offenders as predatory or even on the radar.⁴⁹

Public Perception

Public perception is an important factor in shaping the criminal justice system. The 1980s and 1990s were dominated by the “get tough” on crime stance taken by the criminal justice system in the United States. This policy was a response to the public outcry regarding the violent crime rates in the US, sex offender legislation and notification laws being an example of this policy. Public attitude and perception of the sex offender registry is in need of evaluation. Zgoba et al. (2018) noted that the public has driven changes to the Sex Offender registry.⁵⁰ Initially, change was made by public outcry after the death of Jacob Wetterling and later with the abduction and subsequent deaths of Megan Kanka and Adam Walsh, the registry has undergone modifications based on public attitudes.⁵¹ Because the public has been a driving force of the sex offender registry, it is necessary to consider modern trends in public perception and attitudes. Thus, the general public is the target population.

Mancini et al. (2014) acknowledged the role of the public in pushing for new legislation or changes to the criminal justice system, noting that public perception of crime and their overall opinion has a place within the system itself.⁵² Previous research demonstrates that

the public views sex offenders as being some of the “worst of the worst” offenders in the criminal justice system⁵³. With regard to sex offender legislation, public opinion has pushed for updates in policy and sometimes, changes in sentencing.

While there have been years of research on public opinion of crime as a general topic or theme, the opinion of sex offenders and their crimes tend to vary based on the information that is presented.⁵⁴ This includes the public forming an opinion about the crime, those who commit such crimes, and sentencing initiatives. As such, public opinion is often developed through a combination of information from media and information that circulates through communities. Focus groups in New Zealand determined that perceptions are a combination of both information from the media as well as myths and facts that circulate through the community.⁵⁵

As such, the public plays an important role in the criminal justice system. Research on public attitudes includes a study from Mancini and Budd (2016), which suggested that not only is public opinion toward crime a complex issue, but perceptions and misperceptions about sex offenders can influence policy to include sentencing initiatives.⁵⁶ King (2016) highlighted the role of public opinion on the criminal justice system.⁵⁷ The public can influence changes to legislation based on perceived threats such as the passing of the sex offender notification laws. Zgoba, Jennings, and Salerno (2018) found that the public has driven changes to the Sex Offender Registry.⁵⁸ Initially by outcry after the death of Jacob Wetterling and later with the abduction and subsequent deaths of Megan Kanka and Adam Walsh, the registry has undergone modifications based on public opinion and attitudes.⁵⁹ Such changes can be attributed to public perception and the role of public opinion on crimes like those that are sexually motivated.

Research Questions

The research, quantitative in nature, is aimed at addressing the gaps within the literature.

The question along with the accompanying hypotheses are as followed:

Research Question 1:

Can gender, parental status, and political affiliation predict public perception of female sex offenders and level of danger?

Null Hypothesis:

Gender, parental status, and political affiliation cannot predict public perception of female sex offenders and level of danger.

Alternative Hypothesis:

Gender, parental status, and political affiliation can predict public perception of female sex offenders and level of danger.

Methodology

As the research is interested in what variables (gender, number of children, and political affiliation) influence public perception of female sex offenders, the study utilized a non-experimental correlational design. The research question and corresponding hypotheses consider the relationship of the variables and the strength of the relationship on the dependent variable. Nonexperimental research is an appropriate method as there is no manipulation in the independent variables.⁶⁰ Previous authors have utilized quantitative methods as a base for their research to examine perceptions of sex offenders, helping ground this study within the same context.⁶¹

The data was sourced through the implementation of a survey, the Community Attitudes Toward Sex Offender Scale (CATSO) developed by Church et al. (2007).⁶² Surveys are

considered to be easy to administer as participants are able to complete them at a convenient time and with the ease of online surveys, they can be accessible to many.⁶³ Participants were recruited through an online notice that included a link to the survey instrument with accompanying inclusion criteria. The same questions were asked of all participants and consisted of demographic information as well as a series of statements that utilized a Likert scale (1-6) for response.

