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Quantitative Analysis of Public Perceptions of Female Sex Offenders

Michael Buckley
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Michael Buckley

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Quantitative Analysis of Public Perceptions of Female Sex Offenders

by

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MPhil, Psychology – Walden University

MS, Criminology – Regis University

BS, Criminal Justice–Forensics – American Public University

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Public perception may have formed a consensus belief regarding sex offending. Males have considerably outweighed females with offenses, which may have created a bias against males. This study was a quantitative examination and review of the public's perceptions of female sex offenders (FSOs) as it related to their crimes and differences in sentencing when compared to male sex offenders (MSOs). There may be many reasons why females sexually offend, but there is a lack of understanding of these reasons and how FSOs are viewed by the public and the sentencing by the judicial system. The theoretical framework for the study centered around social learning theory, which views peoples' words, thoughts, and actions as having been influenced by someone else. Data collection was via 2 social media sites: Facebook and LinkedIn. The online survey presented 20 questions centered around the research questions, along with 6 questions focused on demographics of participants. Data were collected from 157 participants with no inclusion criteria necessary for participation and analyzed by finding key words to identify common trends among the participants that took part. Key findings for the study included beliefs that FSOs did not exist; FSOs and MSOs having no difference; FSOs existing because of being victims themselves as a minor; societal biases regarding women being the nurturer, carer, and mother of children; FSOs being coerced by MSOs; FSOs receiving less of a punishment than MSOs despite the crime being the same; a lack of media awareness for FSOs; the difference of gender and genitalia; and a lack of legal fairness between genders. Findings may be used by the judicial system to better understand FSOs, resulting in positive change.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Katie and our six children Arden, Anna, Sebastian, Emerson, Roman, and Dawson; for their constant and unwavering support all these years in the pursuit of my graduate studies. Their patience and sacrifice of many things, has enabled me to reach my potential and realize that there was something greater than what I had plans for. Thank you for being there through all the ups and downs I experienced. I am forever indebted to all of you!

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions and Hypotheses	6
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	6
Nature of the Study	7
Definitions.....	9
Assumptions.....	10
Scope and Delimitations	11
Limitations	12
Significance.....	13
Summary	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
Introduction.....	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Theoretical Foundation	18
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts	19
History of Female Sex Offenders	19

Identifying Female Sex Offenders	20
Typologies of Female Sex Offenders	23
Prevalence of Female Sex Offending	29
Comparison of Male and Female Sex Offenders	31
Female Sex Offender Sentencing by the Courts	33
Social Learning Theory.....	37
Public Perception	40
Summary	46
Chapter 3: Research Methods	49
Introduction.....	49
Research Design and Rationale	49
Methodology	50
Population	50
Sampling and Sampling Procedures	51
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	52
Data Analysis Plan.....	54
Threats to Validity	55
Ethical Procedures	57
Summary	58
Chapter 4: Results.....	60
Introduction.....	60
Data Collection	60

Demographics	63
Race/Ethnicity.....	63
Age.....	64
Gender.....	65
Marital Status.....	66
Highest Level of Education	67
Employment Status.....	68
Summary.....	69
Results.....	70
Survey Questions	71
Questions Answered and Participation.....	99
Summary.....	101
Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations	104
Introduction.....	104
Interpretation of the Findings.....	105
Knowledge Confirmation.....	120
Knowledge Extension	121
Limitations of the Study.....	123
Recommendations.....	126
Implications.....	127
Positive Social Change	127
Methodological Implications	129

Theoretical Implications	129
Empirical Implications.....	130
Recommendations for Practice	130
Conclusion	131
References.....	133
Appendix: Online Survey Questions	142

List of Tables

Table 1. Online Survey Completion Dates and Number of Responses61

Table 2. Survey Completion Rate by Question71

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Race/ethnicity.....	64
<i>Figure 2.</i> Age.....	65
<i>Figure 3.</i> Gender.....	66
<i>Figure 4.</i> Marital status.....	67
<i>Figure 5.</i> Highest level of education.....	68
<i>Figure 6.</i> Employment status.....	69
<i>Figure 7.</i> Demographics questions.....	70
<i>Figure 8.</i> Question 1: Do you believe that there is a cause for concern for female sex offenders in society today?	72
<i>Figure 9.</i> Question 2: Do you feel that female sex offenders are treated differently than male sex offenders when compared to crimes they commit? If so, why do you feel that way?	73
<i>Figure 10.</i> Question 3: Do you feel there is a difference in dangerousness between male sex offenders and female sex offenders?	75
<i>Figure 11.</i> Question 4: What do you believe, if anything, has caused a difference between female sex offenders and male sex offenders?	76
<i>Figure 12.</i> Question 5: Are there any societal factors that you feel have caused female sex offenders to be looked at differently, when compared to male sex offenders in society?	77
<i>Figure 13.</i> Question 6: Does inequality play a role in how female sex offenders and male sex offenders are viewed, even when committing the same sex crimes?	79

Figure 14. Question 7: If there is equality or inequality in the treatment of female sex offenders and male sex offenders, what do you believe brought you to that conclusion? 80

Figure 15. Question 8: What do you feel causes female sex offenders to commit sex crimes?81

Figure 16. Question 9: Do you believe differences exist for male and female sex crimes?81

Figure 17. Question 10: What has caused/steered your belief of female sex offenders to be that way?83

Figure 18. Question 11: If female sex offenders’ and male sex offenders’ abuse stems from experiences outside of their control—for example, being abused as a child—should the sentencing be more lenient?84

Figure 19. Question 12: Do you feel that prison sentences should be the same for female sex offenders and male sex offenders? If so, why do you feel that way?85

Figure 20. Question 13: What are the positive and/or negative outcomes, both short and long term, when female sex offenders do/don’t get sentenced the same as a male sex offender?87

Figure 21. Question 14: Is it wrong to give a lesser sentence to an female sex offender, even though they commit the same crimes as an male sex offender? If so, why do you feel that way?90

Figure 22. Question 15: What should determine sentencing for female sex offenders? ...92

Figure 23. Question 16: Is it enough to sentence female sex offenders when they commit sex crimes? Or should there be added measures to stop recidivism?93

Figure 24. Question 17: Do people’s religious beliefs, political persuasions, how they were raised, as well as other influences, play a part in how they view female sex offenders when compared to male sex offenders?94

Figure 25. Question 18: Should the prevalence of female sex offenders’ sex crimes be exposed more to the media?.....95

Figure 26. Question 19: Should female sex offenders be in the news as much as male sex offenders in order to expose the frequency of their crimes and what they do?96

Figure 27. Question 20: Would exposing female sex offenders more to the public, in the media, make a difference in how people view them? Or would it cause more of a negative impact on society?.....98

Figure 28. Questions answered and skipped.100

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Victims who report incidents of sexual offenses are overwhelmingly female, with suspects who are male. These subconscious gender assignments have become a stereotype influencing public perception and expectations (Hickey, 2016). There are reports of females as offenders; however, because of women's roles in society, police officers, psychiatrists, and judges have a challenging time not believing victims accounts who identify their attackers as female (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 111-125; Hislop, 2001). Those at the forefront of emergency services are often skeptical of reports of females as sex offenders (Hickey, 2016). In some sexual offense cases in which the suspect is a female, the police may label the accusation as unfounded (Hickey, 2016). With responses such as this and the subsequent lack of follow-up action, women offenders go undetected. Due to the caregiving role women play in society, along with notions that it is physically impossible for a female to sexually offend, there is a slim likelihood of increased indictments and public awareness of female sex offenders (FSOs). Despite research showing females sexually offend as often as males and the increased reports of female teachers having sexual relationships with minor students, the public has no such belief that female-perpetuated crimes occur with much frequency (Denov, 2016; Gannon & Cortoni, 2010; Hickey, 2016). To address this knowledge gap, this quantitative research study was centered on the public's perception and awareness of how females commit sex crimes, which were collected through an online survey.

In addition to illuminating crimes committed by FSOs, the aim in this study was to form an understanding of why members of the public view FSOs different from male

sex offenders (MSOs). Chapter 1 is not just the outline for the dissertation but also the background of sexual offenses committed by females. Different typologies of FSOs will be explored as well as the reasons they may be underreported or under recorded when it comes to identifying offenses and offenders. The gap in the research is included along with possible avenues to enable a better understanding of FSOs in the public's purview. Further, the three research questions that formed the foundation of the dissertation and the theoretical framework will be described in this chapter. The assumptions and a discussion of the study's scope and delimitations along with limitations also appears in this chapter, as do the purpose and nature of the study. The significance of the study is also discussed before a conclusion.

Background

When looking at MSOs, they considerably outweigh FSOs just for sexual assault alone (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2000, p. 2). In 1998, it was reported that out of 452,000 offenders, 442,000 of them were male between the 5-year period of 1993 to 1997 (BJS, 2000, p. 2). This shows that on a percentage scale of 100 sex offenders, approximately 97.8% of them were male (BJS, 2000, p. 2). These percentages outline where the efforts have been concentrated. However, there has been little information available regarding this population, with information mostly focused on the types and characteristics of FSO-committed crimes as well as the individual characteristics of the FSO (Budd, Bierie, & Williams, 2017). Other researchers (Collins & Duff, 2016; Williams & Bierie, 2015) have compared offenses between MSOs and FSOs, examining participants either as individuals or in a group setting.

Despite a lack of research on FSOs, some researchers have provided information on why females commit sexual offenses (DeCou, Cole, Rowland, Kaplan, & Lynch, 2014). One example is group offending, a situation normally driven by a domineering male offender with whom the female is in a relationship or otherwise knows (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). When women take part in group offending, they are helping other people commit sexual crimes against innocent victims (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). In most cases, the female is the partner of the male who is orchestrating the crime (DeCou et al., 2014). Females may participate in sex crimes with male partners because of the fear of being left alone, not being satisfied, or even being harmed for not taking part in what their partner wants them to do (DeCou et al., 2014).

Studies also show FSOs have often suffered past abusive experiences by people close to them. These abusers may include one or both parents, aunts or uncles, one or more siblings, or even some sort of caretaker. With the experiences FSOs have gone through, there may be a reconnection with similar experiences as they grow older, which then leads them to sexually offend (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). Further, FSOs offend because of multiple factors, which include both environmental and social (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016).

Current views of FSOs by both the public and members of law enforcement demonstrate the need to give more attention to the sentencing and punishment of FSOs (Oliver & Holmes, 2015). Further, the choice of victim has elicited interest from recent media reports of teachers having romantic relationships with underage male students (CBS Interactive Inc., 2018). Male victims not only appear in the area of student–teacher

relationships but also in the roles of caregiver/caretaker, parent/child, sibling, and extended family (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). The intent of this study was to examine different views of society and the legal system with regard to the type of sexual offense, addressing a lack of research regarding how the public views FSOs. Opportunities are available to identify the depth and breadth of what information is missing and what can be done to close the gap between society, the legal system, and crimes committed by FSOs.

Problem Statement

Despite decades of study regarding sexual offenses, researchers have primarily focused on male sex offending and other crimes perpetrated by men (Hislop, 2001). However, case documentation from the 1930s and 1940s revealed females experimenting with children in sexual ways (Hislop, 2001), and although MSOs commit the majority of sex crimes, between 4% and 5% of all sex crimes are committed by females (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2014). Recent researchers have also argued that there is sufficient evidence that FSOs offend in a variety of ways (Budd et al., 2017) for different reasons (Hislop, 2001). But FSOs and the different types of sexual offenses they commit, whether as individuals or in a group, do not receive punishment for their crimes as severe as MSOs do. Societal awareness is limited regarding FSOs and their offenses compared to MSOs. A better understanding may help bridge the gap between society, offenders, and their crimes, and what legal actions are necessary to effect change in the sentencing and punishment of FSOs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine differences in the public's perceptions of MSOs and FSOs as it relates to their crimes and differences in sentencing. The focus of this study was to examine societal factors that influence society's different views of sex offenders and the differential treatment between both in the courts. The independent variables were the questions participants were asked, and the dependent variable was the members of the public and their answers to the survey questions. The covariate variables were the overall outcomes of the online surveys, which noted a positive or a negative reaction to the questions posed on the survey.

The online survey was provided and became accessible to potential participants on different social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook. The link was provided through both open and closed groups as well as different social media feeds. These social media feeds were educational, professional, and personal, along with any others found to be credible. The respondents remained anonymous and consist of both male and female adults. No minors completed the online survey for this study.

The foundation for the study was the research of prior qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies with a focus on FSOs. The reason for researching public perceptions of FSOs was to identify an informational gap to help explain why FSOs received different treatment than MSOs. Another reason to perform this study was to determine why the public had different views on FSOs and MSOs when both genders committed the same crime or crimes. The intent was to understand the main reasons behind the silent approach to FSOs in society when compared to MSOs. The study

incorporated different types of FSOs from the babysitter, to the caregiver, from the female teacher, down to the group/individual offender. Giving attention to the different types of FSOs may help to see why there was a gap in the public's view of them.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The three research questions that will examine the gap in the literature within this study are:

Research Question 1: How is the public's perception about female sex offenders different from male sex offenders?

Research Question 2: What factors have influenced these differences in public perceptions?

Research Question 3: How do public perceptions differentially influence the sentencing and punishment of male and female sex offenders?

The null hypothesis for this study is the belief that members of the public hold a favorable view of FSOs. The alternative hypothesis is focused around members of the public holding a view that sees FSOs the same as MSOs. Both hypotheses are driven by the questions asked in the online survey and the responses given by the participants, whether positive or negative.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The framework for this study is social learning theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977). This model explains that individuals learning from other people, either as children or as adults (Bandura, 1969, 1977; Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). Bandura's model also extends to the childhood and adult environments in which learners find themselves, including both

conscious and unconscious states as well as experiences that directly and indirectly impact them (Bandura, 1969, 1977; Culatta, 2015). The learning can be in the form of behavior, observation of different values, and the attitudes of others, or in physical actions that happen to an individual, which may be retrieved later in life (Bandura, 1969, 1977; Culatta, 2015). Further, humans often learn behaviors through observation, whether cognitive, behavioral (physical nature), or environmental (Bandura, 1969, 1977; Culatta, 2015).

The link between FSOs and public perception may be tied to social norms. FSOs could be influenced by a past experience or present personal contact, and conditioning could play a part over time through the different experiences FSOs have had throughout their lives. Additionally, public perception may come from opinions that might help explain why FSOs receive different treatment when sentenced. Social learning theory helped establish the structure of the study as to what creates public perceptions regarding FSOs. Social learning theory is relevant to this study because it allowed a view of the public's perception of FSOs in a way that affects society as a whole. The theory also enabled data collection via firsthand feedback, which illuminated not only how people viewed FSOs but where their views originated. There was also the chance to uncover more factors than just societal influences (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016).

Nature of the Study

This study followed a quantitative research method, specifically, a survey research strategy approach, which provides a numeric outlook of the opinions and/or attitudes of the sample population (Creswell, 2014, pp. 12-13; Ravitch & Carl, 2016, pp.

172-174). The direction for this comes from prior researchers who identified a limited amount of information and data on FSOs. Even more limited are data on public perceptions of FSOs and why there is a difference in sentencing and punishments for FSOs (DeCou et al., 2014). The topic of sexual offense cannot always focus on MSOs, as there is evidence that females commit those same crimes, though on a smaller scale (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016). Although the percentages of females who offend is smaller, FSOs do not receive the same treatment as MSOs (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016; Oliver & Holmes, 2015). Further, there is always the risk that females can become sex offenders. But there is a gap in literature with regard to females, the sexual offenses they commit, and how the public views these acts (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016; Turchik, Hebenstreit, & Judson, 2016).

