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**Author(s):** Irma Kovco Vukadin, Renata Bilokapic and Tajana Ljubin

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IRMA KOVČO VUKADIN, RENATA BILOKAPIĆ, TAJANA LJUBIN

## SEX CRIMES' FEATURES REGARDING THE VICTIMS' AGE: CROATIAN PERSPECTIVE

*Sex crimes are traditional crimes still quite burdened with many myths regarding offenders and victims. Criminological researches from past few decades brought a great light into this area and thus revealed variety of problems. Sex crimes against children are extensively researched topic because of the consequences and possible preventive value.*

*The aim of this paper was to get a general insight into sexual delinquency in Croatia and to find out if there are some differences in crime features regarding the victims' age. Data were collected from personal files of 201 male prisoners who served their prison sentence for sex crime (rape, sexual intercourse with a child, lewd acts) in a state prison Lepoglava from 1980 till 2000. General data support current international knowledge on sex crimes. Out of 16 analysed variables, chi – square test showed significant differences in 8 variables between the offenders who victimized victims of different age: perpetrators' age, drinking patterns, crime status, crime modality, how many offenders committed a crime, victims' resistance, victims' injuries, perpetrators' confession for a crime.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual delinquency is very broad domain that covers different forms of sexual victimization. However, illegal sexual intercourses have got a great attention just a few decades ago, when modern society was mature enough to recognise that very often this kind of delinquency include children – both as a victims and as a perpetrators. Stereotype about sexual crime mostly regards adult female as a victim and an adult male as a perpetrator, with sexual consent being usually questioned, due to intimacy of sexuality and due to some rape and sexual myths that still exist in societies, no matter how modern they are. These stereotypes are not only held by lay people, but are also often held by state representatives who are members of the same society – police officers, prosecutors, judges and the others who are suppose to help victims in their pursue of justice. On the other hand, child sexual victimization is a topic that every society wants to address with due respect – although firstly often ignoring the problem, society then recognize the problem and demand severe punishments for the perpetrators. Nowadays, child sexual victimization is a "big issue" in many modern societies and even becomes political issue. Governments passes the laws based on public demands coming from concrete cases. However, public knowledge that stands behind some demands for legal and practical changes on this issue is quite often insufficient and therefore questionable, and data based on researches and involvement of professionals are often left out or ignored. To overcome this the decision-making process should include more data based knowledge.

Current knowledge gives support for the claims that sexual delinquency is a very heterogeneous field and that many differences exist between the different types of victimization (serial rapes, adult rapes, child sex abuse etc.). The most researched type in a few last decades has been child sexual victimization. Some national cases got international attention and contributed to the urge for bringing more light into this area. Especially, pedophilia is very exploited term in the newspaper. Newspaper reports very

often feed the old myths about this kind of perpetrators – picturing him as a disturbed stranger. Societies very slowly learn that risk for a child doesn't come from a strange, old man, but usually from a relative, a babysitter or an acquaintance. It could be said that the picture that we all have both about general sexual victimization and the specific forms of sexual victimization as well, is still very distorted. That's why more researches and far more public compains are needed, not just to protect children's sexual integrity, but everyone's.

If we talk from Croatian perspective, we can observe that sexual victimization is still dominantly a part of females' NGO general "battle" against female discrimination. The state agencies recognize the problem, but very slowly, and need constant support. There are just few researches on this topic, and they are very selective in terms of researched problems. There were some cases that got great publicity and lived for a period of several days in public discussion. This fact speaks for itself. However, if we want to get an objective picture on how interested one society is in sexual victimization problem, we should analyse how many professionals are in this field, what kind of formal help is offered to victims and what programs for offenders (asides from sanctions) one society have, or speaking in economic terms – how much money a society is willing to spend on this problem. In this study we wanted to get a general insight into sexual delinquency in Croatia with a specific goal – to test if there are some differences in some criminological features of sex crime regarding the victims' age.

## **METHOD**

### **SAMPLE**

Data were obtained from personal files of 201 males who served their prison sentence for sex crime (rape, sexual intercourse with a child, lewd act) in a state prison Lepoglava from 1980 till 2000.

### **MEASURES**

We used questionnaire that was created for scientific research called "Criminological features of violent crime offenders". For the purpose of this paper we used 17 variables (perpetrators' age, previous convictions for sex crime, alcohol consumption, crime localisation, crime status, crime modality, one or more perpetrators, crime committed more times, victim overtly abused, victim humiliation, victims' resistance, victims' injuries, victims' gender, victims' alcohol intoxication, perpetrators' alcohol intoxication, victim – offender previous relationship, perpetrators' confession of the crime).

