

## **Sex Offenses: A Short Questionnaire Assessing Knowledge and Attitudes**

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Within the last decade there has been increased concern about the occurrence of sex offenses within our society. Rape is the offense most talked and written about, but there is also renewed interest in exhibitionism, voyeurism, prostitution and incest. Medical, legal and other professional groups, as well as the general public are focusing increased attention on the issue. They are asking for information in the form of lectures, discussion sessions and seminars, and are forming attitudes that will shape treatment and policy in the future.

Traditionally, sex offenses are poorly understood and the literature is replete with myths and unsubstantiated opinions. Since 1970, however, a number of books and articles have been published, reporting research and clinical observations, which have begun to replace opinion with fact. Information from many of these sources was reviewed for this article, and used as the basis for developing a documented true-false questionnaire about sex offenses. The questionnaire is designed to be used as an assessment instrument and stimulus for discussion groups.

Thirty-five true/false statements are presented, thirty of which are based on documented findings in scientific literature and five of which are statements of opinion. These five opinion statements are placed at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire with documented answers can be found in the Appendix. Questions 1-30 can be scored easily. The key to scoring can be found in the Appendix following documentation of the correct answers. The reader may wish to test her/his knowledge before checking these answers.

### **Method**

Two forms of the questionnaire were developed. Form 1 is the questionnaire reproduced in the Appendix. Form 2 consisted of the statements identical to Form 1 except that the direction (*i.e.*, true or false) was reversed. For example, question number 1 in Form 2 read, "Rape is not a crime punishable by death." The questionnaire was originally used in a criminal law course for first year law students

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(n=122). Form 1 was given to the students prior to instruction and distribution of reading materials. Form 2 was given at the completion of the course.

The questionnaire was therefore used to: (1) assess the initial knowledge about and attitudes toward sex offenses; (2) stimulate interest in the course material; and (3) assess acquisition of knowledge and changes in attitudes following didactic presentations, assigned readings and class discussion. No grades were based on the results of the questionnaire and students participated voluntarily. 122 students completed both forms of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also administered to a group of physicians at a community hospital (n=11) and the staff of a community mental health center made up of psychologists, social workers, and paraprofessionals (n=15). Each time, the purpose was to provide the groups with a self-assessment of their knowledge of sex offenses and to stimulate interest and discussion in formal presentations that followed.

### Results and Discussion

There are several possible uses for the Sex Offenses Questionnaire. In all three groups to which the questionnaire was administered, it served as a stimulus for discussion and clarification of misconceptions about the topic. Many of the questions are controversial and members of each group spontaneously asked about certain questions. In turn, other issues were raised about sex offenses, offenders, and victims that were not specifically covered in the questionnaire.

A second use was to measure the group's current knowledge and identify those areas where group knowledge was deficient. Table 1 presents the mean knowledge scores for the three groups tested. Each group answered approximately two-thirds of the questions correctly. Though the first year law students cannot be considered typical of the general population, one would expect professionals who have an increased likelihood of encountering either sex offenders or victims to be more knowledgeable than beginning students. Therefore, the questionnaire demonstrates a deficiency in knowledge in each group, confirming the beliefs of the investigators that recent advances in the understanding of sex offenses have not been transmitted to the general public nor to professionals.

Although the overall mean scores for each group do not vary significantly, areas of deficit did vary. The mental health center group did not score as well on items about frequency data, *i.e.*, the who, when, and where questions. Physicians demonstrated a better knowledge of frequency data, but had less knowledge about the connections of drugs, alcohol, prostitution, and mental retardation with sex offenses. No specific trends were noted in the law student group.

The percentage of all subjects (n=146) who answered each statement incorrectly can be seen in Table 2. Frequent misconceptions about

whether most rapes are planned, the role of victim precipitation in rape, past criminal behavior in rapists, the victim's resistance, the incidence of gang rape, the role of alcohol, and the subject of incest were noted.

The percentage of each group who answered "true" to the attitude questions is presented in Table 3. Attitudes in no way correlated with scores on the knowledge section of the questionnaire. Only one item, "A woman cannot be raped against her will" showed a marked tendency to be answered uniformly by all members of the group. Attitudes about sex offenses showed definite discrepancy among the professional groups surveyed. How these attitudes affect the behavior of a professional toward a sex offender or victim remains to be answered, but lack of a consistent approach by professionals would be expected.

The questionnaire was also used to measure the effects of lectures and course materials with the law students. Pre- and post-course scores were compared. The total knowledge score increased by an average of five points, a modest but definite increase. The post-test, as stated previously, consisted of Form 2 of the questionnaire. It should be noted that the didactic presentations in the course were limited to four one-hour lecture-discussion groups with supplemental readings. Attitude scores did not change significantly following the instructional period.

The investigators believe that the questionnaire, when self-administered and corrected, together with the documented answers and reference list, can provide a useful background for both formal coursework and informal lecture-seminar series. It should be administered to other populations, especially larger groups of physicians and mental health workers, lawyers in practice and members of the general public to obtain better normative data.