The sample population was drawn from the area classified as Northern Virginia. The target population was adults over the age of 18 that reside in Virginia. The specified area is Northern Virginia, which contains the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, and Stafford along with the independent cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park.⁶⁴ The sample strategy was convenience sampling, a form of non-probability as not every individual had an equal chance of participation.⁶⁵ Two social media platforms were selected to disseminate the survey, Facebook and LinkedIn. Therefore, members of the Northern Virginia population that had access to Facebook or LinkedIn and the public post had a higher chance of being included in the research. Information about the survey, the rationale for the research study, and inclusion criteria were noted on a recruitment notice. As the recruitment notice and link to the survey were posted on a personal Facebook and LinkedIn page, a caveat was added to the recruitment notice that excluded personal friends, family members, and co-workers of the researcher.

Community Attitude Toward Sex Offenders Scale (CATSO)

The Community Attitude Toward Sex Offenders Scale (CATSO) scale was used to collect data with permission from the original researcher, Church. One modification was made to the language of the existing tool within the instructions. The phrase “please provide an answer

to each question with female sex offenders in mind” was added so that participants would answer the questions while considering female sex offenders, rather than male sex offenders. This change was made to influence responses. Church provided permission to add the caveat to the instructions.

The scale consists of 18 self-report items. The instrument included both standard items and reverse scored items that were used in the analysis. The responses were recorded on a 6-point Likers scale with a range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Scores for the overall CATSO can range from 18-108. During the initial testing and implementation phases, the researchers determined that higher scores on the CATSO are more likely to be indicative that sex offenders are dangerous and unlikely to change.⁶⁶ Further, higher scores are also indicative of negative views about sex offenders.⁶⁷

Presentation of Data: Demographic Data

The survey collected data from individuals who met the inclusion criteria: (a) participants over the age of 18, (b) those who reside in the specific geographic area of Northern Virginia, and (c) individuals who are not and have not previously been listed on the SOR. Although the survey was disseminated through two social media platforms, it is unknown how many individuals saw the recruitment notice or had access to the survey. While 124 surveys were collected, not all were completed. As such, the sample consisted of ($N = 91$) participants. Based on the recommended equation for multiple regression $N > 50 + 8m$, a minimum of 74 surveys were needed for the study.

Gender

A majority of the participants identified as female (68.1 percent, $N = 62$). Males were represented in the survey sample (29.7 percent, $N = 27$), while those who identify as non-binary

(2.1 percent, $N = 2$) were represented in the surveys collected. This data indicates that females were slightly more likely than males to participate in the survey.

Table 1
Summary of Gender of Survey Participants

Gender	Sample Percentage	N
Male	29.7%	27
Female	68.1%	62
Non-binary	2.2%	2
No Response		
		$N = 91$

Parental Status

In the sample, parents had the highest percentage of participation in the survey (53.8 percent, $N = 49$) followed closely by non-parents (46.2 percent, $N = 42$). This data indicates that individuals with children or those who identify as parents were more likely to participate in the survey.

Table 2
Summary of Parental Status of Survey Participants

Parental Status	Sample Percentage	N
Yes	53.8%	49
No	46.2%	42
No Response		
		$N = 91$

Political View

The last demographic characteristic of interest is the political view of participants. The survey included a range of options from very liberal to very conservative. In the sample, participants largely identified as neutral (37.4 percent, $N = 34$), followed by slightly liberal (28.6 percent, $N = 26$). Respondents with very conservative views (3.3 percent, $N = 3$) represented the

group with the lowest survey participation followed by very liberal (10.9 percent, $N = 10$). This data indicates that individuals with a more neutral political view were more likely to respond to the survey in comparison to those that lean to one side or the other.