### **PROCEDURE**

Specially educated prison personnel completed questionnaires based on data in inmates personal file (contain all relevant information about crime, perpetrator, victim, criminal procedure, sentence, diagnostic results from Center for psycho-social diagnostic and inmates behavior in prison). Data were processes with the SPSS. For the purpose of this paper we calculated descriptive statistics and chi square to test differences between perpetrators regarding victims' age (1. child -up to 14; 2. juveniles – 14-18; 3. younger adults – 18-21; 4. 22-30; 5. 30 and more).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When we talk about age of sexual offenders, we usually think of adult males. However, recent researches suggest that sexual delinquency is very heterogeneous field in terms of perpetrators features, and therefore more specific researches are required. Juvenile perpetrators also contribute in this type of crime. British Home Office present data on significant number of perpetrators aged up to 14 (Home Office, 1992; according: Komušar, 1998).

According to Australian Institute for criminology (2002) the peak age of male sexual offenders is 15 to 24 years, juveniles are less likely than adults to commit sexual assaults. Juvenile ratio in sexual crimes is stable from 1995 - 8%. Hunter (2000) states that juveniles account for 1/5 of all forcible rapes and 1/2 of child sex abuse per year in America. The dominant age group of perpetrators varies on different type of crime. Child sexual abuse is usually connected with slightly older age of the perpetrator (Hunter, 2000; Burger, Reiter, 1993; Finkelhor, 1986).

The peak age of perpetrator in this sample was between 31-40 (32,3%). There is a difference in perpetrators' age regarding to victims' age (Table 1). Younger adults contributed with 7% in complete sample and mostly victimized persons older than 30 years. Perpetrators older than 30 years relatively more frequently in comparison with younger offenders victimized children. Children are most likely to be victimized by offenders aged between 51-60 years. This results are in line with previously mentioned studies.

According to Lievore (2004), a number of studies report sexual recidivism rates below 10% and relatively few are higher than 20%. Also, he finds results across studies often inconsistent, with some reporting higher recidivism rates among rapists than child molesters, or vice versa. Hanson and Bussiere (1998) present a meta analysis of 61 recidivism studies with over 23.000 subjects from six countries which did not support the popular view that sexual offenders always commit further sex crimes. On average, just over 13 per cent of sex offenders were known to have recidivated sexually, with rapists showing higher rates of sexual, violent and general recidivism than child molesters. Lievore (2004) summaries results from different studies in a following way:

- rates of sexual recidivism are low relative to other offence types. Most sex offenders are not reconvicted or re-imprisoned for sex crimes, although a sizeable group continues a general criminal career;
- there is considerable continuity between sexual and violent offending, particularly among rapists, many of whom have extensive general criminal histories;
- subgroups of sex offenders recidivate at different rates. In general, incest offenders are least likely to re-offend and extra-familial child molesters are most likely to be reconvicted;
- sexual recidivists often specialise in their choice of victims or behaviours and the likelihood of reoffending is contingent to some extent upon the offender's particular sexual criminal career;
- while most sex offenders recidivate within two or three years of release from prison, the risk of sexual recidivism remains long after.

Results of this study showed that only 14,4% of sexual offenders had previous convictions for sex crimes. Those having history of previous sexual convictions did not differ in choosing victims of specific age in comparison to those with no previous convictions.

Excessive drinking or alcohol addiction is often associated with sexual crimes for several reasons (e.g. it increases sexual arousal, reduces inhibition etc.). Greenberg et al. (2002) found that 81% of rapists had history of substance abuse, and 37% were in-

toxicated while committing crime. Not just that effect of alcohol consumption had consequences, but there is also the role of alcohol expectancies among victims and perpetrators (Corbin, Bernad, Calhoun, McNair, Seals, 2001).

In analysed sample we found that 58,2% had no record of alcohol abuse, while 32,8% were excessive drinkers and 9,0% were addicts. Alcohol consumption was related to victim's age (Table 1). Offenders showing excessive drinking or alcohol addiction were more likely to choose older victims (older than 30 years).

Sex crimes are frequently regarded as an urban crime (Singer, Kovčo Vukadin, Cajner Mraović, 2002). To test whether the age of victim is associated with the type of area where the crime was committed, we categorized the crime location in 5 categories (from Zagreb as the most urban area and village as the least urban area). There was no difference in victims' age groups by different crime location.