With awareness of FSOs in society lacking, combined with the difference in sentencing and punishment, looking at sexual violence through a different lens may help in identifying areas where changes could be made for both MSOs and FSOs to facilitate equal treatment (Turchik et al., 2016). I selected these specific factors because of the problem identified through past researchers of FSOs. A gap exists related to the exploration of public perception of FSOs, where the introduction of the independent and dependent variables come into play. Specific questions that required voluntary responses comprised the independent and dependent variables for this study, whereas the covariate variable is comprised of a positive or negative reaction from the participants for the questions asked.

The quantitative methodology approach was chosen after reviewing existing researchers who identified similar gaps in knowledge. I selected the field research method as the most productive approach to obtain the necessary firsthand data, through observation from the online survey and the results it gives. The study involved an online survey via different social media platforms. Volunteer participants completed a survey consisting of an array of questions related to females and their ability to sexually offend. Sample selection was random, without bias based upon age, race, religion, political persuasion, or other factors. Although this was an online survey, there is no ethical justification to exclude individuals who may happen to belong to vulnerable populations. But because participants must be adults, this naturally excludes minors from taking part in the online survey. Checks and balances were also in place to ensure no misrepresentation of the collected data. There were periodic evaluations to screen for any “holes” in the process of obtaining data from willing individuals.

Definitions

Group offending, also known as *co-offending*: Occurs when more than one individual commits a crime or aids in committing the crime (Carrington, 2014). Group offending is sometimes a misleading term, as it suggests a large group has committed the crime when it could be only two individuals (Carrington, 2014).

Male sex offenders and *female sex offenders*: Individuals who have committed a crime that is sexual in nature or related thereto and have subsequently been convicted of it (U.S. Legal, 2016). Examples of sex-related crimes include rape, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, incest, and other similar crimes (U.S. Legal, 2016). Sex offenders are subject

to different types of punishment based on the frequency of the offense and the requirement to register as a sex offender (U.S. Legal, 2016).

Rational choice theory: Encompasses assumptions about the behavior of individuals and their criminal acts (Akers, 1990). Although the concept originated from an economic outlook, its introduction into criminology draws from the foundation of individuals considering the pros and cons of their actions for the intended outcome (Akers, 1990). According to rational choice theory, individuals making the choice have weighed the consequences of their intended actions and found such acts to be more profitable to achieve the desired outcome (Akers, 1990).

Social learning theory: Describes how people observe others' behaviors and then either consciously or unconsciously mimic what they have seen (Bandura, 1977). This observation also extends to attitudes and outcomes of the experienced behavior (Bandura, 1977). Observed behaviors may be modeled and used as a guideline for the observer's actions from that point forward. Social learning theory highlights the connection and the potential lasting relationship between an individual's cognitive, behavioral, and environmental actions, attitudes, and outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

Assumptions

The primary assumption in this study was that when hearing about sex offenders, members of the public automatically assume a male is the suspect and a female is the victim based on reporting trends in the media (Hislop, 2001). Additionally, in comparing criminality between men and women, the assumption was that if and when women commit crimes, they should submit to a male-tailored and -centered perspective of

punishment (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010). False expectations and inaccurate approaches may stem from these gender differences and expectations. Further, the current view on FSOs contains an assumption that women do not commit sexual offenses because of their physical inability to do so. Although the concept of female sex offending often lacks consideration, prior researchers (e.g., Hislop, 2001) have shown the existence and crimes of FSOs. The presentation of the findings within this study in regard to FSOs and perceptions of members of the public is to educate them with regard to the capabilities of both genders in sexually offending.

Scope and Delimitations

Data were gathered from individuals via social media who volunteered to participate in the online survey to address the gap between MSOs primarily labeled and viewed as sex offenders when FSOs also commit these acts. Measuring public awareness was important to determine what people believe as well as the basis for those beliefs. Causes may have included a natural disbelief, political persuasion, religious belief, family upbringing, or another avenue of conviction. The approximate number of responses sought from individuals was between 50 and 60 to obtain sufficient data to accurately portray the belief systems and awareness of different people from different backgrounds. Administering an online survey allowed people to accurately reflect on their own reasons for the lack of awareness of FSOs. There was no coaching of any kind.

There were no restrictions on age, gender, or race, other than minors, who did not merit consideration for this research. The population was anyone who was on the social media platforms of LinkedIn and Facebook who wished to participate. The online survey

included information on types of sex offenses committed by women, including forced assault, babysitter abuse, incestuous abuse, and dominant woman abuse (Hickey, 2016). The potential for generalizability in this study came in the form of participants not seeing FSOs the same as MSOs in the crimes they commit or even not seeing FSOs as being harmful.

Limitations

There is no anticipation of accessibility to pose a problem or concern; rather, the risk was with the credibility of the individuals completing the online survey. Participants may have biased opinions based on prior beliefs. In addition, it is possible that individuals unintentionally misrepresented what they were trying to convey when completing the online survey. A limitation may be participants' tendency to omit or alter information for fear they will appear as someone other than how they currently portray themselves. To mitigate bias in data collection, periodic checks were performed on the process to ensure a smooth execution from start to finish. Continuous self-evaluations were made to make any changes deemed necessary to reduce or eliminate limitations.

The only other way that internal validity can be disrupted is if participants did not answer questions, which means no responses would be garnered for those specific questions. Adhering to the intended 50 to 60 people helped to focus and collect enough data to substantiate the study and not influence the outcomes and conclusions. As far as generalizability goes, the target population are random members of the public who were willing to take the online survey, so the results may not be applicable to everyone due to some of the population not having access to the Internet due to circumstances or age.

Significance

This study will contribute to sex offender research by examining public perceptions on FSOs. The objective was to determine why members of the public view FSOs differently than MSOs when both genders sexually offend in similar ways. The study's findings will help to illuminate the reasoning behind the public's views as well as why the law may deal with MSOs and FSOs differently (Deville & Le Grand, 2015). The intent is to identify the factors that play a part in shaping these views.

The findings of this study will also show the different outlooks people have on gender with regard to sexual offense. In addition, the study may reveal a new way for members of the legal community to view FSOs and their crimes. Findings may also spotlight needed changes so FSOs can neither bypass punishment nor receive a lesser sentence than a male because of their gender. In comparison to MSOs, FSOs may not receive serious sentences and punishments due to how the public and members of the law view them as a group (Oliver & Holmes, 2015). Ideas for further research on this topic may include investigating why FSOs receive different treatment than MSOs for the type of offenses they commit (Deville & Le Grand, 2015).

Summary

Female sex offending is not a new phenomenon; it has been traced back to the 1930s when women committed sexual acts on children (Hislop, 2001). However, sexual offending by females does not receive the same attention or outrage as when males offend. The public may not be aware of FSOs, believing women do not have the genitalia needed to commit sexual assault or offense (Hislop, 2001). With the probability of this

subconscious stigma guiding the public, FSOs are often overlooked at great risk to the public. For example, if the offender is a mother, the abuse will continue based on the natural bond between mothers and children, as the children's loyalty may prevent them from reporting the act. When family members sexually encroach on young children, youths may believe what happens to them is normal because that is all they know (Hislop, 2001). Based on social learning theory, the children who are now adults may draw from their observations of this behavior and commit acts that are against the law (Bandura, 1977). This study was conducted to address the public's perception of FSOs and these potential reasons for committing sexual offenses. The next chapter covers a literature review on the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

With sexual assaults and other related offenses growing across the United States, current researchers have investigated where the problem may occur. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine differences in the public's perception of MSOs and FSOs as it relates to their crimes and differences in sentencing as well as what influences society to view females differently and the differential treatment in the courts (see Denov, 2016). Some people's thoughts and beliefs regarding viewing FSOs may stem from having little knowledge or awareness about FSOs (Hickey, 2016, p. 177). Biases or opinions may be one reason FSOs are not recognized or categorized in the same way MSOs are. There is a certain degree of understanding regarding sexual offenses, but people still expect sexual offenders to be male based on statistics showing that MSO cases have outweighed known FSO cases (BJS, 2000, p. 2).

Despite a lack of focus on FSOs, sex offenders, whether male or female, do not discriminate. No matter the age or gender of the victim, sexual offenses can occur, which pose a danger to the victims whether physical, mental, spiritual, or emotional. However, it is difficult to accurately gauge how much sexual offending has occurred in the last 10 to 20 years alone because a number of victims either underreport or do not report the offense. For instance, it is unknown how to capture sex offenders for crimes committed in the home without anyone reporting the act, and research is needed for identifying ways to identify offenders in the workplace when victims do not report the crimes for fear of losing their jobs. Identification and exposure of different types and classes of sex offenses

may better indicate where the problem occurs and with what frequency. But the research that has been conducted on sexual offense rates have shown that between 1993 and 1997, females accounted for 10,000 (2.2%) of the 452,000 offenders who committed sexual assaults in the “violent crimes” category (BJS, 2000, p. 2). Between 1990 and 1996, a 119% increase occurred for females who raped or sexually assaulted their victims (BJS, 2000, p. 5). In 1990, there were 202 known female offenders, numbers that rose to 375 in 1992, and nearly doubled in 1994 at 630 (BJS, 2000, p. 5). In 1996, that number went down to 442; however, the percentage increase from 6 years prior was still notably high (BJS, 2000, p. 5). Between 1993 and 1997, one out of every 50 violent sexual offenders were female for acts including rape and sexual assault. In 1996, only one percent of all offenders sentenced to prison for rape and sexual assault were female (BJS, 2000, p. 10).

Both MSOs and FSOs pose risks to any community; however, public ignorance regarding the presence of, risks posed by, and opportunities and abilities of FSOs create unique risks due to unawareness. If the overall public perception of FSOs and their offenses were different, law enforcement and psychiatric treatment might be different (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 114-115), with a change in outlook leading to an increase in FSO sentencing and punishment. Because the public’s view of FSOs does not equate with how society views women, a shift in thinking is needed to align with reality (Hickey, 2016, p. 177). Major sections of this chapter include the strategy behind the search, the theoretical foundation for the study, and the literature review that was related to key variables and concepts.

Literature Search Strategy

The strategy for the literature review involved accessing multiple platforms via local and national web-based libraries and search engines. Scholarly databases and multiple online college libraries also served as sources, including PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, EBSCO, SAGE Journals, Springer, and the American Psychological Association. The primary means of searching was through Walden University's online library. The keywords used in the searches came from the title of the research topic, or words that branched off from those title words, which included *female sex offender*, *male sex offender*, *sex crime(s)*, *public perception*, *sex offense awareness*, *sex offense exposure*, *sex offense perpetrator*, *female perpetrator*, *male perpetrator*, *sex abuse*, *sexual abuse*, *social learning theory*, *choice theory*, *rational choice theory*, *group offending*, and *childhood abuse*. Keyword searches occurred using different journals, vendors, and organizational providers. The incorporation of websites into the search generated information substantial enough to highlight examples of FSOs studied or researched before via the BJS. To obtain current research, the range of the publications was between 2013 and 2018. Some publications appeared prior to 2013, but they supported the theoretical framework by Albert Bandura and evidence of prior research about FSOs. Books further facilitated this literature review, with the majority published between 2013 and 2018.

Researchers have revealed evidence of law enforcement and psychiatric beliefs about FSOs (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 111-125) but not necessarily the beliefs of the general public. This gap in research shows the need to investigate the public's perception

of FSOs to ascertain why FSOs are treated differently. Additionally, an understanding of the public mindset and construct about why FSOs do not receive consideration is important (Denov, 2016, pp. 77-88). The literature supported the perceived gap in the research. It also supported which theory best fit the knowledge gap and the research method used to understand the public's mindset and perceptions. Sources used included websites, peer-reviewed journals, books, and reports on FSOs and MSOs; most of these offered scholarly views on FSOs. Although not all resources directly related to the public's perception of FSOs, they did highlight a concern about FSOs. The literature was centered around qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches, from all different angles of prior sex offender associated articles.

Theoretical Foundation

The ability to learn from others is an integral part of growing. However, when that learning has deviance attached to it, problems can arise. In his book *Social Learning Theory* (1977), Bandura stated that people are not driven by any type of inner force but more so by the external psychological influences coming in the form of personal and environmental interactions (pp. 11-12). Observations enable individuals to acquire knowledge and understanding so they can later replicate the behaviors, both consciously and unconsciously (Bandura, 1977, p. 12). Individuals also control and measure behavior replicated from others and subsequently exhibited on their own (Bandura, 1977, p. 13). Social learning theory explains human behavior and therefore is applicable to different facets of life, including the deviant side, such as crime. Thus, social learning theory can

answer questions about sexual offenses and why individuals commit them (Burton, 2012).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

History of Female Sex Offenders

Records of female sex offending date back to the 1930s and 1940s, when reports of molestation between females and children appeared (Hislop, 2001, p. 29). The 1980s saw an increase in female sexual abuse reports, with research about FSO crimes not increasing significantly until the 1990s (Hislop, 2001). Documentation has continued but became less believable by many police officers and psychiatrists because of the mindset that males are sex offenders, not females, and because of the rarity of offenses on the female's part (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 111-125). Police officers' and psychiatrists' negative opinions and comments regarding FSOs are unhelpful when dealing with issues directly related to females who sexually offend because it may affect the way they are treated/rehabilitated (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 111-125).

Interest surrounding FSOs and behavior by the public has increased over time, leading to empirical studies (Hislop, 2001, pp. 29-30). But women abusers have not received serious consideration over the years, although the crimes received more attention in the 1990s than in the 1930s (Denov, 2016, pp. 78-88, 111-125; Hislop, 2001, pp. 29-30). Because of this lack of attention, many children's claims of sexual abuse by women went uninvestigated (Hislop, 2001, p. 30). As a result, many women, including mothers, babysitters, childcare workers, and more, went undetected, and if apprehended, did not receive the same attention as similar crimes committed by men (Hislop, 2001,

p. 30). For example, in a 1983 interview of 930 women led by Diana Russell regarding childhood sexual abuse by family members, only 18 women said they reported the abuse (Hislop, 2001, p. 31; Russell, 1983). Without fully knowing how often FSOs have committed sex crimes, especially in the decades prior, many people show a lack of belief when faced with the topic. Just having the words “female” and “sex offender” next to one another brings about questions and comments indicating disbelief.

Identifying Female Sex Offenders

FSOs do not have a definitive path or methodology to becoming sex offenders or abusers, often making them difficult to detect. A woman who sexually abuses children or experienced abuse as a child has not necessarily come from a broken or bad home. Some cases include FSOs who abused children, personally suffered abuse as children, or came from highly abusive homes; however, the causality of FSOs includes more than a line of experiences and exposure to sex crimes. FSOs come from both normal and broken homes and struggle with mental health issues, environmental effects, and other problems (Gillespie et al., 2014; Kramer, 2017, pp. 26-27).

Additionally, many people have an inaccurate view of FSOs, who may be aunts; different caretaker types, such as mothers, grandmothers, and babysitters; sisters; and teachers (Duncan, 2010, p. 141; Hislop, 2001, pp. 73, 79, 92-93). The victims’ description of FSOs gives rise to rethinking the view of them. Mothers and close friends or neighbors who abused are perceived as dark, evil, and brutal (Kramer, 2017, p. 125). As the victims matured, the view became more distinct and emotions played a part in describing their experiences. Mothers are the nurturers, the givers, the helpers, the

examples, and the teachers, among many other roles. When women commit crimes against their own or other children, it violates these perceptions and descriptions (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 166). Reality replaces the expected outlook of motherhood with disrepute, which can shock the children, close friends, and family. Thus, stereotypes of motherhood may prevent acknowledging FSOs, which is why many incidents go unreported. For example, in one incident, a man had continuous sexual relations with his mother for approximately 17 years while he was growing up and into his early 20s and had a simultaneous relationship with his sister for a longer period of time into his years of retirement, as early conditioning made him view the FSOs' actions as harmless and normal (Hislop, 2001, p. 92-93). Despite some mothers and stepmothers being a focal point of this kind of crime, the actions of aunts, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers have come into question as well (Hislop, 2001, pp. 11, 92). Research has reported on children as young as 4 years of age being abused by their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, which highlights the fact that age is not a discriminator in these crimes (Hislop, 2001). Being a caretaker of some kind holds certain responsibilities, and FSOs use these responsibilities to disguise their sexual acts (Hislop, 2001, p. 11). Children who have negative experiences growing up with their offender may not go through healthy elements of growth (Hislop, 2001, p. 115).