Table 3
Summary of Political View of Survey Participants

Political View	Survey Percentage	N
Very Liberal	10.9%	10
Slightly Liberal	28.6%	26
Neutral	37.4%	34
Slightly Conservative	19.8%	18
Very Conservative	3.3%	3
No Response		
		$N = 91$

Presentation of the Data: Community Attitude Toward Sex Offenders Scale

The CATSO is comprised of 18 questions that are further divided into four subscales. One subscale, Severity/Dangerousness, answers the research question for this study. Five specific statements from the CATSO are included in the subscale. As the response selections on the CATSO are in the format of a Likert Scale (1-6), the subscale was summated prior to creating the individual factor for analysis.

Severity/Dangerousness

The sample included 91 responses to the CATSO, specifically the questions that related to the subset of Severity/Dangerousness (Questions 4, 9, 13, 15, and 17). These statements were reverse scored per the instructions from Church et al. (2008). Table 4 shows each question from the Severity/Dangerousness subscale and how respondents answered.

Table 4*Statements Included in Subscale Severity/Dangerousness*

Question	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Probably Disagree 3	Probably Agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6	Total
4	41.7%	43.9%	4.3%	4.3%	5.4%	0%	
N	38	40	4	4	5	0	91
9	46.1%	30.7%	16.4%	4.3%	1.0%	1.0%	
N	42	28	15	4	1	1	91
13	40.6%	32.9%	16.4%	6.5%	1.0%	2.1%	
N	37	30	15	6	1	2	91
15	51.6%	28.5%	10.9%	2.1%	2.1%	4.3%	
N	47	26	10	2	2	4	91
17	75.8%	23.0%	0%	0%	0%	1.1%	
N	69	21	0	0	0	1	91

The summary of results from the subscale are as follows: Question 4 ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.063$), Question 9 ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.035$), Question 13 ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.140$), Question 15 ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.272$), and Question 17 ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .655$). The results from the summated Severity/Dangerousness subscale were ($M = 26.07$, $SD = 2.891$).

Table 5*Summary of CATSO Severity/Dangerousness Subscale*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Statement 4	2.00	6.00	5.121	1.063
Statement 9	1.00	6.00	5.123	1.035
Statement 13	1.00	6.00	4.989	1.140
Statement 15	1.00	6.00	5.121	1.272
Statement 17	1.00	6.00	5.714	.655
Severity/Dangerousness	18.00	30.00	26.077	2.891

Multiple Linear Regression Model

A multiple regression analysis was to examine if the independent variables (gender, parental status, and political view) affected the dependent variable (severity/dangerousness). The regression model is tested with an ANOVA to determine if the independent variables can significantly predict severity/dangerousness (Table 6).

Results from the multiple linear regression model revealed there was no statistically significant findings as the model determined there was no significant relationship between the predictor variables and the dependent variable $F(7, 59.261) = 1.014, p = .428, R^2 = .00$. In this instance, the study fails to reject the null hypothesis. Gender, parental status, and political affiliation cannot predict public perception of female sex offenders and severity/dangerousness.

Table 6
ANOVA Results for Severity/Dangerousness

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H ₁	Regression	59.261	7	8.466	1.014	0.428
	Residual	693.200	83	8.352		
	Total	752.462	90			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Discussion

The main goal of the study was to examine the predictor variables of gender, parental status, and political view and their relationship with the dependent variable, severity/dangerousness. Unfortunately, the overall study did not find support that the independent variables were able to predict public perception of severity/dangerousness as they apply to female sex offenders. While these results were unexpected, the study did answer the research question by determining, no, these independent variables cannot predict public perception of danger/severity posed by female sex offenders.