### **Appendix**

#### **Sex Offenses Questionnaire**

*Instructions:* Circle the answer (T=True; F=False) you think is correct. Questions 31-35 assess only your attitude as there is no documented correct answer to these questions.

- T F 1. Rape is a crime punishable by death.
- T F 2. When rape occurs, the rapist and the victim are usually of the same race.
- T F 3. Rape is a seasonal crime with most rapes occurring in the fall of the year.
- T F 4. Most rapists use some form of physical force or display of weapons to achieve their goal.
- T F 5. Rape is the only violent crime that occurs more frequently among the rich than among the poor.
- T F 6. Most rapes are planned events.
- T F 7. Most rapes occur in open spaces such as alleys, parks and poorly lighted streets.
- T F 8. Rapists seldom murder their victims.
- T F 9. More whites than blacks have been executed following

- conviction for rape.
- T F 10. Rape seldom occurs after a woman agrees to sexual realtions and then changes her mind.
- T F 11. More than 10% of rape victims are prostitutes.
- T F 12. Rapists are often involved in other crimes before committing rape.
- T F 13. Raping a woman is often the first sexual experience for the rapist.
- T F 14. Less than 20% of reported rapes lead to convictions.
- T F 15. Sex offenders characteristically are of low intelligence.
- T F 16. In most cases the rape victim does not actively resist the rapist.
- T F 17. Rapists can be physically distinguished from other men.
- T F 18. Most rapists are less than 25 years of age.
- T F 19. Rape is actually more common on weekdays than on weekends.
- T F 20. The rapist is usually more violent if he has been drinking.
- T F 21. Less than 10% of rapes are gang rapes.
- T F 22. Use of hard drugs is seldom associated with rape.
- T F 23. Alcohol is a factor in over 60% of all reported rape cases.
- T F 24. Exhibitionism — the exposure of genitals to someone of the opposite sex in public — is usually not associated with physical violence.
- T F 25. The exhibitionist is seldom arrested again for the same crime.
- T F 26. The pedophile — one who is sexually attracted to children — often drinks and has a berating wife.
- T F 27. Incest is slightly more common between mothers and sons than between other pairs within the family.
- T F 28. Incest may help to keep a family together.
- T F 29. Mentally retarded adults frequently have a hyperactive sex drive.
- T F 30. Neurologic problems — brain tumors, strokes, and other diseases of the nervous system — can cause people to show abnormal or inappropriate sexual behavior.
- T F 31. An attitude of sexual permissiveness in society contributes to an increase in rape.
- T F 32. A woman cannot be raped against her will.
- T F 33. Children who are victims of sex offenders play little or no part in provoking the offense.
- T F 34. Prostitution is a victimless crime.
- T F 35. Looking at pornographic material leads to committing sex offenses.

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## Documentation to Questionnaire

1. Rape is no longer punishable by the death penalty. The Supreme Court has ruled that the death penalty is unconstitutional for this crime.
2. Contrary to the common misconception that negro men are more likely to attack white females, rape is generally an intraracial event. (Negro men are more likely to rape negro women and whites are more likely to rape whites. (Amir, 1977))<sup>1</sup>
3. Rape occurs year round, although there is a slight increase in the number of rapes committed during the summer months. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>
4. Most rapists do use some form of physical force or display of weapon in threatening the victim. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>
5. The majority of rapists who have been studied, regardless of race, tend to be poorly educated and have low status occupations. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>
6. Based on descriptions of the rape by offenders and victims, more than 70% of rapes were found to be planned events. This is contrary to the popular belief that rape is a spontaneous, explosive act. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>
7. A number of investigators have considered the location of rapes. Although figures vary, most studies suggest that the highest percentage of rapes occur in the victim's residence. A significant percentage occur in cars. This is contrary to the popular belief that, unless a woman is walking alone outside, she is protected against rape. (Brownmiller,<sup>2</sup> 1975; Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>
8. Rapists seldom murder their victims. Less than 2% of all murders involve rape and the number of reported rapes greatly exceeds the number of murders involving rape. (Brownmiller, 1975)<sup>2</sup>
9. During the period 1930-1968, 455 of the more than 3,300 men executed in the U.S. were charged with rape. Of these, 405 were negroes, 40 were white and 2 were of other races. (Macdonald, 1971)<sup>3</sup>
10. Victim precipitation for the crime of forcible rape, as defined by the National Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, occurs when the victim agrees to sexual relations but retracts before the actual act or when she invites sexual relations through language, gestures, etc. Victim precipitation was found to account for only 4.4% of reported rapes. This was less than with any of the other so-called crimes of violence (homicide, assault, armed robbery, unarmed robbery). (Brownmiller, 1975)<sup>2</sup>
11. Less than 2% of rape victims were found to be prostitutes in a study by the Memphis Police Department in 1973. This data does not uphold the belief that many rape victims are prostitutes who say they are raped when they aren't paid. (Brownmiller, 1975)<sup>2</sup>
12. 70% of confessed or convicted rapists have a prior arrest record. More than 85% go on to commit other crimes. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>
13. Raping a woman is rarely the first sexual encounter for the rapist.