Another type of caretaker is a babysitter, someone who has full care of the child until the parents return home. Cases include some babysitters sexual abusing on children as young as 5 years of age (Hislop, 2001, p. 80). In one account, a boy sexually abused by his babysitter later became another victim through the mother of the child he was

babysitting (Hislop, 2001, p. 80). Sexual abuse at the hands of a babysitter is not necessarily abusive in nature but can come from the isolation babysitters and their victims have until the parents return. This time period is when curiosity can settle in (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 149). Although daycare workers are not specifically babysitters, they fall into the realm of caretaker due to the nature of their job. Both babysitters and daycare providers have the potential to sexually abuse children in different ways, which include digital penetration and fondling of the vaginal area and breasts/chest (Denov, 2016, p. 80, 115).

The proper roles traditionally played by each type of caretaker diminishes because the sexual gratification masks the true relationship in which children feel neither abandoned nor betrayed (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, pp. 166-167). Different parts of the caretaker's identity or role decrease because of the sexual gratification (whether sexual, romantic, or through beatings), which rises in importance above all else for these women (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 166; Hislop, 2001, p. 13; Johnson, 2008, p. 134; Kramer, 2017, pp. 27-28). According to Department of Justice's National Sex Offender registry, 60% of sexual acts or abuse against children are not family members, but the child knows the person; 30% are family members; and 10% are unknown to the child (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). Within these numbers, 67% are adult offenders and 23% are minors (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.).

Along with caretakers, other cases of FSOs include professionals such as teachers, female police officers, ministers and members of the clergy, and nuns (Denov, 2016, pp. 132, 134; Duncan, 2010, p. 119; Hislop, 2001, p. 13), who may beat the children in

their charge for the sole purpose of sexual gratification (Hislop, 2001, p. 13). However, beating a victim for sexual gratification is not always the case, as found in Johnson's (2008) book *From Teacher to Lover*. The teacher–student relationship sometimes stems from romantic motives rather than sexual ones (Johnson, 2008, p. 36). Despite public beliefs about this kind of relationship, teachers may fall into the category of FSO due to the position they hold over the child and the power they have within that position (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 34). Not all FSOs are predatory in nature, but all still target sexual gratification in some way, shape, or form (Hislop, 2001, p. 13; Johnson, 2008, p. 134; Kramer, 2017, p. 27-28; Socia & Harris, 2016, p. 380). Further, to avoid the label of FSO, female offenders will mimic MSOs and deny any type or form of sexual abuse (Duncan, 2010, p. 143). This rationale enables them to become comfortable in explaining what happened, despite it being sexual abuse. This foundation may be their way coping with their crimes because they have already conditioned themselves to act this way.

Typologies of Female Sex Offenders

Sex offender typologies could include behavior, personality, or trends of symbolism. In his book *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*, Hickey (2016) presented typologies that now help identify more offenses instead of only looking at the obvious way's females may offend. Some examples of these typologies are forced assault, babysitter abuse, incestuous abuse, dominant women abuse, teacher–lovers, predisposed child molesters, male-coerced sexual offenders, experimenter exploiter, psychologically disturbed, subtle abuse mother molester, seductive abuse mother molester, humiliation offender, overt sexual abuse offender, heterosexual nurturers, noncriminal homosexual

offenders, female sexual predators, young adult child exploiters, homosexual criminals, and aggressive homosexual offenders (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177; Kramer, 2017, p. 27).

Experts have defined these typologies over the years, which helped them form a better understanding of what the individual FSO's mindset is when she commits the sex crimes (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). Teacher-lovers tend to be female instructors who believe what they are doing is not harmful but helpful as a "sexual educator" of some kind (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177; Kramer, 2017, p. 26). The belief remains despite both building a relationship with the minor student and committing sex crimes in private. As attraction forms, the pursuit starts, and then the teacher gains fulfillment through accomplishing the goal/task she set by fulfilling her sexual fantasies/dreams and those she believes the student may have of her. There is another belief that the relationship is more about romance than sex (Johnson, 2008). Though teacher-lovers are not necessarily predatory in nature, their behavior includes illegal sexual acts based on current laws and policies against relationships between teachers and minor students, who usually range between 13 and 17 years of age (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177).

Women falling into the predisposed child molester typology have their own way of dealing with their emotions in the present and sometimes the future (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). They feel the only way of finding stability within their emotions are by molesting children (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). The predisposed child molester commonly acts with a view, and self-drive, for sexual intimacy with a child/children, which is due to having a history of abuse and addiction themselves (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). The typology of male-coerced sexual offenders involves female individuals

who show patterns of abuse in their past (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). These FSOs often assist their partner or husband in sexually abusing not just any minor, but their own children as well, even initiating the abuse (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177; Kramer, 2017, p. 27).

Although trends within each typology are not definitive, sometimes uncommon outcomes occur. For instance, in the typology of male coercion, the female may be the one doing the coercing. However, this does not rule out the male still participating in some way. A sense of worthlessness for both the male and female abuser(s) may be present due to a history of abuse at the hands of family members when he/she was growing up. Females are the dominant gender in this typology, where sexual aggression fuels the drive to commit the crime (Kramer, 2017, p. 27).

The experimenter exploiter normally is at an age where she experiments with her sexuality, but finds an easy target as a victim: normally a male in preschool or grade school (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). The typology of the psychologically disturbed abuser includes the FSO having problems controlling their own impulses, specifically those related to their own libido (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177). Some of these typologies may overlap with each other due to the difficulty in generating a category involving only one type of sex offender. Some FSOs cross over into another category because they cannot find what normally attracts them.

Other areas of FSO typology for categorization purposes come from Kramer (2017, pp. 27-28), who outlined more subsections based upon her research. These included males accompanied–rejected/revengeful, heterosexual nurturers, noncriminal

homosexual offenders, young adult child exploiters, homosexual criminals, aggressive homosexual offenders, criminally limited hebephiles, criminally prone hebephiles, young adult child molesters, high-risk chronic offenders, older nonhabitual offenders, and homosexual child molesters (Kramer, 2017, p.28). The author provided a large breakdown of typologies with some sub typologies featuring very specific elements.

The typologies of male coerced and male accompanied–rejected/revengeful have close ties to one another because the FSO is not necessarily forced by a male, but reacting through jealousy or anger (Kramer, 2017, p. 27). Heterosexual nurturers are closely related to the teacher–lover type due to the target victim being the grade school aged male (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). Noncriminal homosexual offenders target only females around the grade/middle school age, as well, with an average of 13 years of age (Kramer, 2017, p. 28).

The young adult child exploiters category has some of the youngest victims because the offenders target kindergarteners that have an approximate age of 7 years but do not seek a specific gender (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). Homosexual criminals do not necessarily target victims for self-gratification, but instead focus on making money through prostitution (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). The aggressive homosexual offender type targets an older age category of female victims, with a median age of 31 years (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). These typologies allow for more specific categorization to fit closely to offenders' behaviors and crimes (Kramer, 2017). Kramer (2017, p. 28) referenced these typologies as identified by both Vandiver and Kercher (2004) and Sandler and Freeman (2007). Both studies were similar but performed in different parts of the United States

(Kramer, 2017, p. 28). The typologies of criminally limited and criminally prone hebephiles are grade school aged targets, specifically between 11 and 14 years old (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). The difference between these two typologies is the rate of arrest (Kramer, 2017, p. 28).

High-risk chronic offenders, arrested considerably more often than other types of offenders, target female children of all ages (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). Older nonhabitual offenders have committed a sex crime and been forced to register as a sex offender, but have not reoffended since the arrest (Kramer, 2017, p. 28). The last typology is the homosexual child molester who solely target females younger in age and younger than the offender (Kramer, 2017, p. 28).

Gillespie et al. (2014) compared solo FSOs and FSOs who worked with someone else as a co-offender. Although they assessed only two populations, they helped highlight some of the reasons an individual may offend (Gillespie et al., 2014). The researchers found mental health and environmental issues as personal factors for both populations in this study; therefore, these same issues may play a part in other typologies. Victims can be family members, prepubescent or postpubescent children (either gender), those in a specific age range (with the victim usually considerably younger than the offender), of a specific gender, or selected for self-gratification, or someone else's gratification (Kramer, 2017, pp. 27-28).

Types of Sexual Acts Performed by Female Sex Offenders

Abuse comes in many forms, with FSOs having performed all kinds of sex acts, in every form possible, on victims who are sometimes too young to know what is going on.

FSOs' sexual acts range from sexually forcing an object into the victim, engaging in sexual intercourse, vaginal and anal penetration, or masturbation (Hislop, 2001, pp. 11-13; Kramer, 2017, p. 107). FSOs have participated in fondling their victims (genitals, anus, and breasts); oral and manual stimulation of the genitals, anus, and breast(s); exhibitionism; voyeurism; the touching of genitals (minus the penetration); and a simulated version of sexual intercourse (Hislop, 2001, p. 12; Kramer, 2017, p. 107). In some cases, FSOs force the victim to perform such acts on the offender (Hislop, 2001, pp. 12-13). Digital penetration occurs among FSOs, too, but offenders also use alternate means of sexual satisfaction (Hislop, 2001, pp. 12-13). Evidence shows children have been penetrated with objects deemed dangerous (Hislop, 2001, pp. 12-13), including:

sticks, candles, knives, metal toys, a crucifix, a toothbrush, crochet needles, lit matches or candles, a bottle brush, a knife handle, a plunger handle, a whiskey bottle, a knitting needle, a potato masher, a bath brush, pencils, lit cigarettes, coat hangers, an ice pick, thorny rose stems, surgical knives, hair rollers, keys, light bulbs, hairbrushes, fruits and vegetables, wooden spoons, religious medals, goldfish, vacuum cleaner parts, dildos, and vibrators. (Hislop, 2001, p. 12)

Hislop reported on one instance of sexual abuse of a child where a metal screw was used (Hislop, 2001, p. 12). FSOs have also sexually rubbed their genitals against the offender (Hislop, 2001, p. 13). Examples of aggressive sexual abuse by FSOs include forcing the victim to do something to the FSO or the FSO acting with excessive pressure or force, which may cause added harm to the victim (Duncan, 2010, p. 78; Hislop, 2001,

p. 13; Russell, Doan, & King, 2017). The aggression can come from the FSO who is trying to get back at a specific person or a type of person (Duncan, 2010, p. 78).

Prevalence of Female Sex Offending

Stemple, Flores, and Meyer (2017, p. 303) cited research showing evidence of FSOs committing sexual acts against men at a high rate between 2010 and 2012. The Center for Disease Control found, over a 12-month period, both men and women reported similar numbers for sexual acts committed against them where consent was not given. Most of the men reported they were assaulted by females (Stemple et al., 2017, p. 303). Young (2017) discussed a 2010 survey performed by Stemple et al. in which the researchers evidenced approximately 4.5 million men were made by women to commit a sex crime, specifically some form of forced penetration on their victim (Young, 2017). In addition, Stemple et al. found 79.2% of aggressors were women (Young, 2017), a number that dropped to 43.6% two years later. Young also highlighted evidence from Stemple et al. regarding a 2014 study in which 284 men and boys had been forced into sexual intercourse. With only 5% of offenders reported as being male, 95% were presumed to be female (Young, 2017). Therefore, the issues of FSOs and their crimes are not just found in academia, but in the media, as well.

Public opinion fosters a general stereotype of women playing a role where they are nice, caring, and rather harmless; however, FSOs shatter this stereotype as evidenced by these statistics and studies (Young, 2017). Sexual assaults and other sex crimes committed by FSOs are not rare. Despite the problems arising from the prevalence of reported FSOs, one of the main issues is the barriers that keep from people trying to

report offenses (Australian Institute of Family Services [AIFS], 2014). Because FSO studies are somewhat new and narrow in scope, trying to outline the prevalence of FSOs with any accuracy is problematic (AIFS, 2014).

Researchers in five countries have reported credible statistics regarding FSOs: Canada, the US, the UK (England and Wales), Australia, and New Zealand (AIFS, 2014). Some barriers found within the reporting process included fear, shame, and uncertainty (AIFS, 2014). Across those five regions, between 2001 and 2004, 23% of sexual assault cases involved females (AIFS, 2014). In Australia, between 2011 and 2012, women committed 45 out of the 2,875 sexual offenses (AIFS, 2014). In 2001, the National Incident-Based Reporting System reported, 3.1% of all sex offenders that year were females (AIFS, 2014). During a tri-nation study across the US, UK, and Canada, between 1.2% and 8% of people charged for sexual offenses were women (AIFS, 2014).

For the same countries, between 1.5% and 4% of those who offended against children were females (AIFS, 2014). During a 2011 research study in the UK, FSOs made up approximately 2,085 of the 12,268 (17%) reported calls to a helpline for children (AIFS, 2014). A 2005 research study conducted by Dube, Anda, Whitfield, Brown, Felitti, Dong, and Giles, centered on child sexual abuse in San Diego (Dube et al, 2005). The study showed that approximately 497 of 1,276 incidents included FSOs in some capacity, who either acted alone or with an MSO performing the abuse/act on a male child (AIFS, 2014). Even when female children were the victims, approximately 129 incidents out of 2,310 included FSOs either acting alone or with an MSO (AIFS, 2014).

Comparison of Male and Female Sex Offenders

In comparison, MSOs and FSOs are more similar than expected. In “An Incident-Based Comparison of Female and Male Sexual Offenders,” Williams and Bierie (2015, pp. 237-238) highlighted key similarities between MSOs and FSOs prior to becoming offenders and when they become offenders. In their study, the researchers found both MSOs and FSOs suffered the same kinds of abuse as children, received similar psychological diagnoses, had some involvement in drugs and crime, and featured similar histories. This comparison shows no matter what gender the offender is, their histories and backgrounds are similar in nature and lead to comparable outcomes later in life (Williams & Bierie, 2015, pp. 237-238).

Differences in the nature of the crimes committed between MSOs and FSOs exist, but all actions nonetheless fall under the umbrella of “sex crimes.” However, a history of violence within a relationship and rape is more common in FSOs than MSOs (Williams & Bierie, 2015, pp. 237-238). In a study performed by Peters (2008), she found that both MSOs and FSOs abuse their victims in similar ways, with the most popular avenues for abuse being fondling the genitals of their victim (Williams & Bierie, 2015, pp. 237-238). Similar acts occur when MSOs and FSOs physically abuse. When MSOs physically offend, they are more involved with anal and oral intercourse with their victims; whereas FSOs still perform similar sexual acts to MSOs, but they substitute for objects to commit the act of penetration (Williams & Bierie, 2015, pp. 237-238).

Coercion and exploitation are common strategies for MSOs and FSOs seeking victims for sexual gratification (Williams & Bierie, 2015, pp. 237-238). Out of all sex

offenders housed in the criminal justice system, approximately 93% are male and 17% are female (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, p. 1395). Apart from the criminal aspects, the peer group setting, the lack of employment, and the relationships between family members contribute to both MSOs' and FSOs' criminal lifestyles (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, p. 1395). Even so, females may have more issues directing them to sexually offend, including depression, self-esteem problems, and being a victim themselves (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, p. 1395). Freeman and Sandler noted a 1991 comparative study consisting of 75 MSOs and 65 FSOs who committed sexual crimes against children (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, pp. 1395-1396). The results showed each gender would target the opposite gender and commit similar sex crimes on their victims (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, pp. 1395-1396).