The study was limited in its design. Using the Internet as a means of distribution does present several advantages. First, the researcher does not need to be physically present when the survey is distributed. Second, an online platform provides participants with the ease of completing the survey in their own time that is convenient and within their own setting. Lastly, the use of the Internet for distribution is cost-effective and uses less paper resources. However, along with benefits come limitations. For this study, participants would need access to the Internet by phone, tablet, or computer to access the survey. Additionally, the survey specifically used social media for distribution. The use of online social media platforms to disseminate the survey has its own built-in limitations. For instance, whilst the survey and recruitment flyer were made public, participants would need to be members of either Facebook or LinkedIn to see the notice

The study also faced minor methodological limitations. The study was designed to be anonymous. With this comes the risk that the individual completed the survey more than one time information that would limit a participant to one time was not collected. Another limitation of the study includes the number of incomplete surveys. The total number collected was 122, with 31 participants not completing every question. Of the 31 who did not complete the survey 18 completed the prescreening questions but did not complete the survey. It is likely that some of these participants did not meet the criteria, thus, were not prompted to continue. Of the remaining 13, who did not complete the survey, they dropped off at various points throughout the survey process. This could have been due to a variety of factors such as the length of the survey, loss of signal/Internet, or loss of interest.

Due to the use of convenience sampling, it is not necessarily representative of all of Northern Virginia. Instead, the study provides a cross-section of the region. The demographic

statistics show one particular county, Prince William County, as a high participating area in comparison with the others that make up Northern Virginia. This may not accurately correlate with the population in the specified counties. Therefore, it would be difficult to generalize these results to the entirety of Northern Virginia. With this in mind, it would also be difficult to generalize the views of those across the entirety of the Commonwealth based off this study.

Alone, this study is not likely to be the basis of any major changes to policy or practice. It is however, a starting point for future discussions in the field regarding the role of female perpetrators and criminal behavior. The literature revealed that the opinion of the public has been taken into consideration when it comes to policy initiatives. This has often been the case when it comes to updates in the requirements of the Sex Offender Registry.⁶⁸ As the study findings fell short on being able to determine if demographic characteristics can predict public perception of female sex offenders within the context of severity/dangerousness, there are no implications for policy or practice at this time.

Recommendations for future research have developed from both the review of the existing literature as well as the limitations of this study. The first recommendation is to replicate the study with a larger sample size. A larger sample size may be more representative of Northern Virginia. Second, the study should either be replicated in different regions across the Commonwealth or include the entirety of the Commonwealth to gain a better understanding of how the public in Virginia views female sex offenders and their level of danger.

It is recommended that a future study extend the number of independent variables to see if there are other demographic factors that influence these perceptions. While this study limited itself to three, other demographic variables such as age, race/ethnicity, and level of education

could contribute to public opinions of female sex offenders and severity/dangerousness. These variables could make for an interesting analysis to see their role on public perception.

Lastly, it is recommended that a similar study be replicated to determine if the psychometric validity of the instrument is challenged when the CATSO is used to gain insight on public perception about female sex offenders. Such research would contribute to the field by not only providing additional data about female sex offenders but would add to the discussion regarding the use of the CATSO and its subscales.

The literature review determined that there are stereotypes and misconceptions about who perpetuates sex crimes. Specifically, it was noted that the sex offender stereotype is focused on males committing crimes of a sexual nature.⁶⁹ Females challenge this stereotype.⁷⁰ In order to better understand public perception, future studies should consider using the CATSO twice in the same study. The first time, with no alterations in the instructions and the second time with the caveat used in this study, to respond to the statements focusing on female offenders. A comparison of this data could provide more information about public perception of females in comparison to males, adding more to the knowledge base and addressing the same gap within the literature that was identified in this study.

Conclusion

The quantitative study was developed based on an interest regarding how the public views female sex offenders. An anonymous survey was distributed via social media, targeting the population of Northern Virginia. The study examined the relationship between three independent variables: gender, parental status, and political view and the dependent variable of severity/dangerousness. Multiple regression was used to conduct the data analysis using the open-source program JASP. The research determined that the three selected independent

variables were not able to predict public perception of severity/dangerousness. Given the results of the study, additional questions arise as to whether or not stereotype or subconscious viewpoints that males (not females) are sex offenders, were present in the study. Although the study did present statistically significant findings, there is much more to explore regarding public perception and female sex offenders in future research.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lewis, Tisha. 2023. "Former Virginia Middle School Teacher to Avoid Sex Offender Label in Plea Deal." FOX 5 DC. August 2, 2023. <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/former-virginia-middle-school-teacher-to-avoid-sex-offender-label-in-plea-deal>.