However, several other criminological variables showed there is a difference in the way the crime was committed in relation to the age of the victim. The crime was more frequently completed when a victim was a child. Also, threat (without physical force) was used more often with children, in comparison with other age groups of victims.

There are some crime features that increase the severity of psychological trauma and present aggravated circumstances in terms of sentencing. Those are – crime committed by more than one perpetrator, crime committed more times, abusing and /or humiliating of victim and causing injuries. In this sample 16,4% of the crimes were committed by more than one perpetrator. These types of crimes were more frequently committed with a victim aged between 14 – 30 years, and less frequently with a victim aged less than 14 years or more than 30 years. Victim's age was not related to the abuse or humiliation of the victim, but was related to victim's resistance and victim's injuries. As expected, resistance of the victim increased with the victim's age, especially using of both yelling and physical resistance. High resistance is associated with the older victim's age. Almost half of the victims (43.3%) had no injuries, 48,3% had mild injuries, 3% of the victims had serious injuries and 5,5% had mild and serious injuries. There was an association between level of injuries and victim's age. Serious injuries were found only in younger adult group (66,7%) and in juvenile group (33.3%).

Regarding the gender of the victim, Hunter (2000) states that juveniles who sexually offend against peers or adults predominantly assault females. Craissati and McClurg (1996) in a sample of child sexual abuse perpetrators also found that 63% were female. Lievore (2004) gave results of one Australian research using sample of 629 persons who were apprehended for sexual assault in 2001, showing that almost 87% of the victims were females. In our study, the majority of the victims were females (96,5%), regardless of the age of the victim.

At the moment of the crime, only 5% of the victims were intoxicated, while in perpetrators 40,8% of them were intoxicated. A tendency shows that intoxicated perpetrators choose older victims.

The majority of the offenders did not confess their crime (60,2%), while only 17,9% confessed completely. Those who confessed (either completely or partially) were more frequently found in sexual crimes against older victims (aged more than 30) than in crimes against juveniles. As expected, a confession is more likely to be made in the case when a victim is an adult and not a child, due to the stigmatisation of child sexual offenders. However, the significant number of those who victimized children confes-

sed their crime. Based on this data we can not conclude about the reasons underlying this result. It may be that they confessed but did not feel responsible for the crime (using rationalization, like alcohol intoxication, or projection, like victim's provocation and/or their misperception of victim's willingness to sexual activity).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to get insight into some features of sex crime in Croatia and to test if there are some differences in analysed features regarding the victims' age. General results can be put in a following profile:

- victims were dominantly older then 30 years (23,9%) although children (up to 14) and juveniles (14 to 18) together participate in 34,8%;
- perpetrators' dominant age group was from 31 to 40 (32,3%);
- 14,4% of the perpetrators were previously convicted for sex crime;
- 41,8% of the perpetrators had some drinking problem (excessive drinking or addiction);
- crimes were mostly committed in Zagreb;
- the majority of the offences (79,1%) were completed;
- in a large amount of cases (55,7%) perpetrator used threat and physical force toward the victim;
- 16,4% of the cases included more then one perpetrator;
- in 22,4% of the cases the victim was victimized more then once;
- victim was excessively abused in 27,4% of the cases;
- victim was humiliated in 28,4% of the cases;
- victim yelled and physically resisted to the perpetrator in 52,2% of the cases;
- the majority of the victims got mild injuries;
- victims were dominantly female (96,5%);
- victims weren't intoxicated during victimization (95%);
- perpetrators were intoxicated in 40,8% of the cases;
- the majority of the perpetrators confessed a crime.

Statistically significant differences were found in 8 analysed features. Results from this study are in line with current knowledge on sex delinquency. There are some limitations of this study. The sample was selective (prison based) and we used secondary data (data from inmates' personal files).

Finally we can say that these results support need for more specific research on sexual victimization in Croatia in general and specifically regarding the victims' age if we are interested in sexual victimization prevention.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Irma Kovčo Vukadin**, Ph. D. Assistant Professor, Vice Dean at the Police College in Zagreb, Croatia. She lectures Criminology, Penology and Social Pathology.

**Renata Bilokapić**, MA, police officer, Unit for juvenile crime prevention, Ministry of Interior, Zagreb, Croatia.

**Tajana Ljubin**, Ph. D. Assistant Professor, Vice Dean at the Police College in Zagreb, Croatia. She lectures Forensic Psychology, Social Psychology and Research Methodology.