Rapists frequently give a history of previous sexual perversion. Most experience their first heterosexual intercourse before late adolescence, while the first rape usually occurs in late adolescence or early adulthood. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>

14. According to F.B.I. Uniform Crime Statistics, only about 16% of reported rapes lead to conviction. At least 15% of reported rapes are thought by the police to be unfounded. In less than 50% of the remaining cases is a suspect apprehended. An even smaller number are prosecuted. Almost half of those prosecuted are acquitted. (Brownmiller, 1975)<sup>2</sup>

15. Although a number of studies have considered the intelligence of sex offenders, there is not sufficient evidence to generalize about the intelligence level. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>

16. More than half of rape victims do not actively resist the rapist. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

17. No studies have substantiated that rapists can be distinguished from other men on the basis of physical appearance. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>

18. More than half of all rapists are less than 25 years old. The median age is approximately 23. (Brownmiller,<sup>2</sup> 1975; Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

19. The highest number of rapes occur on weekends. More specifically, they occur from Friday night to Saturday night. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

20. Alcohol intake of the offender is strongly related to the amount of violence used in the rape. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

21. Pair or group rape — there is more than one assailant — occurs more commonly than popularly believed. Amir found that 43% of the victims in his Philadelphia study had 2 or more assailants. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

22. There is no data substantiating an association between use of hard drugs and rape. (Rada, 1978)<sup>4</sup>

23. Alcohol appears to be a factor in about one-third of all reported rapes. (Amir, 1977)<sup>1</sup>

24. Exhibitionism is rarely associated with violence. (Sadoff in Freedman, Kaplan and Sadock, 1975)<sup>7</sup>

25. The exhibitionist is the most recidivistic of sex offenders. (Sadoff, 1975)<sup>8</sup>

26. The pedophile often feels impotent and unable to perform adequately with an adult female. When denied sexual relations or put down by his wife he often begins drinking and subsequently attempts to achieve sexual gratification through his attraction to children. (Sadoff, 1975)<sup>7</sup>

27. Incest occurs most commonly between father and daughter. (Henderson, 1975)<sup>9</sup>

28. It is thought by many that incest within a family may serve to protect and maintain a dysfunctional family structure. (Lustig, *et al.*, 1966)<sup>11</sup>

29. The degree of mental retardation appears to correlate with delayed sexual development. Consequently, mentally retarded adults

may have a decreased sex drive rather than a hyperactive one. (Roberts and Clayton, 1969)<sup>5</sup>

30. Structural pathology of the brain can be associated with loss of social control, with sexual behavior occurring at inappropriate times and under inappropriate circumstances. (Small and Small, 1975)<sup>10</sup>

The correct answer to each odd-numbered question (*e.g.*, 1, 3) is false and each even-numbered question (*e.g.*, 2, 4) is correctly answered true.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF KNOWLEDGE SCORES

|                            | n   | Mean Score<br>(max.=30) |
|----------------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| Law Students               | 122 | 19.43                   |
| Physicians                 | 11  | 20.18                   |
| Mental Health Center Staff | 15  | 19.86                   |

TABLE 2  
PERCENT ERRORS FOR ALL SUBJECTS (n=146) FOR EACH ITEM

| Question # | % Errors |
|------------|----------|
| 1          | 42       |
| 2          | 18       |
| 3          | 9        |
| 4          | 16       |
| 5          | 9        |
| 6          | 64       |
| 7          | 40       |
| 8          | 33       |
| 9          | 14       |
| 10         | 72       |
| 11         | 44       |
| 12         | 63       |
| 13         | 14       |
| 14         | 4        |
| 15         | 24       |
| 16         | 65       |
| 17         | 1        |
| 18         | 45       |
| 19         | 46       |
| 20         | 34       |
| 21         | 79       |
| 22         | 21       |
| 23         | 55       |
| 24         | 6        |
| 25         | 7        |
| 26         | 55       |
| 27         | 18       |
| 28         | 87       |
| 29         | 16       |
| 30         | 26       |

TABLE 3  
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO ATTITUDE QUESTIONS  
(% OF SUBJECTS IN EACH GROUP AGREEING WITH THE STATEMENT)

| Question #<br>and Answer | Law Students                              | Physicians | Mental Health Staff |
|--------------------------|---|------------|---------------------|
|                          | (% in Each Group Answering True or False) |            |                     |
| 31 True                  | 25  | 36         | 20                  |
| 32 True                  | 5   | 9          | 0                   |
| 33 True                  | 83  | 73         | 87                  |
| 34 True                  | 50  | 27         | 33                  |
| 35 True                  | 22  | 36         | 13                  |

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