² Goldenberg, Suzanne. 2006. "Too Pretty for Prison." The Guardian. March 24, 2006. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/24/usa.gender>.

³ Brown, Kelly M., and Juliane A. Kloess. 2020. "The Motivations of Female Child Sexual Offenders: A Systematic Review of the Literature." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 50 (January): 101361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.101361>; Hickey, Eric W. 2015. *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. 7th ed. Boston, Ma, Usa: Cengage Learning.; Wijkman, Miriam, Catrien Bijleveld, and Jan Hendriks. 2010. "Women Don't Do Such Things! Characteristics of Female Sex Offenders and Offender Types." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 22 (2): 135–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063210363826>.

⁴ Gakhal, Baldeesh Kaur, and Sarah J. Brown. 2011. "A Comparison of the General Public's, Forensic Professionals' and Students' Attitudes towards Female Sex Offenders." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 17 (1): 105–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2010.540678>.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid; Weekes, John R., Guy Pelletier, and Daniel Beaudette. 1995. "Correctional Officers: How Do They Perceive Sex Offenders?" *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 39 (1): 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x9503900107>.

⁷ Brown, Kelly M., and Juliane A. Kloess. 2022. "Attitudes towards and Perceptions of Females Who Sexually Offend against Children: A Comparison between Students and Professionals." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 30 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2022.2110292>; Christensen, Larissa S. 2018. "Professionals' Perceptions of Female Child Sexual Offenders." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36 (7-8): 088626051878537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518785377>; Russell, Brenda L. 2014. "Perceptions of Female Offenders: How Stereotypes and Social Norms Affect Criminal Justice Response." *Perceptions of Female Offenders: How Stereotypes and Social Norms Affect Criminal Justice Responses*, January, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5871-5_1.

⁸ Christensen, Larissa S, and Jodie Woods. 2024. "The Underexplored Topic of Females Who Perpetrate Child Sexual Abuse Material Offenses: What Do We Know about This Offending Group?" *Sexuality & Culture* 28 (4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10188-7>; Gannon,

Theresa A, and Franca Cortoni. 2010. *Female Sexual Offenders : Theory, Assessment, and Treatment*. Chichester, Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell.; Ibid.

⁹ Denov, Myriam S. 2016. *Perspectives on Female Sex Offending*. Routledge.

¹⁰ Shields, Ryan T., and Joshua C. Cochran. 2019. "The Gender Gap in Sex Offender Punishment." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 36 (1): 95–118.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-019-09416-x>.

¹¹ Hoggett, James, Kieran McCartan, and Jack O'Sullivan. 2019. "Risk, Discretion, Accountability and Control: Police Perceptions of Sex Offender Risk Management Policy in England and Wales." *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 20 (4): 174889581983974.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895819839747>.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Kerr, Nathan, Ruth J. Tully, and Birgit Völm. 2017. "Volunteering with Sex Offenders." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 30 (6): 107906321769196.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063217691964>.

¹⁴ Ghossoub, Elias, and Nadia El Harake. 2023. "Insights on Female Sex Offenders from the Missouri Registry." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* 51 (4).
<https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.230057-23>.

¹⁵ Vandiver, Donna M., and Jeffery T. Walker. 2002. "Female Sex Offenders: An Overview and Analysis of 40 Cases." *Criminal Justice Review* 27 (2): 284–300.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/073401680202700205>.

¹⁶ Cortoni, Franca , and Theresa Gannon. 2016. "Understanding Female Sexual Offenders." In *Theories of Sexual Offending*, 453–71. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Augarde, Sophie, and Michelle Rydon-Grange. 2021. "Female Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Clinical and Empirical Literature – a 20-Year Update." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 62 (November): 101687. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101687>.; McLeod, David Axlyn. 2015. "Female Offenders in Child Sexual Abuse Cases: A National Picture." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 24 (1): 97–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2015.978925>.

