FACT SHEET: VIOLENT OFFENDERS
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Violent offenders

Violent offenders are individuals who are incarcerated due to any criminal charge for a violent offence against another individual—including assault, assault causing bodily harm, wounding, attempted homicide, homicide, kidnapping, forcible confinement, armed robbery and all ‘hands-on’ sexual offences. Although they are significantly different from other sub-groups of offenders (i.e. non-violent or sexual offenders) in terms of personality characteristics, psychopathology and reconviction rates, they cannot be considered a homogenous group. Violent offenders score significantly higher on the hostility, depression, tension, psychopathic, impulsivity, and aggression (when measured by the SHAPS Special Hospitals Assessment of Personality and Socialization) compared to other type of offenders. They are more likely to have a history of substance abuse, express suicidal or homicidal ideation, have a history of employment problems and exhibit a personality disorder (most commonly ASPD). In addition, violent offenders display a significant cognitive distortion (such as errors of thinking or significantly poorer moral value judgments) and structural and functional abnormalities in the frontal lobe.

Recidivism rate

Factors that are taken into consideration when predicting recidivism among violent offenders are considered to be very similar to those of a sexual kind. The strongest predictors are:
- juvenile delinquency
- antisocial personality
- age
- prior criminal history
- minority race
- substance abuse

However, personal distress and low intelligence take little effect on violent offenders in the terms of recidivism rate prediction and risk. According to the U.S Bureau of Justice Statistics reconviction rates did not change significantly between the years 1983 and 1994 and remained stable for this type of offence. However, the number of violent offenders who committed a crime again changed from 39% to 74% (35% raise) in the period of next 10 years so it is the highest rate of reconviction among all type of offenders (general offenders - 18% raise and sexual ones – 17% raise).

Treatment opportunities

There are many types of treatment that are used on violent offenders. There are few treatment approaches that may be used regardless of a type of committed offence, and specific ones addressed to a specific type of offending such as family violence or sex offending. The main ones are:
- cognitive-behavioral approach (impulse control, problem solving, conflict resolution);
- cognitive self-change programs (challenging criminal thinking, i.e. pro-criminal beliefs and anti-social attitudes);
- anger management programs (anger control, relaxation and social skills training, substance abuse education);
- multi-model program (focus on a wide range of offender’s specific needs)

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Additionally, according to the latest reviews, anger management methods reduce violence among participants but not offending. Furthermore, it is less effective than multiple models that reduce both violent (7-8%) and non-violent (8-11%) reoffending rates. It was also found that noncompleters of treatments are more likely to commit a crime again in comparison to the ones who completed it. Moreover, higher risk clients are more likely to commit an offence again so correctional interventions should be more focused on them as recidivism reduction might be more effective then. Interventions consisting of longer sessions and durations are also more advisable as they are proven to give more influential and permanent treatment

Psychopathy and violent crime

outcomes. Psychopathy is a severe personality disorder characterized by a lack of remorse, guilt and empathy. Moreover, a psychopathic individual is behaviorally impulsive and irresponsible and is at risk of displaying extreme antisocial behaviors including elevated levels of both reactive and instrumental aggression. As it is shown in multiple studies, 5 – 35% of incarcerated individuals are psychopaths, and, furthermore, as outlined by Hare: "They commit more than twice as many violent and aggressive acts, both in and out of prison, as do other criminals". Psychopathy is a well-documented predictor of violent criminal behavior among various offender groups (male, female and juvenile offenders). Research indicates that psychopaths offend more frequently and more violently and they are four to eight times more likely to engage in violent recidivism.

Conclusion

As Violent Offenders have proven to be very costly (in terms of damage caused, law enforcement efforts and correctional and rehabilitation costs) it is very important to continue research not only on how to prevent, punish and rehabilitate this group but also on underlining the causes of the phenomenon itself. What is more, it may be possible to help them more effectively and on a long term basis by considering recidivism rate risks and paying more attention to high risk clients.

Quick summary:

- Violent offenders display distinct personality traits, cognitions and brain structures.
- Damages caused by violent offenders are very costly
- Reconviction rates remain stable over time
- Noncompleters of treatments are more likely to commit a crime again
- Psychopathy is a strong predictor of violent offending

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