

Self-reported motivations for offending by autistic sexual offenders

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Approximately 1% of the population are autistic. The prevalence of autism in forensic populations (e.g., prisons) is reported to be significantly higher than this (approximately 4.5%). It has been suggested that the minority of autistic individuals who do offend engage more frequently in crimes against the person (e.g., assault) and sexual offences than other types of offences such as property, driving, and drug offences. To date little is known about the reasons why autistic individuals engage in sexual offences, yet understanding the motivation(s) for offending are key to developing and implementing effective interventions to help reduce both initial offending and also re-offending. In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine autistic sexual offenders in prisons and probation services across England and Wales. The semi-structured interview included several basic questions asked to all offenders (e.g., can you tell me in your own words, why you think that you committed the crime?). Analyses of offenders' reported reasons revealed five main themes: (1) social difficulties; (2) misunderstanding; (3) sex and relationship deficits; (4) inadequate control; (5) disequilibrium. Across these themes, social skills difficulties, lack of perspective, misunderstanding the seriousness of their behaviours and a lack of appropriate relationships were the main reasons for offending reported by this group of autistic sexual offenders. Findings highlight a need to develop sex and relationship education interventions which are tailored to the needs of autistic individuals, to address both their reported reasons for offending and their reported lack of sexual knowledge and awareness.