¹⁹ Smith, Jason M., Carl B. Gacono, and Ted B. Cunliffe. 2021. *Understanding Female Offenders : Psychopathy, Criminal Behavior, Assessment, and Treatment*. London, United Kingdom: Academic Press, an imprint of Elsevier.

²⁰ Colson, M.-H., L. Boyer, K. Baumstarck, and A.D. Loundou. 2013. "Female Sex Offenders: A Challenge to Certain Paradigmes. Meta-Analysis." *Sexologies* 22 (4): e109–17.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sexol.2013.05.002>.; Gannon, Theresa A., and Mariamne R. Rose. 2008. "Female Child Sexual Offenders: Towards Integrating Theory and Practice." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13 (6): 442–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2008.07.002>.; Patterson, Tess, Linda Hobbs, Nadine McKillop, and Kelley Burton. 2019. "Disparities in Police Proceedings and Court Sentencing for Females versus Males Who Commit Sexual Offences in New Zealand." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 25 (2): 161–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2019.1581281>.

²¹ Denov, Myriam S. 2001. "A Culture of Denial: Exploring Professional Perspectives on Female Sex Offending." *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 43 (3): 303–29.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cjcrim.43.3.303>.; Ghossoub, *Insights*.

²² Hamilton, Norma. 2021. "Redefining Sex Offenders: The Fight to Break the Bias of Female Sex Offenders." Digital Commons @ Touro Law Center. 2021.
<https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/jrge/vol10/iss1/10>.

-
- ²³ Cortoni, Franca, Kelly M. Babchishin, and Clémence Rat. 2016. "The Proportion of Sexual Offenders Who Are Female Is Higher than Thought." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 44 (2): 145–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854816658923>; Saradjian, Jacqui. 2010. "Understanding the Prevalence of Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse and the Impact of That Abuse on Victims." In *Female Sexual Offenders: Theory, Assessment and Treatment*. Wiley. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470666715.ch2>.
- ²⁴ Embry, Randa, and Phillip M. Lyons. 2012. "Sex-Based Sentencing: Sentencing Discrepancies between Male and Female Sex Offenders." *Feminist Criminology* 7 (2): 146–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085111430214>.
- ²⁵ Denov, *Culture of Denial*.
- ²⁶ Wong, Thessa M. L., and Rens Van de Schoot. 2011. "The Effect of Offenders' Sex on Reporting Crimes to the Police." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27 (7): 1276–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511425245>.
- ²⁷ Gibbs, Benjamin R., and Tusty Ten Bensel. 2021. "Sentencing Females Convicted of Sex Offenses: Examining Measures of Perceived Dangerousness and the Decision to Incarcerate." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 49 (1): 009385482110327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548211032708>; Javaid, Aliraza. 2018. "The Unheard Victims: Gender, Policing and Sexual Violence." *Policing and Society* 30 (4): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1539484>.
- ²⁸ Wong, *The effect of offenders*.
- ²⁹ Walker, Arlene, Kimina Lyall, Dilkie Silva, Georgia Craigie, Richelle Mayshak, Beth Costa, Shannon Hyder, and Ashley Bentley. 2020. "Male Victims of Female-Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence, Help-Seeking, and Reporting Behaviors: A Qualitative Study." *Psychology of Men & Masculinities* 21 (2): 213–23. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000222>.
- ³⁰ Budd, Kristen M., and David M. Bierie. 2017. "Injury Matters: On Female-Perpetrated Sex Crimes." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 35 (19-20): 088626051771117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517711178>.
- ³¹ Hayes, Sharon, and Bethney Baker. 2014. "Female Sex Offenders and Pariah Femininities: Rewriting the Sexual Scripts." *Journal of Criminology* 2014: 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/414525>; Malinen, Sanna, Gwenda M. Willis, and Lucy Johnston. 2014. "Might Informative Media Reporting of Sexual Offending Influence Community Members' Attitudes towards Sex Offenders?" *Psychology, Crime & Law* 20 (6): 535–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316x.2013.793770>; Zarkin, Judith, Miranda Sitney, and Keith Kaufman. 2021. "The Relationship between Policy, Media, and Perceptions of Sexual Offenders between 2007 and 2017: A Review of the Literature." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23 (3): 152483802098556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020985568>.
- ³² Brown, Steven, Jo Deakin, and Jon Spencer. 2008. "What People Think about the Management of Sex Offenders in the Community." *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 47 (3): 259–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2008.00519.x>.
- ³³ Näsi, Matti, Maiju Tanskanen, Janne Kivivuori, Paula Haara, and Esa Reunanen. 2020. "Crime News Consumption and Fear of Violence: The Role of Traditional Media, Social Media, and Alternative Information Sources." *Crime & Delinquency* 67 (4): 574–600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720922539>.
- ³⁴ Lowe, Giulia T., and Gwenda M. Willis. 2021. "Do Popular Attitudinal Scales Perpetuate Negative Attitudes towards Persons Who Have Sexually Offended?" *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 28 (2): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2021.2009050>.