Differences exist in reporting past abuse for MSOs versus FSOs. MSOs were not as likely to report any kind parental abuse, but FSOs would (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, pp. 1395-1396). In addition, the psychological and sexual aspects of both MSOs and FSOs are similar, with differences between the two groups that included age, current educational level, and other similar things encompassing an average person's life (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, pp. 1395-1396). The researchers also showed female sexual offenses increased 7% over a three-year period, concluding that despite males being the offender in most cases, females committed a large number of sexual offenses as well (Freeman & Sandler, 2008, p. 1410).

Female Sex Offender Sentencing by the Courts

When the court system must sentence an individual for crimes committed against people, property, or the government, they weigh the elements of the crime along with any other additional information on behavior and intent. When the courts sentence MSOs, the decision follows a definitive pattern of the length of incarceration, along with any factors after prison, such as mandatory treatment. For FSOs committing the same or similar sex crimes or having been involved with the MSO, sentencing does not follow the same pattern, thus illustrating the need for change.

A comparison of MSOs and FSOs may lead to an understanding on why the sentencing is different (Cairns, 2012). Cairns wrote about gender bias as it pertains to sentencing teachers who commit sex crimes against their students, despite such acts being consensual in some cases. The following examples display how sentencing can be different between genders.

Sexual encounters both inside and outside the classroom took place between a female teacher, Mary Beth Haglin, and a male student, on several occasions (Cairns, 2012; Zilber, Wilkinson, & Farberov, 2017). Although the teacher faced up to 5 years in prison, she received only a 90-day jail term (Cairns, 2012; Zilber et al., 2017). In another example, a female teacher named Michelle Preston engaged in sex with multiple students, receiving only 36 months of probation and required to register as a sex offender (Cairns, 2012; Quigley, 2011). As long as Preston did not violate the terms of her 36-month parole, the courts would clear her record as if she never committed a sex crime (Cairns,

2012; Quigley, 2011). Normally for crimes like this, a male's sentence ranges between 31 months and 13 years in prison (Cairns, 2012; Quigley, 2011).

Between 2006 and 2010 in Denver, CO, just over 2,100 men received guilty verdicts for some form of sexual assault on a child while given the trust and confidence of an organization to watch over children, with more than half receiving a prison sentence of some kind (Whaley, 2011). Of the 79 women who committed the same crimes, only 38% received some kind of prison sentence, with nearly half given a different route of punishment: intensive supervised probation (Whaley, 2011). In comparison, fewer than 745 men (35%) convicted, received intensive supervised probation (Whaley, 2011). Despite the fact that considerably more males are arrested for sexual offenses than are women, FSOs receive better treatment in terms of punishment (Whaley, 2011).

When in the caretaking role, MSOs and FSOs are charged equally, but in many cases, FSOs hold the advantage (Hassett-Walker et al., 2014, p. 77). A comparison between the National Judicial Reporting Program and National Incident-Based Reporting System showed over a 10-year period between 1996 and 2006, that male and female sentencing was considerably different, with MSOs receiving consistently longer, more severe sentences than FSOs, hence the perception of FSOs as better off than MSOs (Hassett-Walker et al., 2014, pp. 77, 80). The frequency of male and female sexual offending increased over this time as well in regards to both offending and sentences (Hassett-Walker et al., 2014, p. 80).

Devilly and LeGrand (2015) felt the "soft on crime" approach stemmed from the media misrepresenting the situation (p. 195). If the media labeled an offense by an FSO

as a “sexual romp,” it may send the wrong message to the audience. This factor could contribute to the different punishments between MSOs and FSOs (Whaley, 2011).

Two cases focusing on the differences in sentencing involved two teacher sex scandals occurring in an elementary school and a middle school during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Ferguson, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Helling, 2017). Mary Kay Letourneau and Dennis Turner were both teachers holding positions of authority over students in their respective schools (Ferguson, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Helling, 2017). In 1996, Letourneau worked at Shorewood Elementary School in Burien, Washington, where she became attracted to 12-year-old Vili Fualaau, who was in sixth grade when the affair began (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017). Upon arrest, Letourneau was charged with two accounts of second-degree child rape (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017).

Letourneau had met Fualaau when she was his second-grade teacher; however, sexual relations did not begin until the boy was in sixth grade (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017). After sentencing Letourneau to just over 7 years in prison, the judge suspended the sentence to 6 months if the offender kept away from the victim (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017). Letourneau did not fulfill this requirement and was subsequently sent to prison to serve the entire term of her sentence (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017). At the conclusion of her sentence, Letourneau married Fualaau, having two children with him before their separation (Ferguson, 2017; Helling, 2017).

Turner, a drama teacher at Edgewood Junior/Senior High in Merritt Island, Florida, had an inappropriate sexual relationship with an underage student over a 3-year period (2003 to 2006; Gallup, 2016). The sexual contact between Turner and his victim

was on nearly a daily basis when they were both at school, with additional acts committed at the victim's house (Gallup, 2016). Turner received 20 years in a state prison, with another 10 years of supervision as a registered sex offender upon release (Gallup, 2016). Turner had faced 60 separate counts of sexual battery, which could have ended up with him getting a maximum of 758 years in prison, had the case gone to a jury trial; rather, he took a plea deal, pleading guilty to 10 counts (Gallup, 2016).

When looking at the nature of the sexual offenses by Letourneau and Turner, similarities emerge. Both were charged for having sexual intercourse with their students and both served or are serving prison time for their crimes; however, the sentences were markedly different (Ferguson, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Helling, 2017). Letourneau's victim was younger and the attraction/grooming may have gone on longer than Turner's (Ferguson, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Helling, 2017). However, had she been able to fulfill the terms of her probation, Letourneau would have received only 6 months' jail time. In turn, Turner received a 20-year prison sentence with 10 years' supervision afterward (Ferguson, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Helling, 2017). The initial evidence of sexual assault/rape of a minor and the age of the victims should be enough to elicit similar sentences (Stangeland & Efron, 2015), yet they did not. Although free, Letourneau had the label of being a registered sex offender for the rest of her life, like Turner will upon release from prison (Carlson, 2017; Gallup, 2016).

Gavin Hopper and Karen Ellis were physical education teachers in Australia who worked at separate schools (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013, p. 164). Hopper had an affair with a 14-year-old girl, whereas Ellis's affair was with a 16-year-old boy (AAP, 2004; "Sex

Offender Teacher Weeps,” 2005). Tried in the same legal system, Hopper received a minimum 2-year jail sentence, whereas Ellis got a 22-month suspended sentence (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013, p. 164).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory helps explain children's learning in relation to adult perspectives. Learning is harder to achieve when individuals rely on themselves and what they do in life instead of learning through others; as such, one effective way of learning is through modeling (Bandura, 1977, pp. 22-24). Thus, learning can occur because individuals view someone else exhibit a behavior and then transfer this knowledge to their own behavior, sometimes not even knowing the change is taking place (Bandura, 1977, pp. 22-24). What an FSO sees as a child, becomes the fuel for effectively acting in new ways, as the observed learning becomes the learning acted out. The advantage of someone learning from observing another person's actions is the observer seeing the errors made by the first person and adjusting personal actions for a better outcome (Bandura, 1977, pp. 22-24).

Normal observational learning allows observers to keep effective behaviors and discard the unwanted behaviors. Although this does not always happen, the learner's space for implementation is a lot broader in scope than the observed person's space. The learner has an expectation of seeing where the error lies (Bandura, 1977, p. 24). Four areas comprise observational behavior modeling: *attentional processes, retention processes, motor reproduction processes, and motivational processes* (Bandura, 1977, pp. 23-24).

In attentional processes, accuracy is a key component. To follow the behavior, the FSO must break down the specific features of the behavior (Bandura, 1977, pp. 24-25). One example of this is the complexity of the offense and the actions leading up to it and thereafter, with adherence to these features needed for the behavior to take full effect in an FSOs' life (Bandura, 1977, p. 24-25). Perceptions from past exposure and experiences of an FSO affect how they choose what to extract from the current observational experiences (Bandura, 1977, pp. 24-25). Next follows the interpretation of what the observer saw and heard in the exposure (Bandura, 1977, pp. 24-25). FSO characteristics determine what and how much of the experiences to receive while observing the behavior (Bandura, 1977, pp. 24-25).

The next part of the modeling behavior is the retention process (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). Many FSOs may have gone through observational learning in some way, but without the retention, the observation serves no purpose (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). Next, a symbolic medium occurs where experiences are stored for later use, with two measures of success being imagery and verbal cues (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). At some point, provided the FSO was involved in the same incident multiple times as either a victim or an offender, the image or act is now stored in their minds as they remember what took place (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27).

FSOs may make an internal association when they see certain actions or exposures again, subsequently reproducing that act or action (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). This association, based on experience, then becomes what they continuously learn and go through to perfect the behavior for future use. Verbal associations may occur with the

image as well, or may only occur if the association has been formulated that way (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). Verbal cues, on the other hand, have a more direct approach to learning, as most learning can occur by this means. An example is giving verbal instructions for the sex act for the next victim. Word association with created images allows an FSO to follow suit with observational behavior (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27). When a female witnesses a sex crime, both images and words become associated with the act. This association then causes the FSO to exhibit the behavior themselves, sometimes from merely watching the act or participating in any capacity (Bandura, 1977, pp. 25-27).

The motor reproduction process involves the conversion of symbols to actions within a FSO's behavior (Bandura, 1977, pp. 27-28). The selection and organization of responses are only successful when combined with the right amount of necessary skills (Bandura, 1977, pp. 27-28). When FSOs experience sexual acts, they can only gauge the success of their actions by those around them, whether by another FSO, an MSO, or the victim (Bandura, 1977, pp. 27-28). An FSO must witness the same or similar sexual acts multiple times to be comfortable in trying it themselves on either an individual basis or through group co-offending.

The last stage of the modeling process, the motivational process, incorporates the concept of performing an act if the outcome is a desired one, affording an incentive for participation (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29). If an FSO sees or believes the outcome may not be as profitable, she may either postpone or cancel the act. An effective behavior far outweighs a negative one (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29). Behavior regulation determines the

response of the FSO, the act she performs, and which victim she will select (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29).

The motivation to commit a sexual act comes from the FSO wanting to perform the act; the act itself does not promote motivation. Without an understanding of the desired act and outcome, the FSO may feel like she is walking into a situation blindfolded, not knowing what will happen (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29). Success on the part of the FSO comes from the satisfaction she gets from the outcome of the act, but does hold onto things she personally disbelieves in and therefore does not engage in forward thinking about personal disbelief (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29). In essence, an FSO only interacts and entertains what she deems as positive, and leaves anything she does not want (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29).

If FSOs constantly listen to other FSOs or MSOs and replicate behaviors they have observed, they are then guided through the sexual acts themselves, despite occasional failure, receiving a form of reward to offend on their own (Bandura, 1977, pp. 28-29). No matter the circumstances, the FSO had to receive exposure in some way, but not in a formal teaching sense. The FSO learns more through experiences with other offenders or even those experienced as a child.

Public Perception

When sexual offenses occur, many public opinions develop regarding the crime itself, the punishment, and those involved (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). In a 2007 article “Public Perceptions About Sex Offenders and Community Protection Policies,” Levenson et al. (2007) discussed public perceptions regarding sexual offenses

as a whole. The authors indicated an inaccurate public outlook regarding sex offenders, showing a public push to secure community protection through government-initiated policies via lawmakers instead of other means (Levenson et al., 2007).

Members of the public believe sex offenders stand a greater chance of committing the same kinds of acts again, and that even those who received treatment do not benefit from it (Levenson et al., 2007). The researchers found the perceptions of the general public in Melbourne, Florida, were opposite to the hypothesis which stated an empirical research study would yield different results (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 157). The media can influence what members of the public believe, which in turn can affect anything that is tied to it, e.g. public/social policy (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 157). Levenson et al. (2007) collected the data from individuals waiting in a local Department of Motor Vehicles office. Although this was a limited sample, participants were members of the public who had specific beliefs regarding sex offenders (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 157). In line with past research, Levenson et al. showed that attitudes change when the public receives accurate information that could influence opinions, especially when the issues have a social impact on all (Levenson et al., 2007, pp. 156-157).

A weakness of the study was performing the research in one county; the strength came from the depth and breadth of categories used to obtain public opinions and perceptions. The researchers presented a detailed plan to show how members of the public felt regarding sex offenders in their community (Levenson et al., 2007, pp. 146-152). These findings prove more research is needed from participants of different backgrounds to fully understand the collective perception about sex offenders. Although

Levenson et al. received a lot of data regarding sex offenders and the public's perception, they lacked information specific to FSOs.

People feel an uncontrolled, impulsive panic/fear when living in communities where registered sex offenders reside (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009, p. 299; Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 834). Although both men and women related similar fears, Kernsmith et al. (2009) presented results regarding the community members' fear of MSOs versus FSOs, (pp. 295-296). The researchers presented evidence of community members sharing their emotions about registered sex offenders, but nothing more.

Harris and Socia (2016) reported the opinions of the public, including the belief that a known sex offender is more likely to reoffend and continue to do so without any positive changes through treatment or management (p. 661). When compared with other types of offenders, sex offenders are one of the most disliked by the public (Harris & Socia, 2016, p. 664). Prior researchers have indicated the public wants to know more about offenders and where they live (Harris & Socia, 2016, p. 664). This attitude was reflected in a national phone survey between 2006 and 2007, and policies that restricted where sex offenders could live (Harris & Socia, 2016, p. 664).

Over time, the public's input in surveys and data collection shows a positive outlook on their intentions in terms of sex offenders. Members of the public want safe neighborhoods but are less against regulating how sex offenders live; however, some do not want sex offenders living among them (Harris & Socia, 2016, p. 664; Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 839). In addition, the label of "sex offender" possibly creates a bigger public impact than the crime itself (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 663-665). If someone is

labeled as a sex offender, the public has an idea about what the individual is like, providing their opinions based upon those preconceived notions (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 663-665).

Zack, Lang, and Dirks (2016) reviewed comments by members of the public appearing in articles published by the *Huffington Post* between November 2010 and November 2013. The researchers found a definitive double standard regarding female teachers having sexual relationships with minor male students (p. 61), leading them to note a different public perception of FSOs, especially when it comes to sentencing (p. 69). The belief creates a double standard because men and women do not receive the same sentence for the same crimes, only because they are different genders (Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 833; Zack et al., 2016, pp. 69-70). Comments made by members of the public indicated both men and women should be sentenced the same and not receive a “way out” (leniency) of serving a full prison sentence (Olver & Barlow, 2010, pp. 833, 839; Zack et al., 2016, pp. 69-70).

Along with this, Zack et al (2016) found members of the public do not see women as predatory sex offenders in society; in fact, FSOs are not on the public’s radar (pp. 69-70). The public frequently interprets a female teacher having sex with a male minor student as the “greatest fantasy for a teenage boy!” (Zack et al., 2016, p. 70) This reveals one factor of why FSOs are treated differently than MSOs (Zack et al., 2016, p. 70). Other comments indicated a lack of belief about female offenders being real and women being incapable of committing sex crimes.

Public perceptions vary, with some feeling males of any age are lucky to experience sexual acts by female teachers and others believing sexual offense punishments should be equal across genders. Many believe FSOs should be registered and identified so people know who they are and where they live (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 663-665; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013, p. 165). When a female commits a sexual offense, the crime may be sensationalized because of some public views; in comparison, a male committing the same act does not yield the same kind of views (Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 834; Zack et al., 2016, p. 75).

