

A Comparison of People with a Sexual Offence and People with a Non-Sexual Offence: Substance Use Patterns, Mental Health Needs, and Concurrent Disorders

Austin Lam¹, MD, Tonia Nicholls^{1,2}, PhD, Amanda Butler³, PhD, Sirui Wu⁴, MA, Maureen Olley⁵, PhD, Leigh Greiner⁵, PhD

¹Department of Psychiatry, UBC, ²BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, ³Faculty of Health Sciences, SFU, ⁴Department of Education and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, UBC, ⁵BC Corrections, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Background

Substance use is common among individuals who have **sexually offended (SO)** and those with **strictly non-sexual offences (NSO)**; e.g., Kirk-Provencher et al., 2022). However, few studies have directly compared substance use needs in SO and NSO groups (Peugh & Belenko, 2001). This paucity of information extends to mental health needs, with or without concurrent substance use.

Objectives

- 1) To describe the SO group across **substance use**, and **sociodemographic, clinical, risk-related variables**;
- 2) **To compare the SO and NSO groups** across the aforementioned domains.

Methods

Sample: New admissions to 9 of total 10 BC provincial correctional centres from January 2009 to September 2017. Women were excluded as few had sexual offences, resulting in a final sample of **41,447 men**, with **4,525 who sexually offended** and **36,922 with strictly non-sexual offences**.

Data Sources:

- Jail Screening Assessment Tool (JSAT; Nicholls et al., 2005)
- BC Corrections Operations Network (CORNET)
- Sentence Data from the BC courts

Measures: The JSAT is a validated structured professional judgment tool that screens for mental health and management needs, completed by trained screeners. CORNET is the primary repository for data relating to an individual’s involvement with BC Corrections.

Results

Individuals with SOs were on average 37.4 years old; the majority were White (57.0%), 32.7% Indigenous; and 52.4% reported having children. Most of the SO group reported some form of family support (81.7%), social support (85.0%), and financial support (51.2%); 9.6% were homeless or unstably housed and 52.8% had at least a high school education. Compared to the NSO group, the SO group was

- Older $t(5347.6)=11.06, p<.001; d=.20$
- More likely to be Indigenous $X^2(1, N=41,447)=285.85, p<.001, V=.08$
- More likely to have children $X^2(1, N=41,447)=6.00, p=.01, V=.01$

Substance Use / Treatment / Mental Health	Individuals who Sexually Offended (SO)	Individuals with Strictly Non-Sexual Offences (NSO)	Cramér’s V; p
Alcohol	1,001 (22.1%)	7,643 (20.7%)	.01; .03
Marijuana	605 (13.4%)	4,836 (13.1%)	.03; <.001
Heroin	104 (2.3%)	3,542 (9.6%)	.10; <.001
Cocaine	296 (6.5%)	4,132 (11.2%)	.06; <.001
Methamphetamine	151 (3.3%)	2,970 (8.0%)	.07; <.001
Past Substance Abuse Treatment	134 (3.0%)	2,373 (6.4%)	.05; <.001
Substance Use Only	1,088 (24.0%)	11,279 (30.6%)	.04; <.001
Mental Health Needs Only	783 (17.3%)	4,209 (11.4%)	.05; <.001
Concurrent Disorders	547 (12.1%)	5,049 (13.7%)	.02; <.001

Mental Health and Risk Needs

Mental Health	SO	NSO	Cramér’s V; p
Mood / Anxiety	756 (16.7%)	5,192 (14.1%)	.15; <.001
Active Psychosis	74 (1.6%)	629 (1.7%)	.00; 1.00
Personality Disorder	126 (2.8%)	929 (2.5%)	.01; =.30
Mental Health Treatment	2,030 (44.9%)	13,605 (36.9%)	.05; <.001

SO group was more likely to demonstrate:

- Violence issues $X^2(1, N=41,447)=219.34, p<.001, V=.08$
- Suicide/Self-Harm issues $X^2(1, N=41,447)=120.04, p<.001, V=.05$

Conclusions

The SO and NSO groups had **distinct histories and needs**. Consistent with prior literature, alcohol and marijuana use were associated with sexual offending, albeit weakly. In contrast, the NSO group was more likely to use heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine. The SO group had more **mood and anxiety disorders** and **mental health treatment histories**. They demonstrated greater primary mental health needs without concurrent substance use. These findings inform prevention and treatment targets.

Future directions: To compare SO with NSO subgroups, e.g., violent offences, general offences.

References

Kirk-Provencher, K. T., Jeglic, E. L., Calkins, C., & Spillane, N. S. (2022). The use of substances in sexual offending in a United States sample. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 29(1), 53-67.

Nicholls, T. L., Roesch, R., Olley, M. C., Ogloff, J. R. P., & Hemphill, J. F. (2005). *Jail Screening Assessment Tool (JSAT): Guidelines for mental health screening in jails*. Burnaby, BC: Mental Health, Law, and Policy Institute, Simon Fraser University.

Peugh, J., & Belenko, S. (2001). Examining the substance use patterns and treatment needs of incarcerated sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 13(3), 179-195.

Funding: Dr. T. Nicholls’ CIHR Foundation Grant

Questions? Email: austinl5@mail.ubc.ca