-
- ³⁵ Zack, Emma, John T Lang, and Danielle Dirks. 2016. “‘It Must Be Great Being a Female Pedophile!’: The Nature of Public Perceptions about Female Teacher Sex Offenders.” *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 14 (1): 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659016674044>.
- ³⁶ Christensen, Larissa S. 2017. “The New Portrayal of Female Child Sexual Offenders in the Print Media: A Qualitative Content Analysis.” *Sexuality & Culture* 22 (1): 176–89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-017-9459-1>.
- ³⁷ Brown, *Motivations*.
- ³⁸ Knoche, Victoria A., and Kristan N. Russell. 2019. “Teacher–Student Sexual Relationships: The Role of Age, Gender, and Multiple Victims on Incarceration and Registration Outcomes.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36 (19–20): 088626051986715. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519867152>.
- ³⁹ Malinen, *Might Informative Media*.
- ⁴⁰ Christensen, *The New Portrayal*.
- ⁴¹ Zack, *It must be great*; Ibid
- ⁴² Cohen, Thomas H. 2017. “Automating Risk Assessment Instruments and Reliability.” *Criminology & Public Policy* 16 (1): 271–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12272>.
- ⁴³ Gibbs, *Sentencing Females*.
- ⁴⁴ McLeod, David Axlyn, and Michal Dodd. 2022. “Modernized Female Sex Offender Typologies: Intrapsychic, Behavioral, and Trauma Related Domains.” Edited by Heng Choon (Oliver) Chan. *Cogent Social Sciences* 8 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2085360>.
- ⁴⁵ Denov, Myriam. 2003. “The Myth of Innocence: Sexual Scripts and the Recognition of Child Sexual Abuse by Female Perpetrators.” *Journal of Sex Research* 40 (3): 303–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490309552195>.
- ⁴⁶ Shields, *The gender gap*.
- ⁴⁷ Kernsmith, Poco D., Sarah W. Craun, and Jonathan Foster. 2009. “Public Attitudes toward Sexual Offenders and Sex Offender Registration.” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 18 (3): 290–301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538710902901663>; Zatzkin, *The relationship*.
- ⁴⁸ Zack, *It must be great*.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid
- ⁵⁰ Zgoba, Kristen M., Wesley G. Jennings, and Laura M. Salerno. 2018. “Megan’s Law 20 Years Later: An Empirical Analysis and Policy Review.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 45 (7): 1028–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854818771409>.
- ⁵¹ Lytle, Robert. 2013. “Variation in Criminal Justice Policy-Making.” *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 26 (3): 211–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403413507274>; Zgoba, Kristen M., Michael Miner, Jill Levenson, Raymond Knight, Elizabeth Letourneau, and David Thornton. 2016. “The Adam Walsh Act.” *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 28 (8): 722–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063215569543>.
- ⁵² Mancini, Christina, and Ryan T. Shields. 2014. “Notes on a (Sex Crime) Scandal: The Impact of Media Coverage of Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church on Public Opinion.” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 42 (2): 221–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2013.06.006>.
- ⁵³ Ackerman, Alissa R., Meghan Sacks, and David F. Greenberg. 2012. “Legislation Targeting Sex Offenders: Are Recent Policies Effective in Reducing Rape?” *Justice Quarterly* 29 (6): 858–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2011.566887>; Lytle, *Variation*; Mancini, *Notes*.
- ⁵⁴ King, Laura L. 2016. “Perceptions about Sexual Offenses: Misconceptions, Punitiveness, and Public Sentiment.” *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 30 (2): 254–73.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403416660150>.; Levenson, Jill S., Juanita Baker, and Yolanda Nicole Brannon. 2007. "Myths and Facts about Sex Offenders: Implications for Practice and Public Policy." *Sex Offender Treatment* 2 (1). <https://texasvoices.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/fortneyetalmythsfacts.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Thakker, Jo. 2012. "Public Attitudes to Sex Offenders in New Zealand." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 18 (2): 149–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2010.526245>.