The public's view of FSOs may originate with the attention garnered by the media when it picks up a story of this nature (Zack et al., 2016, p. 75). The more attention given to FSOs post-incident, the more the public becomes aware of what truly happens when FSOs commit crimes against both males and females. With this increased attention to the story of the FSO, the more the public may perceive FSOs as being the same as MSOs, noting where the sentencing needs to change if the crimes are the same (Zack et al., 2016, p. 75). The public's perception of FSOs may only change if society starts taking seriously the material published by the media, and the court system begins punishing FSOs the same as MSOs.

Willis, Malinen, and Johnson (2013) commented on specific demographic groups that might hold different beliefs of sex offenders (p. 231). They highlighted the potential for different groups to influence sex offenders to recommit sex crimes based on having a specific belief on certain aspects of their reentry into normal life (Willis et al., 2013,

p. 231). This may be an important missing element because members of the public are the ones who influence policy.

Depending on the community, the registered sex offender can live only in a specific area so neighbors and other locals are aware of who lives and works around them (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 663-665; Willis et al., 2013, p. 231). Public beliefs and perceptions may stem from individuals' social networks, educational levels, and political affiliations when it comes to FSO's committing sex crimes. This belief system could be the difference between labeling FSO's as sex offenders or not, which does not always reflect a true account of what they have done (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 661, 663-665; Whaley, 2011). A labeled sex offender means the public may automatically believe the offense involves a child or the offender is a danger to local children (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 661, 663-665; Socia & Harris, 2016, p. 380; Whaley, 2011). Whether the offender is male or female, the "sex offender" label often creates an inaccurate public outlook (Socia & Harris, 2016, p. 380). In an online survey regarding registered sex offenders, Socia and Harris found the following public views: sex offenders are people who are strangers to their victim, sex offenders are pedophiles, the potential of them committing a new sexual or nonsexual crime exists, and the sex offender potentially may abduct a new victim(s).

The literature includes many examples of the preconceived notions of who the public believes sex offenders are. Also discussed were how the public perceives the offenders' actions during the incidents as well as after release to reintegrate into society. These perceptions could be deeply rooted in a political beliefs, personal academia and

research, how members of the public were raised as children, the age and era in which they grew up, as well as the type of occupation they currently have (Willis et al., 2013, pp. 237-238).

Summary

Finding information about FSOs in online journals, books, and other means is labor intensive. Much of the literature is blended with MSO articles, which highlight sexual offenses as a whole. Some of the research occurred prior to 2013 without replication. Multiple reasons may exist on why FSOs do not receive as much study as MSOs, but evidence indicates a high prevalence of sexual offense by both MSOs and FSOs.

FSOs are often ordinary people who live among others in their community. They are mothers, grandmothers, sisters, babysitters, and teachers (Duncan, 2010, p. 141; Hislop, 2001, pp. 73, 79, 92). Within the realm of FSOs, different typologies give substance to how FSOs act (Hickey, 2016, pp. 176-177; Kramer, 2017, p. 27). For typologies, the category reflects a description of the abuse given by the offender and what is experienced by the victim. FSOs use different ways of abusing their victims for sexual gratification, such as using objects, vaginal and anal intercourse via both rape and sexual assault, and masturbating themselves with their victims present or having their victims masturbate them (Hislop, 2001, pp. 11-13; Kramer, 2017, p. 107).

When FSOs offend, it has the same effect on the victims, their families, and the community they live in as it would with MSO's. In addition, neighbors and local governments sometimes do not want registered sex offenders living in their

neighborhoods. If offenders do live in the community, residents want to know who they are and where they live (Harris & Socia, 2016, pp. 663-665; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013, p. 165; Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 839; Willis et al., 2013, p. 231). Members of the public have a wide array of beliefs and perceptions when it comes to sex offenders and who they are, yet when any type of sex offender integrates back into society, an impulsive fear or panic may spread among the community (Kernsmith et al., 2009, p. 299; Olver & Barlow, 2010, p. 834).

The media has contributed a belief system for community members across America regarding sex offenders and who they are (Zack et al., 2016, p. 75). Without media exposure, members of the public might not know who sex offenders are and what they have done (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 157; Zack et al., 2016, p. 75). The media can be used for both good and bad, but with sex offenders, it is necessary to present the truth about the individuals, what crime they committed, and where they are in the community. On the other hand, many misconceptions about sex offenders place undue stress and strain on the community. Some members of the public believe sex offenders are strangers to their victims, always pedophiles, capable of committing other types of crimes, and potentially going to abduct new victims (Socia & Harris, 2016, p. 380). All of these beliefs may be present due to stories the community members have heard.

In short, the information concerning FSOs is often underreported, unreported, or not believed when compared to MSO crimes. With this study, there will be an exploration of why the public has such a different view towards FSOs, specifically the crimes committed and the sentences they receive. I hope to uncover the background of the

public's perception of FSOs, where it may have come from, how much it influences society, and how an FSO is sentenced. All of these factors are necessary in order to bring FSOs' sex crimes out of obscurity and show people that women are equally capable of committing the same sexual offenses as men. The social learning theory by Bandura (1977) will give valuable insight into understanding not only where the public's perception of FSOs could have come from, but also why they believe FSOs and their sex crimes differ from MSOs.

Within Chapter 3, the quantitative methodology underlying data collection and analysis will be outlined. The data gathering discussion will cover random sampling, analysis of survey feedback, and reporting. There will also be a discussion of any biases on the part of the researcher and ethical issues that may arise throughout data collection. Also presented will be the number of people interviewed, demographic data, and any other relevant information to be obtained. Chapter 3 will also include the credibility of the research and data collection, generalizability of data, confirmation of information obtained, and believability of the sample population interviewed.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine differences in the public's perceptions of MSOs and FSOs as it relates to their crimes and differences in sentencing as well as the societal factors that influences their varying views. Data collection came from conducting an online survey via different social media platforms. Both male and female individuals participated and otherwise remained anonymous because the data did not include any personal identifiable information. The results helped to understand why the public views MSOs and FSOs differently even though they commit the same crime. This chapter includes a re-emphasis of the need for the study, justification for the quantitative survey research strategy design, the approach for interviews, and the compilation and analysis of responses. Components of the focus of this quantitative study that were in place to eliminate bias, keep data collection credible and reliable, and ensure participation is random and not preconceived are also described.

Research Design and Rationale

A survey research strategy design guided this quantitative study. The primary concept of the study was the public's perceptions of FSOs; secondary concepts involved the comparison of MSOs and FSOs when looking at crimes committed and treatment by the courts. These concepts were incorporated into the online surveys. The questions within the online surveys stood as the independent variables, and the responses of those participating served as the dependent variables. Covariate variables were the nature of the participant responses: positive or negative.

The rationale for the study's approach came from what prior researchers identified or were unable to identify within data on FSOs. This approach also involved garnering the experiences, feelings, and beliefs of participants. A survey research strategy design incorporates an individual's opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, that when recounted, may undergo analysis to obtain a thorough and accurate portrayal of what perceptions the public may have (Creswell, 2009, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, & DeWaard, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Methodology

Population

The population for this study were members of the public who were on different social media platforms. There were no prerequisites for selection. This population was only accessible through Facebook and LinkedIn. Prior to placing the link on the different social media platforms, the questions on the online survey were checked to make sure they were relevant to the study's purpose and research questions. I advertised my information when introducing the online survey in the open forums as well as what kind of study will be performed.

Saturation may have occurred with fewer participants if no new information or themes were forthcoming; however, at a minimum the goal was to obtain between 50 and 60 completed online survey to gain credibility and allow for anything unexpected as well as garner accurate perceptions of FSOs, the crimes committed by FSOs, and treatment by the courts for FSOs. If individuals began the online survey and then chose not to complete it, this was annotated, with a continuation of collecting those completed online

surveys and continuing in that manner until the requisite amount had been collected and a sufficient amount of data had been collected.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Because the method of data collection was via volunteer participants for the online survey and not participants chosen by me, the sampling strategy used for this quantitative study was the convenience sample strategy (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). The reason for this approach was due to the nature of the online survey, which was set up for anyone to take it who wished to be a part of it (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). The intent of the data collection was to get between 50-60 completed online surveys of those wishing to participate from the social media platforms of Facebook and LinkedIn. The approach was voluntary, without any bias for age, race, religion, political persuasion, or any other factor.

The sample was drawn by posting the invitation for the online survey via Facebook and LinkedIn until the intended number completed the survey. There were no specific directions on who the online survey was posted to except the two social media platforms that were used. The rest was left up to members of the public wanting to take the survey if they chose, so the results are based on participants who were available and willing to participate. There were no inclusion and exclusion criteria, as the social media platforms garnered results necessary for analysis. This online survey and data collection process was open in that the invitation was posted and a waiting period began until the requisite amount of responses had been collected. The sample size created was a random amount, between 50-60 participants, decided based on the breadth and width of the social

media platforms the survey was being put out on. The length of time taken to collect this data depended on how quickly participants completed the online survey. The date the first online survey was completed was annotated as was the date of the last online survey to show the length of time it took to garner the requisite amount of completed online surveys.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection came from online survey responses from 50-60 people via open forums on different social media platforms. I was the one collecting the data. Data collection took place over a period of approximately 2 weeks, dependent on when the last completed online survey came back and whether the number fell between 50 and 60. The demographics that were collected included race/ethnicity, age range, gender, marital status, highest educational level achieved, and employment status. These demographics showed the randomness of participating individuals.

The identification of all variables and factors driving the public's perception of FSOs compared to MSOs was the purpose of data collection through the 50-60 online surveys or as many as were necessary to achieve saturation. If individuals read the preliminary message, clicked on the link to the first page and read it, understood it (are 18 years of age or older), and chose to take the online survey by clicking on that link, they were eligible for the study. Prior to taking the online survey, they were presented an informed consent page to read in order to understand what study they were responding to. If the participant read the consent page, they would have understood that by taking the online survey, they were consenting to being part of the study.

Prior to beginning the online survey, the study was clearly outlined as well as details of the questions. Each online survey lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes, dependent on how quickly participants answered the questions, with no need for further interaction. The participants who took the online survey finished the survey by answering all the questions and clicking the *Submit* button at the end. As soon as this had occurred, they were free to leave the survey. The frequency of potential participant contact was likely based on if the participants reached out for questions or clarifications on contents of the survey. There were no set follow-up procedures for this online study unless a participant requested it. I had full control over the open forums where the online survey was advertised as well as how many days the online survey was available for in order to gather the requisite amount of data. Responses to the online surveys were recorded via Survey Monkey, after which they were printed off and stored in a manila envelope until the data analysis phase.

One means of removing researcher bias was by placing the link on different social media platforms without directly targeting certain groups of people and avoiding those who knowingly had a prior professional affiliation/relationship with me. All participants received the same survey with identical questions. The only things that were asked of the participants were their demographics. Participants' age was asked to track if any minors had taken the survey because participants needed to be 18 years of age or older to take the survey. Mitigating misrepresentation of results occurred through periodic checks to monitor the data collected. During the data collection process, I was continually screening for gaps arising in the process. The first part of the survey was where

participants read the first page in its entirety, and fully understood that when they click on the link, that they were consenting to the survey and all information they give. The participant clicking on the link was a means to not just consent for the survey, but also in order to protect their anonymity.

Data Analysis Plan

Microsoft Word was used to compose the information gathered for analysis, with Microsoft Excel being used to obtain a better understanding of participant responses. The spreadsheet helped to highlight what variables and factors participants shared in their perceptions of FSOs when compared to MSOs. The spreadsheet helped in analysis of the different concepts presented (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), including the responses and demographics of those participating, to show an absence of bias in the participant selection process. No follow-up contact took place with the participants after they had completed the online surveys.

Data compilation and organization allowed the researcher to obtain a greater understanding of what participants presented. Each survey was read thoroughly in order to understand its contents and identify each participant's perceptions of FSOs and MSOs.

The three research questions that examined the gap in the literature within this study were:

Research Question 1: How is the public's perception about female sex offenders different from male sex offenders?

Research Question 2: What factors have influenced these differences in public perceptions?

Research Question 3: How do public perceptions differentially influence the sentencing and punishment of male and female sex offenders?

The null hypothesis for this study was the belief that members of the public hold a favorable view of FSOs. The alternative hypothesis was focused around members of the public holding a view that sees FSO's the same as MSO's. Both hypotheses were driven by the questions asked in the online survey and the responses given by the participants, whether positive or negative. Analysis included looking at the various responses that participants gave and creating visual layouts of graphs to show the results. Each question was commented on, with the responses given by the participants, and overall statistics received from Survey Monkey.

Threats to Validity

Threat(s) to external validity could be directed towards the setting of where the online survey took place (Creswell, 2014). It would normally be advantageous to be able to replicate the same study in a new setting/area, but with it being an online survey, it would have been hard to do that because there was no influencing of any kind in people participating (Creswell, 2014). Also, there was no influencing in where the participants took the online survey (Creswell, 2014). No participant was forced to take the online survey in their home, in a library, at school, etc. Although these are the threats to external validity, there was no direct way to address them because there were no bias or opinions throughout this study.

Threat(s) to internal validity could simply be down to the time that passed during participants taking the online survey (Creswell, 2014). What is meant by this was

participants could have been influenced beyond how they would normally speak, think, or act on what questions were presented to them during the survey (Creswell, 2014).

Another threat to the internal validity could have been the maturity level of the participants during the taking of the online survey (Creswell, 2014). As they read the questions, they could change their view based upon the question(s) asked (Creswell, 2014).

The last threat to internal validity that may have been present during the online survey, was the number of participants that partly finished the online survey or start and then stop immediately without answering any questions (Creswell, 2014). All of these threats to validity, unfortunately, could not be controlled due to the survey being a random, volunteer survey. The survey could not be forced and was performed on the participants own computer, cellular phone, tablet, or another electronic device. The survey did not pick the participant, the participant volunteered to do the survey. There was no control over any kind of demographic by the researcher when participants took the online survey (Creswell, 2014).

When participants were taking the online survey, there was no control over two people standing next to each other, taking the survey at the same time (Creswell, 2014). This could have fallen into the 'influenced' part of the threats (Creswell, 2014). These were the threats to internal validity, which could not be controlled or resolved. There was also no direct way to address them because there were no bias or opinions throughout this study.

Ethical Procedures

I anticipate completion of the online survey by individuals from a range of genders, ages, and ethnicities, with no specific prerequisites for participation. The researcher advertised/posted the online survey in open forums, on different social media platforms, and asked people to participate. Prior to placing this online survey in open forums on different social media platforms, approval was first be obtained from Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Individuals were informed they were under no obligations to participate; however, if they chose to answer questions in the online survey, they could end the online survey at any time, without penalty.

There was no risk of physical harm to participants before, during, or after the interview; however, discussing FSOs and MSOs may evoke uncomfortable psychological responses. Storage of both complete and incomplete surveys were to be in a manila envelope in the researcher's home office, to which only the researcher had access. No personal identifiable information would be available on participants; however, general demographic information collection was necessary to show the absence of preconceived targets. The institutional review board approval number for this study was 03-23-20-0530361 and expires on March 22nd, 2021. No participants were recruited via unethical means, which included specific groups or affiliations within social media.

The researcher had the informed consent outline as part of the first page for participants to read. When each participant clicked the link to the online survey, it would be assumed that they consented to their answers, beliefs, and opinions being used as part of the research study. A copy of each survey was kept both physically and electronically,

with the physical copy being kept in a sealed envelope in the researcher's home office to maintain full confidentiality. The data both physically and electronically, will be kept for a minimum of five years from the end date of the study/closure of this dissertation. No company, institution, organization, third party, or affiliate had provided any funding, and no conflicts of interest existed. After receiving the online surveys, they were collected and analyzed whether they were complete or incomplete.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to show how the research questions and study purpose enabled the researcher to discover more about individuals' different perceptions between FSOs and MSOs. The phenomenon under study was why the public regards FSOs differently than MSOs, even when they commit the same crimes. This chapter included justification for the quantitative survey research strategy design. This method enabled collection of the public's perceptions of FSO's, and how individuals perceive FSOs. Reviewing participants' answers allowed a deeper analysis of those beliefs to obtain an overview of the public's perceptions today.