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**Table 1: Difference in perpetrators' age in relation to victims' age**

Victim's age		All		>14	14-17	18-21	22-30	30 >	chi square	d.f.	p
		N	%								
Perpetrator's age	All	201	100								
	18-21	14	7.0	7.1	28.6	7.1	-	57.1			
	22-25	34	16.9	2.9	32.4	26.5	29.4	8.8			
	26-30	55	27.4	9.1	16.4	23.6	25.5	25.5	48.19	20	.000
	31-40	65	32.3	18.5	18.5	21.5	20.0	21.5			
	41-50	26	12.9	34.6	7.7	11.5	23.1	23.1			
Previous conviction for sexual crime	no	172	85.6	15.7	20.3	19.8	22.1	22.1	7.41	8	.493
	yes	29	14.4	17.2	10.3	20.7	17.2	34.5			
alcohol consumption	no										
	excessive addiction	66		15.2	12.1	15.2	22.7	34.8	20.02	8	.010
crimelocalization	Zagreb	63	31.3	12.7	17.5	25.4	31.7	12.7			
	Other county	21	10.4	19.0	28.6	19.0	9.5	23.8			
	town	27	13.4	33.3	14.8	22.2	7.4	22.2	24.83	16	.073
	city	32	15.9	9.4	21.9	18.8	25.0	25.0			
	village	58	28.9	13.8	17.2	13.8	19.0	36.2			
crime status	attempted	42	20.9	2.4	11.9	31.0	19.0	35.7			
	completed	159	79.1	19.5	20.8	17.0	22.0	20.8	13.99	4	.007
crimemodality	force	80	39.8	13.8	22.5	15.0	17.5	31.3			
	threat	9	4.5	77.8	-	22.2	-	-	34.65	8	.000
	both	112	55.7	12.5	17.9	23.2	25.9	20.5			
more perpetrators	no	168	83.6	17.3	17.9	17.9	19.6	27.4			
	yes	33	16.4	9.1	24.2	30.3	30.3	6.1	10.61	4	.031
more times	no	156	77.6	12.8	17.9	21.8	21.8	25.6			
	yes	45	22.4	26.7	22.2	13.3	20.0	17.8	6.76	4	.149
victim abused	no	146	72.6	17.1	19.2	21.2	19.9	22.6			
	yes	55	27.4	12.7	18.2	16.4	25.5	27.3	1.93	4	.749
victim humiliated	no	144	71.6	18.1	18.1	19.4	20.1	24.3			
	yes	57	28.4	10.5	21.1	21.1	24.6	22.8	2.11	4	.715
victims' resistance	no	38	18.9	47.4	5.3	18.4	13.2	15.8			
	yelling	13	6.5	15.4	46.2	23.1	-	15.4			
	Physical resistance	45	22.4	8.9	20.0	22.2	24.4	24.4	45.91	12	.000
	Both	105	52.2	7.6	20.0	19.0	25.7	27.6			
victims' injuries	No	87	43.3	16.1	14.9	24.1	25.3	19.5			
	Mild	97	48.3	16.5	22.7	15.5	18.6	26.8	21.27	12	.047
	serious	6	3.0	-	33.3	66.7	-	-			
	Both	11	5.5	18.2	9.1	-	27.3	45.5			
victim's gender	M	7	3.5	28.6	28.6	-	-	42.9			
	F	194	96.5	15.5	18.6	20.6	22.2	23.2	5.18	4	.270
victim's alcohol intoxication	No	191	95.0	16.8	18.8	20.4	21.5	22.5			
	Yes	10	5.0	-	20.0	10.0	20.0	50.0	5.22	4	.266
perpetrator's alcohol intoxication	No	119	59.2	19.3	21.0	21.0	21.8	16.8			
	yes	82	40.8	11.0	15.9	18.3	20.7	34.1	9.13	4	.058
v-p previous relation	yes	30	14.9	13.3	36.7	16.7	26.7	6.7			
	stranger	73	36.3	12.3	20.5	26.0	26.0	15.1	4.19	4	.380
Perpetrator confesses	yes	36	17.9	27.8	8.3	16.7	19.4	27.8			
	partially	44	21.9	6.8	11.4	29.5	18.2	34.1	17.59	8	.025
	no	121	60.2	15.7	24.8	17.4	23.1	19.0			