⁵⁶ Mancini, Christina, and Kristen M. Budd. 2015. "Is the Public Convinced That 'Nothing Works?'" *Crime & Delinquency* 62 (6): 777–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128715597693>.

⁵⁷ King, *Perceptions*.

⁵⁸ Zgoba, *Megans Law*.

⁵⁹ Lytle, *Variation*.; Zgoba, *The Adam Walsh Act*.

⁶⁰ Cozby, Paul C, and Scott Bates. 2012. *Methods in Behavioral Research*. New York, Ny: Mcgraw-Hill.; Creswell, John W, and J. David Creswell. 2018. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative & Mixed Methods Approaches*. 6th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

⁶¹ Church, Wesley T., Emily E. Wakeman, Sarah L. Miller, Carl B. Clements, and Fei Sun. 2007. "The Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders Scale: The Development of a Psychometric Assessment Instrument." *Research on Social Work Practice* 18 (3): 251–59.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731507310193>.; Harper, Craig A., and Todd E. Hogue. 2015.

"Measuring Public Perceptions of Sex Offenders: Reimagining the Community Attitudes toward Sex Offenders (CATSO) Scale." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 21 (5): 452–70.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316x.2014.989170>.

⁶² Church, *The Community Attitudes*.

⁶³ Dillman, Don A, Jolene D Smyth, and Leah Melani Christian. 2014. *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys : The Tailored Design Method*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley & Sons.

⁶⁴ "About Northern Virginia | Northern Virginia Regional Commission - Website." 2022. www.novaregion.org. <https://www.novaregion.org/101/About-Northern-Virginia>.

⁶⁵ Creswell, *Research design*.

⁶⁶ Church, *The Community Attitudes*.

⁶⁷ Harper, *Measuring public perceptions*.

⁶⁸ Zgoba, *Megan's Law*.

⁶⁹ Banton, Olivia, and Keon West. 2019. "Gendered Perceptions of Sexual Abuse: Investigating the Effect of Offender, Victim and Observer Gender on the Perceived Seriousness of Child Sexual Abuse." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 29 (3): 1–16.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2019.1663967>.; Rooney, Louise. 2020. "Gendered Perceptions of Child Sexual Abusers: The Paradox of the 'Vulnerable Other.'" *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 36 (4): 559–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986220936099>.

⁷⁰ Friedman, Susan Hatters, Renée M. Sorrentino, Daniel Riordan, and Kerri Eagle. 2023. "Evaluating Female Sex Offenders without Prejudice." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online* 51 (4): 466–74. <https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.230064-23>.