The chapter showed the survey administration, data collection, and data analysis, along with a clear display of parameters and efforts to set aside any bias or personal opinions. Chapter 3 also included a presentation of the research questions guiding creation of the survey. Administering, numbering, collecting, and analyzing surveys are all part of the process. The parameters of each stage provide a solid groundwork for continuous self-evaluation and adherence to ethical guidelines.

As related in this chapter, a continuous review of risk occurred throughout the data collection process to monitor for any confidentiality or privacy concerns of participants. Ongoing reviews contributed to protecting the study from researcher bias and staying as objective as possible (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). No prerequisites existed for participation due to open advertising of the online survey in open forums on different social media platforms. Chapter 3 also included an outline of the data collection process, along with other elements to ensure credibility, generalizability, dependability, and confirmability. Also outlined in this chapter was the use of triangulation (articles, theory, results, and demographics), thick description (received through administration of the surveys), and reflexivity (present beliefs and potential impacts removed and anticipated, respectively).

Chapter 4 will include discussions of the collection and analysis of data gathered from the completed online surveys through the open forums on the different social media platforms, with demographics presented. The process summary will include descriptions of the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the collection and analysis phases, without any identifying information of participants. Another important component of the chapter will be the results portion, including answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the differences in the public's perceptions of MSOs and FSOs as it relates to their crimes and differences in sentencing and their treatment within the court system. The three research questions that guided this study related to how the public's perception about FSOs is different than of MSOs, what factors have influenced these differences, and how public's perceptions influence sentencing and punishment for MSOs versus FSOs. Answering the research questions entailed analysis of the independent, dependent, and covariate variables of questions, responses, and types of responses. Chapter 4 presents the data collection portion of the study, which includes time frame, recruitment, any discrepancies experienced, sample demographics, and the sample population as a whole. Following a discussion of the treatment of the population and challenges encountered is a presentation of the results of the online survey. The chapter concludes with a summary of the material and a preview of Chapter 5.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was through an online survey administered to participants via SurveyMonkey. The survey opened on April 3, 2020 and closed on April 9, 2020 upon achieving more responses than the targeted sample size. Recruitment was random, with individuals who saw the invitation choosing to participate. There was no direct recruitment of participants to prevent introducing any bias into the data

collection and overall study. There were some discrepancies during the data collection process, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Online Survey Completion Dates and Number of Responses

Date of completion	Participant responses
April 3, 2020	7
April 4, 2020	3
April 5, 2020	1
April 6, 2020	1
April 7, 2020	0
April 8, 2020	23
April 9, 2020	122

SurveyMonkey offers the option to send out invitations to a broad range of potential participants via posts on Facebook and LinkedIn. The use of this service allowed for the response rate to increase from 12 responses in 5 days to 145 responses in 2 days. Over the course of the 7 days that the online survey was being posted through Facebook and LinkedIn, both captured the activity of the social media posts for the public. The Facebook social media post had two comments, an unknown number of views and participants for the online survey, and was shared a total of 13 times. The LinkedIn social media post had a total of 181 views, an unknown number of how many times it was shared, and a total of one like. This service significantly reduced the length of time needed to obtain the requisite number of responses from 2 weeks to 1 week, and I received three times as many responses as intended. But the service minimized the risk of not reaching enough people through my personal Facebook and LinkedIn avenues due to SurveyMonkey's distribution channels in those same social media platforms.

During the time of data collection from the online survey, the presence of Corona-Virus 19 (COVID-19) was evident, which meant for the first 6-8 weeks of the pandemic the public was somewhat restricted to where they could go and what they could do. The presence of COVID-19 meant members of the public were potentially using social media and the Internet as a means of entertainment, until restrictions were lifted, which could answer why more people were willing to participate in this online social media survey.

Among the discrepancies noted were skipped questions. The survey included 20 questions directly related to FSOs and MSOs as well as six demographic questions. The total number of questions left unanswered from the 20 questions specific to FSOs and MSOs was 152 out of a potential 3,140, with 180 of a potential 936 demographic questions skipped. Despite no further discrepancies directly related to the questions on the survey itself, I encountered inconsistencies via Facebook and LinkedIn during the collection process. The invitation posted on LinkedIn showed a different web address, which might have caused some confusion for potential participants. Although the URL link did not direct potential participants to the survey, they were able to access the survey by clicking on the SurveyMonkey icon itself. Upon learning of the discrepancy, I corrected the URL after several attempts.

A final unexpected challenge occurred during the data collection process when SurveyMonkey paused the survey. This pause occurred due to the high number of participants (over 50%) who started the survey and subsequently abandoned it, with SurveyMonkey representatives contacting me to offer suggestions modifying the recruitment approach through Facebook and LinkedIn. A member of the SurveyMonkey

target audience team explained that pausing the study could have been for one of four reasons: It was too long, it contained too many open questions, the formatting was incorrect, or the topic of the survey may have deterred individuals from participating. Restarting the survey required me to send a request via e-mail, which I did four times on a single date (April 9, 2020). In the e-mail, I explained the type of survey collection (doctoral dissertation) and asserted that no interference was necessary with regard to the survey's content or formatting.

Demographics

Race/Ethnicity

Out of 157 respondents, only 142 answered this question. Respondent races and ethnicities (see Figure 1) were 85.92% ($n = 122$) White or Caucasian, 4.23% ($n = 6$) Asian or Asian American, 4.23% ($n = 6$) Hispanic or Latino, 3.52% ($n = 5$) Black or African American, 0.70% ($n = 1$) Native American or Alaskan Native, and 1.41% ($n = 2$)

Other, which respondents indicated as Native and White mixed and Afro American.

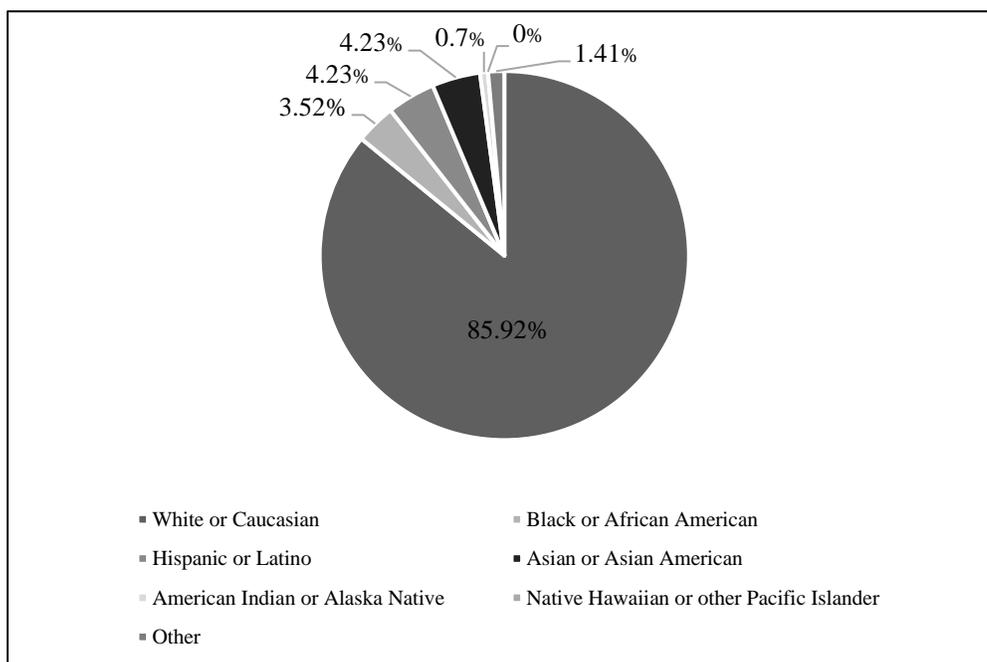


Figure 1. Race/ethnicity.

Age

Of 157 survey respondents, 142 answered the demographic question regarding age (see Figure 2). Responses showed 4.23% ($n = 6$) 18 to 24 years of age, 18.31% ($n = 26$) between the ages of 25 to 34 years, 26.06% ($n = 37$) falling into the 35 to 44 years old category, 14.08% ($n = 20$) 45 to 54 years of age, 19.01% ($n = 27$) between 55 and 64 years old, and 18.31% ($n = 26$) reporting being 65 years of age or older.

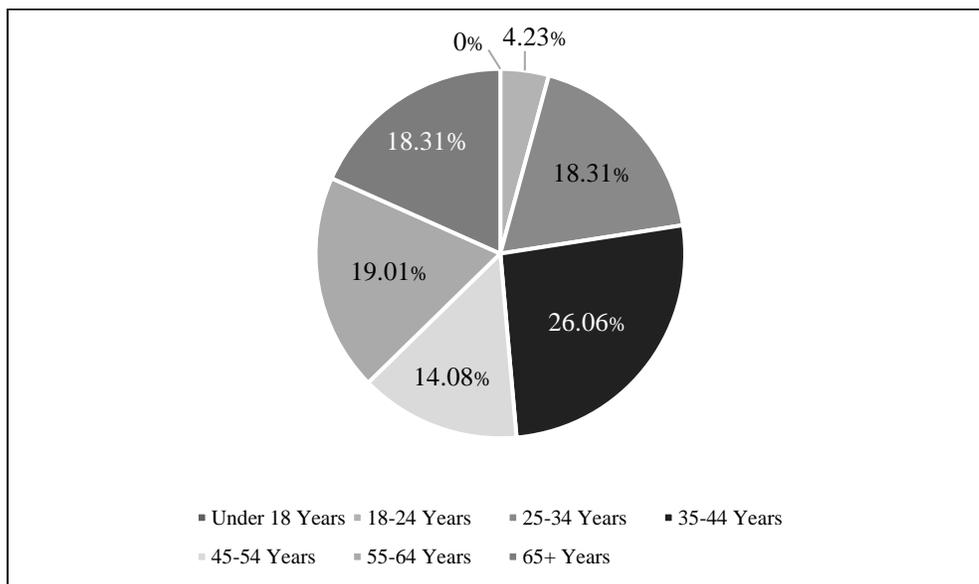


Figure 2. Age.

Gender

The demographic category of gender (see Figure 3) had 142 of 157 responses, with 15 participants skipping the question. The gender makeup of participants was 43.66% male ($n = 62$) and 56.34% ($n = 80$) female. There were no Other responses.

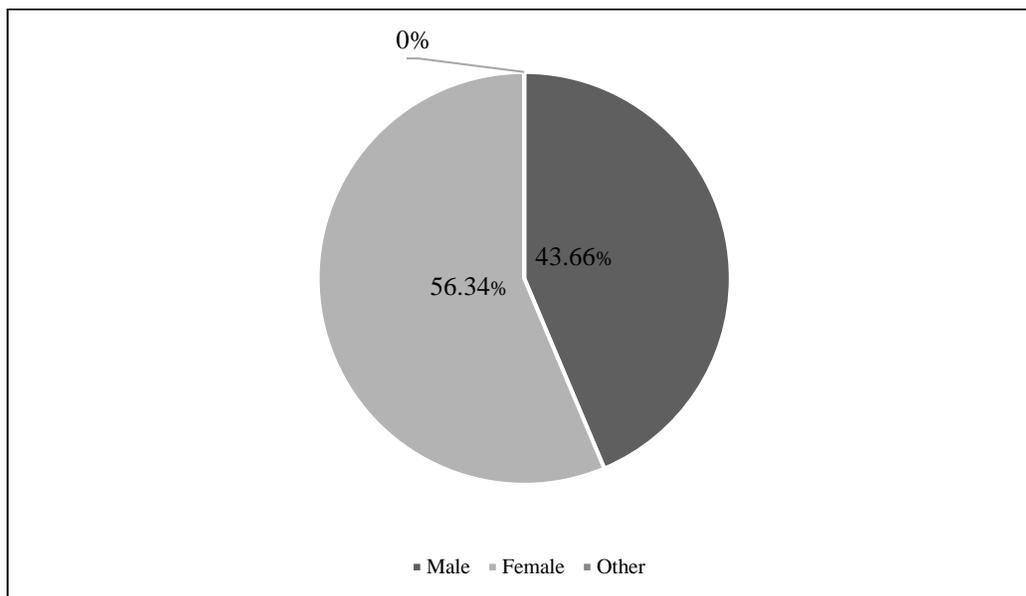


Figure 3. Gender.

Marital Status

The demographic category of marital status (see Figure 4) had 142 out of 157 participants complete this prompt. Responses showed 57.75% ($n = 82$) married, 28.87% ($n = 41$) single, and 4.23% ($n = 6$) divorced. The category of *Other* received 13 responses (9.15%), which included ace, widowed, single with a long-term partner, domestic partnership, monogamous relationship, married/separated, or in an unmarried long-term relationship.

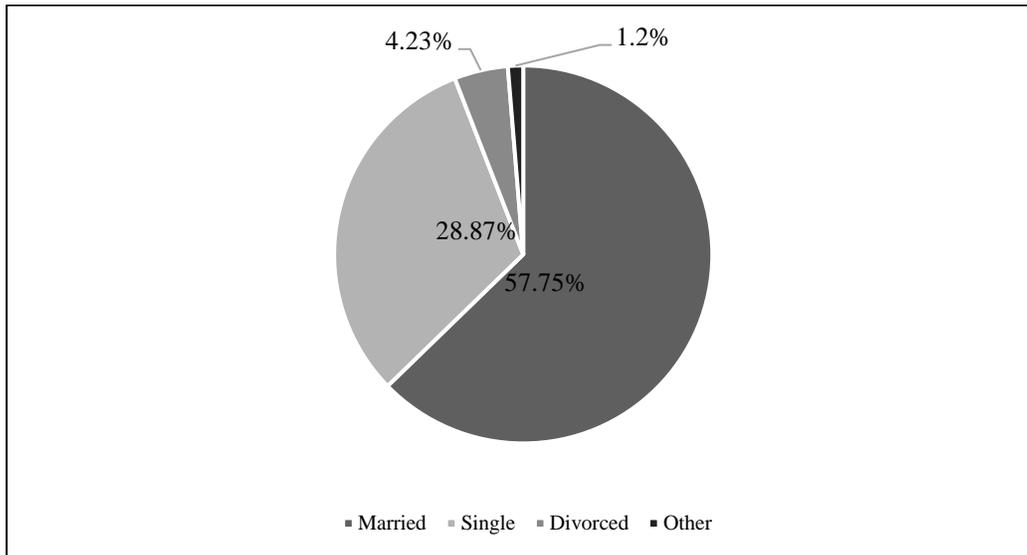


Figure 4. Marital status.

Highest Level of Education

The responses rate for highest level of education achieved (see Figure 5) also received 142 out of a possible 157 responses. Responses broke down to 7.75% ($n = 11$) with a high school diploma, 1.41% ($n = 2$) no college education, 19.01% ($n = 27$) associate's degree, 31.69% ($n = 45$) bachelor's degree, 23.34% ($n = 33$) master's degree, and 8.45% ($n = 12$) doctorate. The *Other* category received 12 responses (8.45%), which included 4 years of college with no degree, some college, professional degree, certifications related to their job, trade school completion, license but no degree, or professional qualifications.

