

The Neuropsychology of Sex Offenders

A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Typically, neuropsychological studies of sex offenders have grouped together different types of individuals and different types of measures. This is why results have tended to be nonspecific and divergent across studies. Against this background, the authors undertook a review of the literature regarding the neuropsychology of sex offenders, taking into account subgroups based on criminological theories. They also conducted a meta-analysis of the data to demonstrate the cognitive heterogeneity of sex offenders statistically. Their main objective was to test the hypothesis to the effect that the neuropsychological deficits of sex offenders are not broad and generalized compared with specific subgroups of participants based on specific measures. In all, 23 neuropsychological studies reporting data on 1,756 participants were taken into consideration. As expected, a highly significant, broad, and heterogeneous overall effect size was found. Taking subgroups of participants and specific cognitive measures into account significantly improved homogeneity. Sex offenders against children tended to obtain lower scores than did sex offenders against adults on higher order executive functions, whereas sex offenders against adults tended to obtain results similar to those of non-sex offenders, with lower scores in verbal fluency and inhibition. However, it is concluded that neuropsychological data on sex offenders are still too scarce to confirm these trends or to test more precise hypotheses. For greater clinical relevance, future neuropsychological studies should consider specific subgroups of participants and measures to verify the presence of different cognitive profiles.