



## I25 Understanding Sexual Offenders: The Importance of Personality Dimensions

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**Learning Overview:** The goals of this presentation are: (1) to provide attendees with an understanding of how sexual offenders behave, (2) to learn how to describe the personality traits of sexual offenders, and (3) to be better prepared to apprehend sexual offenders through a global approach.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing further knowledge about: (1) violence and sexual violence, (2) understanding and evaluating a sexual offender's personality, and (3) the therapeutic approaches for sexual offenders.

The interest in sexual violence, and especially in the perpetrators, has intensified in recent years. The psychological heterogeneity of sexual offenders remains a major difficulty for therapists and researchers involved in understanding these patients.<sup>2</sup>

Among the factors of sexual offenders described in the literature, personality has been put forward as a factor of vulnerability or protection because it offers a holistic approach (impact on emotional feeling, behavior, and social relationships) while addressing the specific needs of everyone.

This population can be portrayed by studying the personality of sexual offenders from a clinical angle (using standardized clinical scales) and in relationship to normal functioning using the Big Five Inventory (BFI) model or bio-psycho-social models such as Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI).<sup>5-7,10,13</sup>

Compared to non-sexually violent patients, the personality of sexual offenders is marked by: (1) a negative emotional experience—they show a lack of self-confidence, loss of self-esteem and less narcissism, more intense feelings of negative emotions, an increase in the neurotic dimension, and will be more prone to develop mood disorders, rapid mood swings, and depression; (2) strong impact on social skills—they show signs of social stress, a decrease in extraversion and openness, difficulty maintaining appropriate social distance, more avoidant, dependent, passive-aggressive personalities, insensitivity to social cues, lack of cooperation, lack of self-direction, quirks, and the presence of schizoid or paranoid behavior; (3) impact on behavior—unlike non-sexually violent men, sexual offenders show better self-control, low impulsivity, drug addiction, presence of obsessive traits, less use of excess violence during assaults, and less sadism or anti-sociality.<sup>1-4,8-10,12,14,15</sup> They exhibit novelty-seeking that can lead to substance abuse.<sup>15</sup>

This study will be presented in two forms: a literature review dealing with the personality of sexual offenders and a presentation of the results of a preliminary study conducted with 30 French sexual offenders and 30 non-sexually violent offenders, assessed with the BFI.<sup>11</sup> The goal is to provide a global picture of the personality dimensions of sexual offenders, specific profiles of subgroups of sexual offenders (extra- or intra-familial, abusers of adults or children, hands-on or hands-off offenders), explanatory perspectives, and implications for therapy.

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### Personality, Sexual Offenders, Violence

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