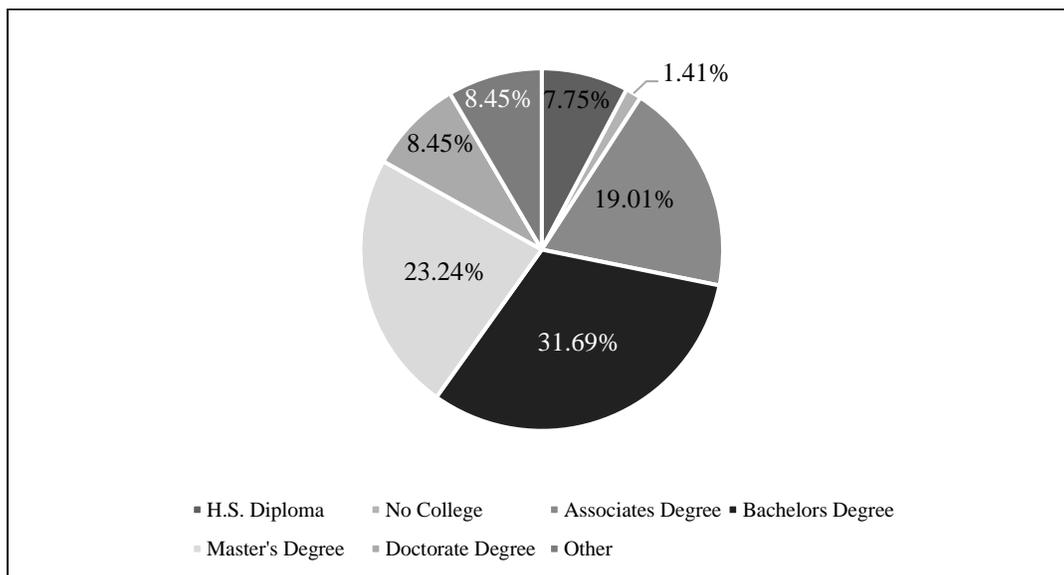


Figure 5. Highest level of education.

Employment Status

The last demographic question pertained to participants' employment status (see Figure 6), which was taken from 142 of 157 participants. Responses included 7.04% ($n = 10$) unemployed, 10.56% ($n = 15$) part time, 57.04% ($n = 81$) full time, and 25.35% ($n = 36$) Other. Responses in this open category included disabled, retired, full-time volunteer, self-employed, short-term disability, homemaker, semiretired, temporarily unemployed due to COVID-19, a mother who was a small business owner, or part of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine with no mention of status as either a volunteer or a paid employee.

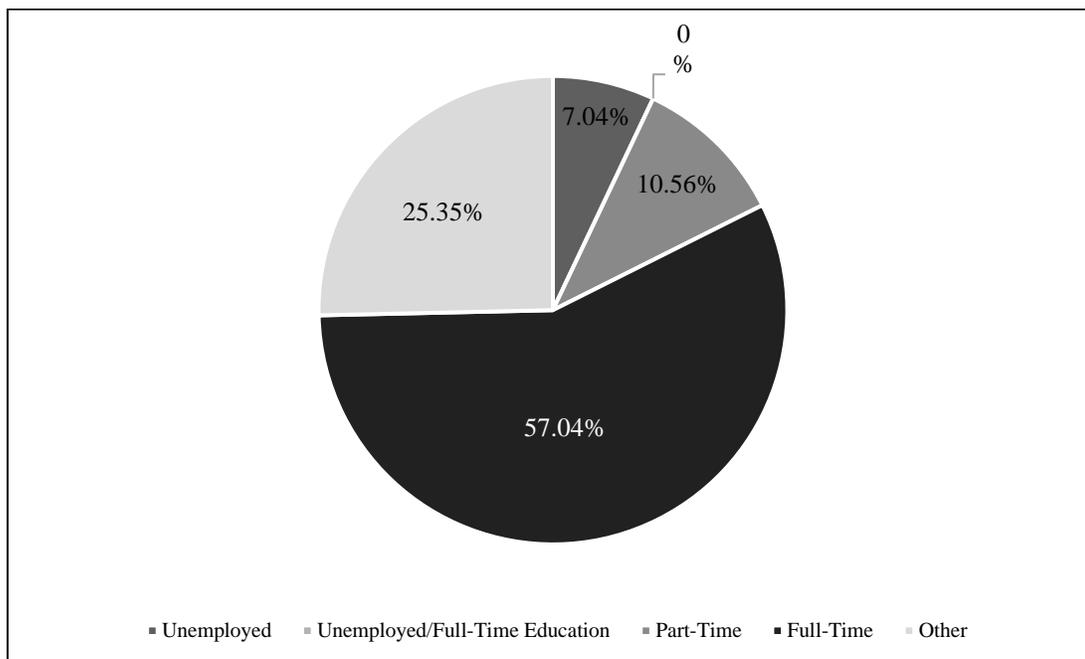


Figure 6. Employment status.

Summary

SurveyMonkey collected additional demographic data not requested and not part of the survey. As this information had not been part of the institutional review board application, it went unused. To accurately represent the questions that were answered and the questions skipped, Figure 7 indicates the collected and missing responses to the demographic questions. Among the 157 potential responses for each demographic question, 142 participants (90.45%) responded, with 15 participants (9.55%) choosing not to answer them. Random members of the public were the population of interest and the target audience, as the purpose of the study was to examine differences in perceptions of MSOs and FSOs specific to their crimes and sentencing. As such, anyone who participated in the online survey qualified as part of the sample population.

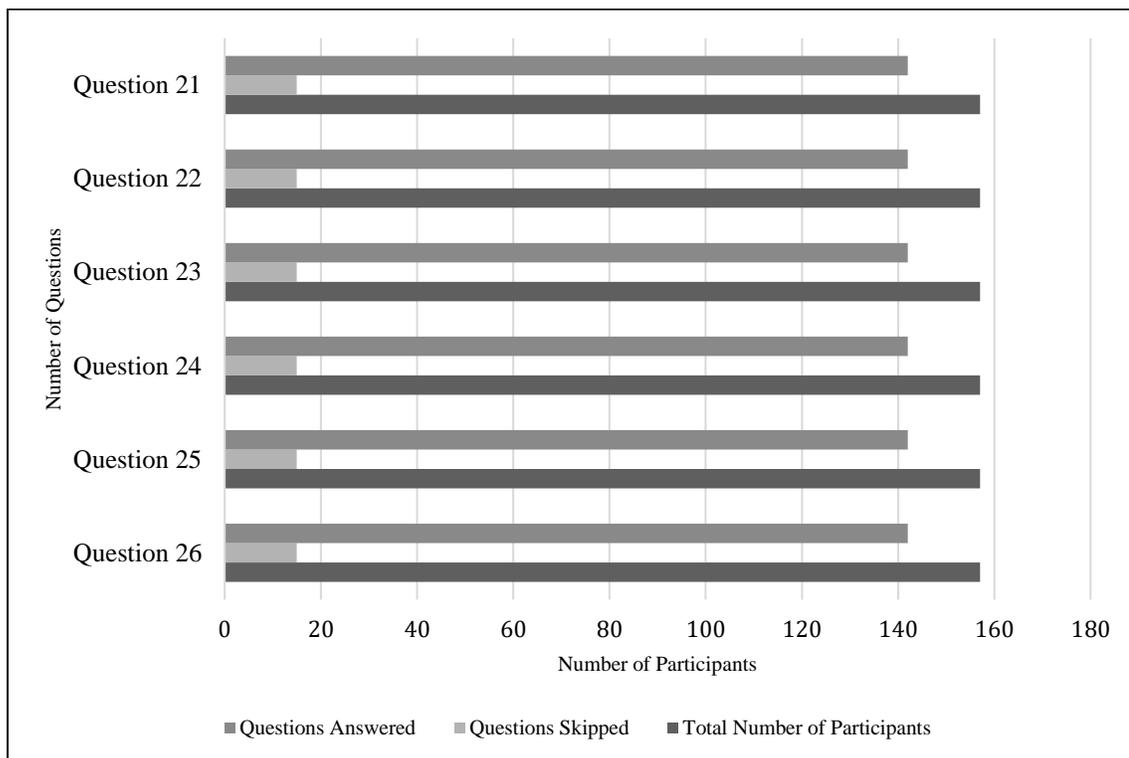


Figure 7. Demographics questions.

Results

The goal was to obtain between 50 and 60 respondents for the online survey, a number greatly exceeded in receiving 157 responses. The numbers of participants who answered the individual questions were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Survey Completion Rate by Question

Question number	Question type	Participant responses (<i>N</i> = 157)
1	Closed	156
2	Open	156
3	Closed	156
4	Open	156
5	Open	156
6	Closed	156
7	Open	155
8	Open	156
9	Closed	156
10	Open	155
11	Closed	143
12	Open	143
13	Open	143
14	Open	143
15	Open	143
16	Open	143
17	Closed	143
18	Closed	143
19	Closed	143
20	Open	143

Survey Questions

Question 1. Question 1 (see Figure 8) was a dichotomous question with two response choices, *Yes* and *No*. The question was “Do you believe that there is a cause for concern for female sex offenders in society today?” Of the 156 participants who responded, 117 (75%) answered *Yes* and 39 (25%) answered *No* (see Figure 8).

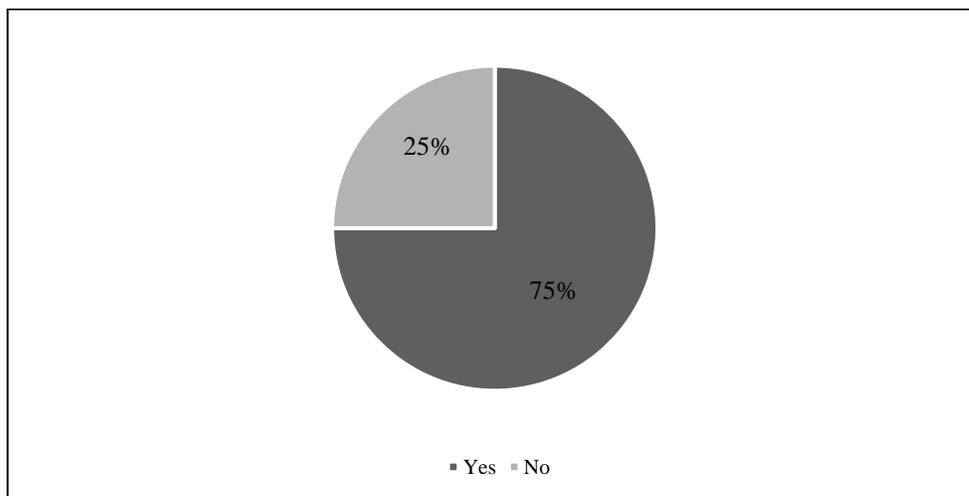


Figure 8. Question 1: Do you believe that there is a cause for concern for female sex offenders in society today?

Question 2. Question 2 was, “Do you feel that female sex offenders are treated differently than male sex offenders when compared to crimes they commit? If so, why do you feel that way?” This two-part question required open responses. Out of 156 respondents, 63.46% ($n = 99$) answered *Yes* or the equivalent, 14.10% ($n = 22$) answered *No* or the equivalent, and 22.44% ($n = 35$) provided an answer of either *Undecided* or no quantifiable response. Figure 9 is a visual representation of participants’ responses to the first part of this question.

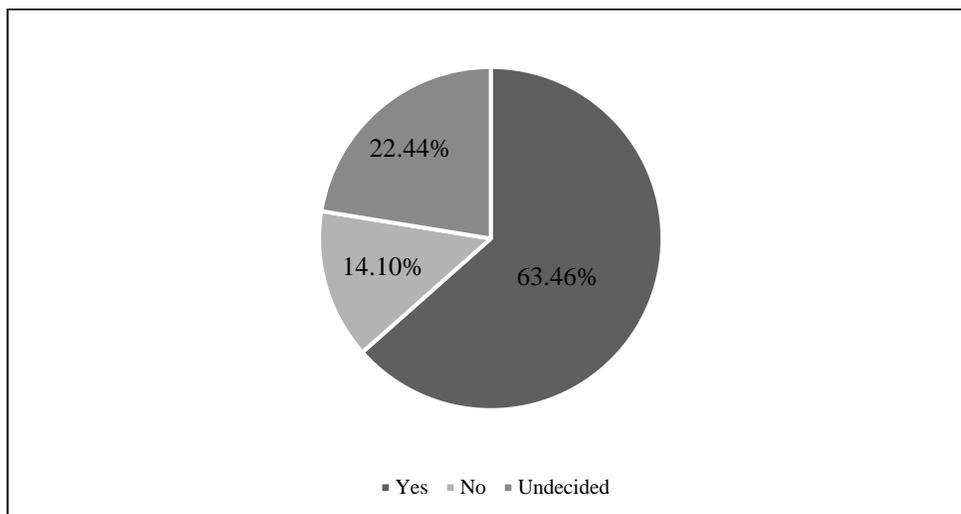


Figure 9. Question 2: Do you feel that female sex offenders are treated differently than male sex offenders when compared to crimes they commit? If so, why do you feel that way?

The opinions and beliefs revealed in participants' responses to the second part of Question 2 were varied. An analysis of responses resulted in grouping similar responses into overarching categories. The keywords and concepts participants used to identify the difference of treatment between FSOs and MSOs, if any, included societal beliefs, a lack of coverage or glorification of FSOs by the media, women's roles (e.g., caregiver, nurturer, protector), the heralding of female teachers as achieving the "fantasy" of sexual relationships with students with their actions not viewed as crimes, FSOs being less aggressive or violent than MSOs, women's prisons being easier than men's, women being physically weaker than men, making it harder for them to commit sex crimes, and a disbelief that women even commit sex crimes.

Some other answers encompassed categories such as FSO victims being less traumatized than victims of MSOs, the difference between the gender of the victim and

the sentencing for the offender, the difference between leniency for FSOs in comparison to MSOs, the outlook of FSOs being victimized themselves in the past, MSOs receiving harsher treatment for their sex crimes, and a double standard between FSOs and MSOs.

One participant reported having specific work experience indicating a predisposition in favor of female defendants. There was reference to the anatomy of FSOs versus MSOs and the inability to charge females with rape due to their gender and race. Some participants felt that FSOs and MSOs received equal treatment, did not believe that females would commit sex crimes, did not know much about the subject, or did not have a “clue” the crimes actually occurred.

Although some participants did not directly answer the question, their response was related to the FSO or MSO committing a sex crime, the sentencing and punishment, and the impact on the victim.

Question 3. Responses to the yes/no question “Do you feel there is a difference in dangerousness between MSOs and FSOs?” were 58.97% ($n = 92$) *Yes* and 41.03% ($n = 64$) *No* (see Figure 10).

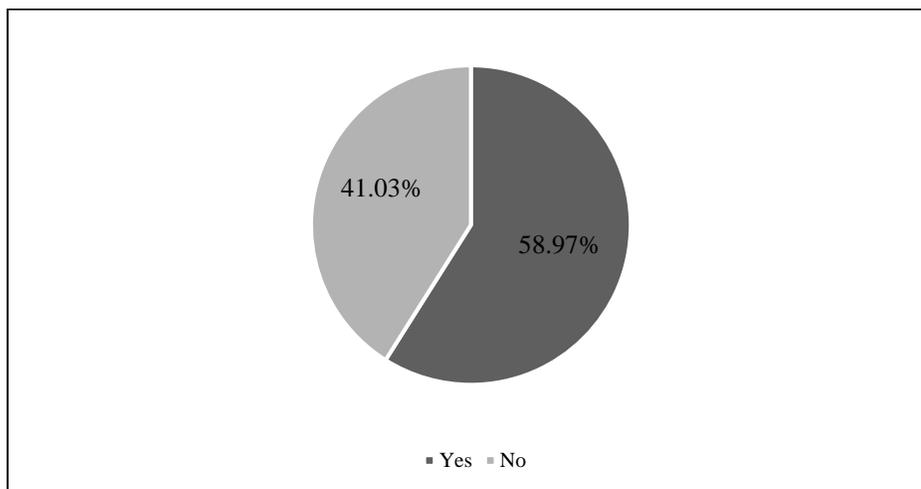


Figure 10. Question 3: Do you feel there is a difference in dangerousness between male sex offenders and female sex offenders?

Question 4. Question 4 was “What do you believe, if anything, has caused a difference between FSOs and MSOs?” Due to a wide range of answers, creating categories of keywords and topics was necessary to succinctly capture participant responses. Response groupings indicated common trends among participant responses to accurately portray respondents’ beliefs, lending itself to visual presentation.

Under each category, 36.54% ($n = 57$) fell under the category of “violence, strength, and aggressiveness,” 18.59% ($n = 29$) related to theme of “societal bias and public perception,” and 7.69% ($n = 12$) responded relative to “gender and genitalia,” 6.41% ($n = 10$) fell under the category of “lack of awareness or media attention.” Additional categories were “nothing/undecided” (18.59%; $n = 29$) and “other” (12.18%; $n = 19$). See Figure 11 for a graphical representation of response categories to Question 4.

The “other” category comprised 19 responses, each of which appeared fewer than five times. Among these themes were “sexism” ($n = 4$), “reported/specified crime” ($n = 3$), “cultural view/men” ($n = 3$), “emotional manipulation or coercion by FSOs” ($n = 2$),

“unwanted pregnancies” ($n = 2$), “feminist movements” ($n = 1$), “genetic makeup” ($n = 1$), “humiliation – male” ($n = 1$), “MSO power, FSO grooming” ($n = 1$), “multiple victims” ($n = 1$), and “rationalization” ($n = 1$).

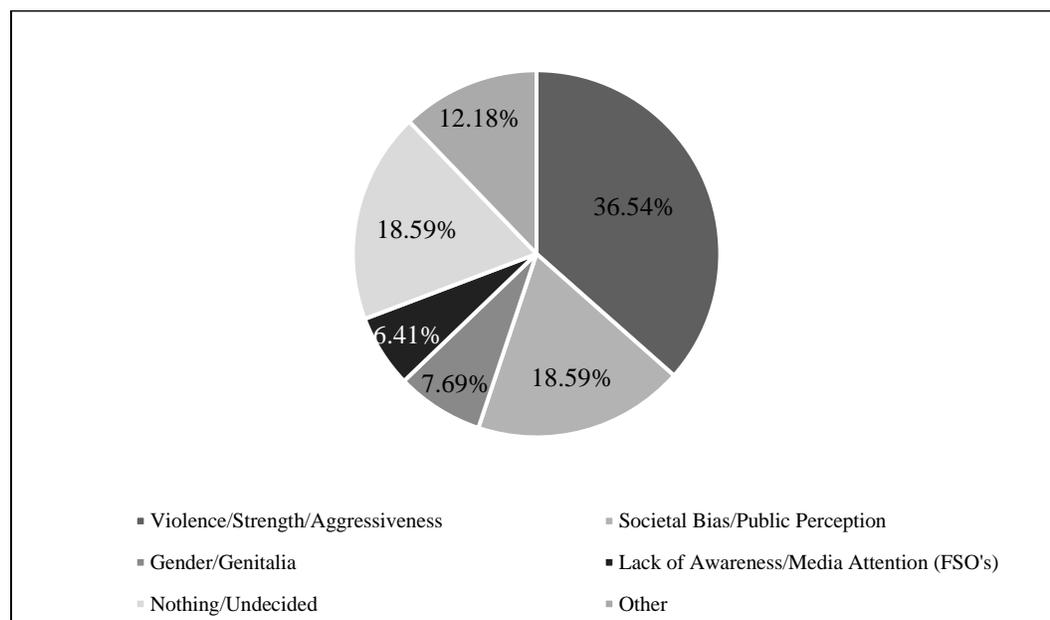


Figure 11. Question 4: What do you believe, if anything, has caused a difference between female sex offenders and male sex offenders?

Question 5. For Question 5, participants responded to the prompt “Are there any societal factors that you feel have caused FSOs to be looked at differently when compared to MSOs in society?” Participants provided responses that fell into one of three categories: *yes* (67.30%; $n = 105$), *no* (11.54%; $n = 18$), or *undecided/not relevant* (21.15%; $n = 35$). Figure 12 is a visual representation of participants’ responses to Question 5.

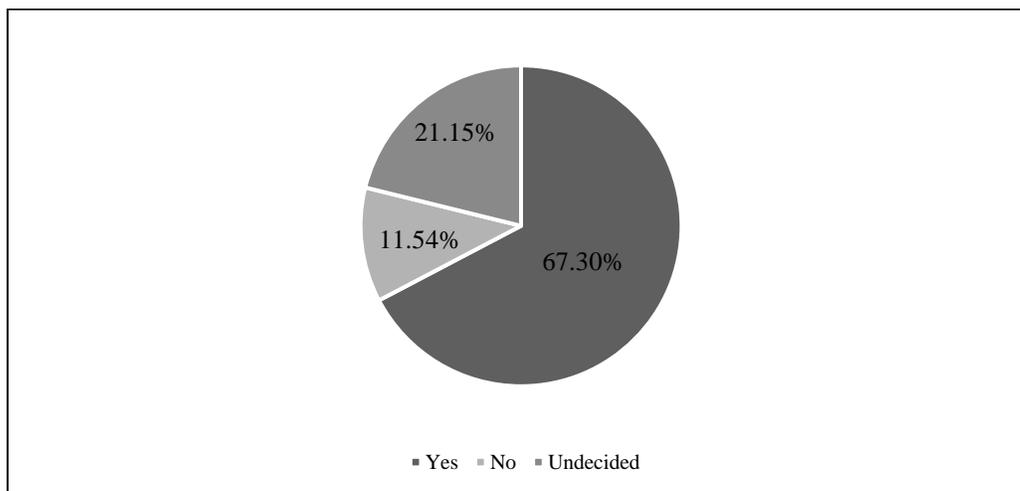


Figure 12. Question 5: Are there any societal factors that you feel have caused female sex offenders to be looked at differently, when compared to male sex offenders in society?

The opinions and beliefs presented by participants were varied. Similar responses became part of larger themes based on common keywords or meanings. Topics of the larger groupings included societal roles and outlooks of FSOs and MSOs regarding the level of threat and violence, media coverage of MSOs but not FSOs, the fantasizing of teenage boys versus teenage girls as victims, a disbelief that women can be sex offenders based on either gender or genitalia, and women receiving different sentences than men.

Other responses given by participants included women playing the “victim card,” both genders of offenders are in society, double standards between FSOs and MSOs, societal repression of female sexuality and denial of FSO existence, the influence on an FSO by an MSO, statistics of MSOs versus FSOs, society viewing women as helpless or victims while believing men want more sex, a believe women cannot abuse men or commit sex crimes, women’s objectification in advertising, assigning fault to the man, men’s disinclination to report an offense by an FSO, femininity, and race.

Lastly, some participant responses had to do with sexism, discrimination, the selling of sex in society, society's perception of women as desirable despite any inappropriate or criminal behavior, the ability for women to get pregnant, a lack of knowledge and attention of the psychological impact of an attack by either sex, the hope that female sex offending does not happen, a lack of awareness of the different perceptions of FSOs and MSOs, what leads MSOs and FSOs to offend, stalking prey (MSOs) versus human trafficking or desperation (FSOs), excusing women's behavior, sentencing based on whether offenders are "good-looking" (lighter sentences) versus "not so good-looking" (longer sentences), and the unlikelihood of perceiving men as victims of FSOs.

Question 6. For Question 6, participants responded to the prompt "Does inequality play a role in how FSOs and MSOs are viewed, even when committing the same sex crimes?" The response breakdown was 78.85% ($n = 123$) *Yes* and 21.15% ($n = 33$) *No* (see Figure 13).

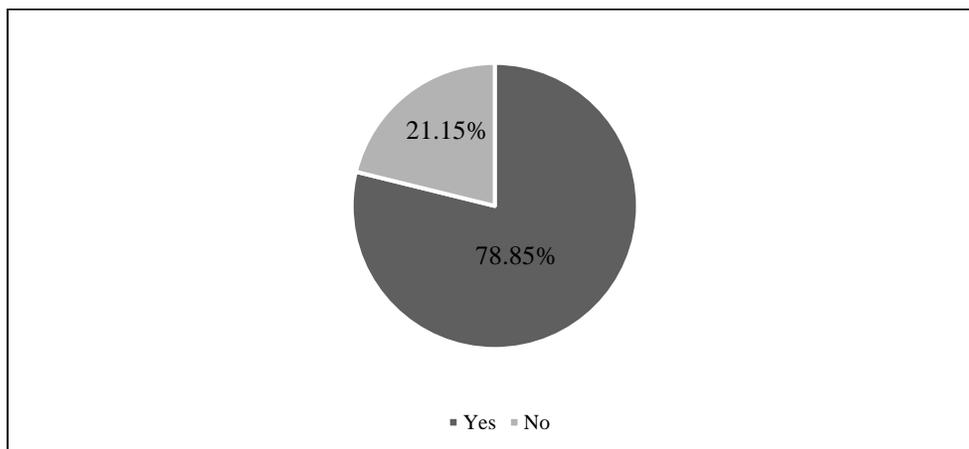


Figure 13. Question 6: Does inequality play a role in how female sex offenders and male sex offenders are viewed, even when committing the same sex crimes?

Question 7. Question 7 was “If there is equality or inequality in the treatment of FSOs and MSOs, what do you believe brought you to that conclusion?” A wide range of answers underwent categorization into keywords and topics for ease in presentation (see Figure 14). Common themes included “societal bias” (38.06%; $n = 59$), “sentencing” (9.03%; $n = 14$), “media coverage” (8.39%; $n = 13$), and “data” (3.23%; $n = 5$). Responses outside of these categories fell into “nothing/undecided” (27.74%; $n = 43$) and “other” (13.55%; $n = 21$).

Responses incorporated into the “other” category were those provided by fewer than five participants. Among the 19 responses, the categories included “gender” ($n = 4$), “less power/women” ($n = 4$), “difference in number of offenses/crimes” ($n = 2$), “type of approach: MSO – physical, FSO – coercion” ($n = 2$), “underreported” ($n = 2$), “violence – MSO” ($n = 2$), “emotions” ($n = 1$), “no difference” ($n = 1$), “sneaky approach – MSO” ($n = 1$), “stories of FSO – caregiver” ($n = 1$), and “wealth” ($n = 1$).

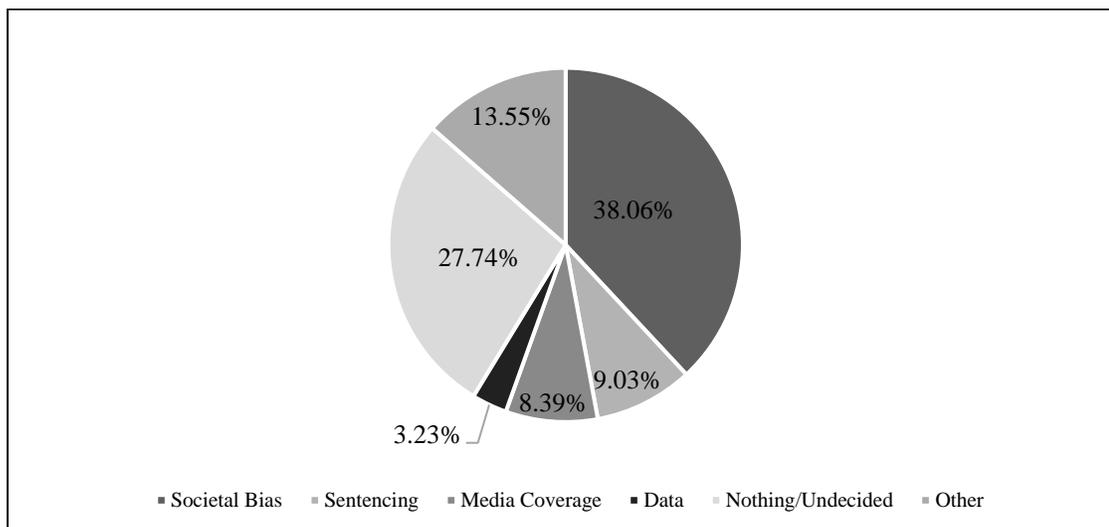


Figure 14. Question 7: If there is equality or inequality in the treatment of female sex offenders and male sex offenders, what do you believe brought you to that conclusion?

Question 8. Question 8 was “What do you feel causes FSOs to commit sex crimes?” The broad range of answers necessitated categorization into keywords and topics for visual presentation purposes. Groupings showed the common trends among participant responses to accurately portray what the sample population believed (see Figure 15).

Breakdowns by category were “mental health” (28.21%; $n = 44$), “power” (14.10%; $n = 20$), “abused as a child/abusive upbringing” 12.82%; $n = 20$), “social/environmental bias” (5.77%; $n = 9$), “prior observations” (5.13%; $n = 8$), “lust” (4.49%; $n = 7$), “nothing/undecided” (21.79%; $n = 34$), and “other” (7.69%; $n = 12$). The other category comprised 12 responses reflecting themes cited by fewer than five respondents. These were “self-esteem” ($n = 3$), “hormonal imbalance” ($n = 2$), “male issues” ($n = 2$), “perversion” ($n = 2$), “attention seeking” ($n = 1$), “money” ($n = 1$), and “physical love and affection” ($n = 1$).

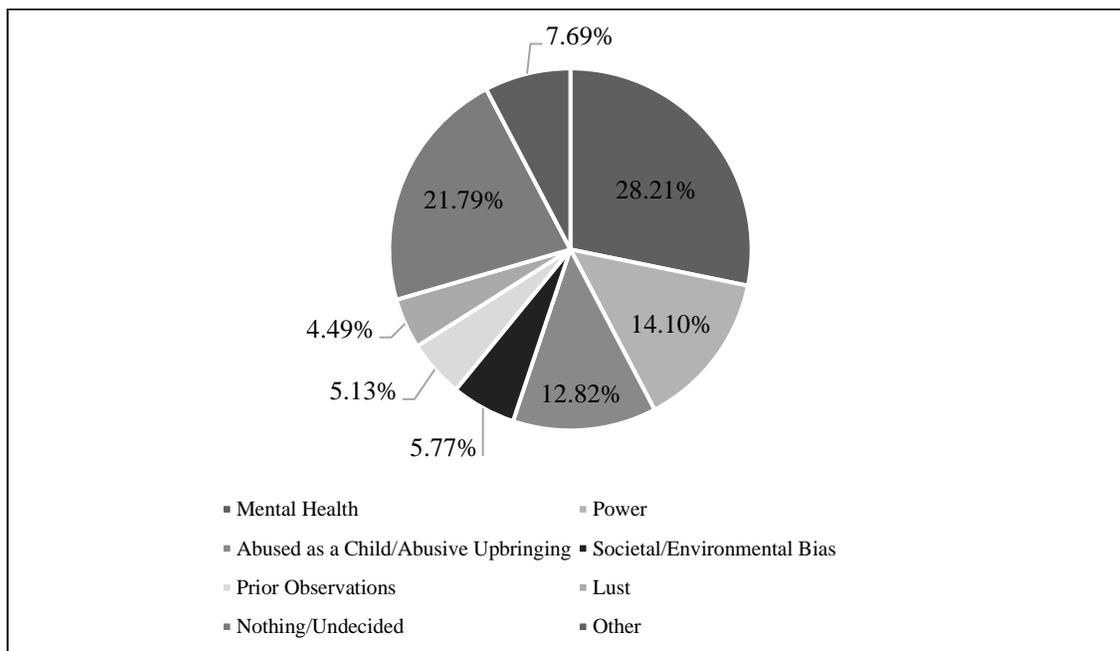


Figure 15. Question 8: What do you feel causes female sex offenders to commit sex crimes?

Question 9. Participants provided responses to Question 9, which was “Do you believe differences exist for male and female sex crimes?” Of the 156 total responses, 71.15% ($n = 111$) were *Yes* and 28.85% ($n = 45$) were *No* (see Figure 16).

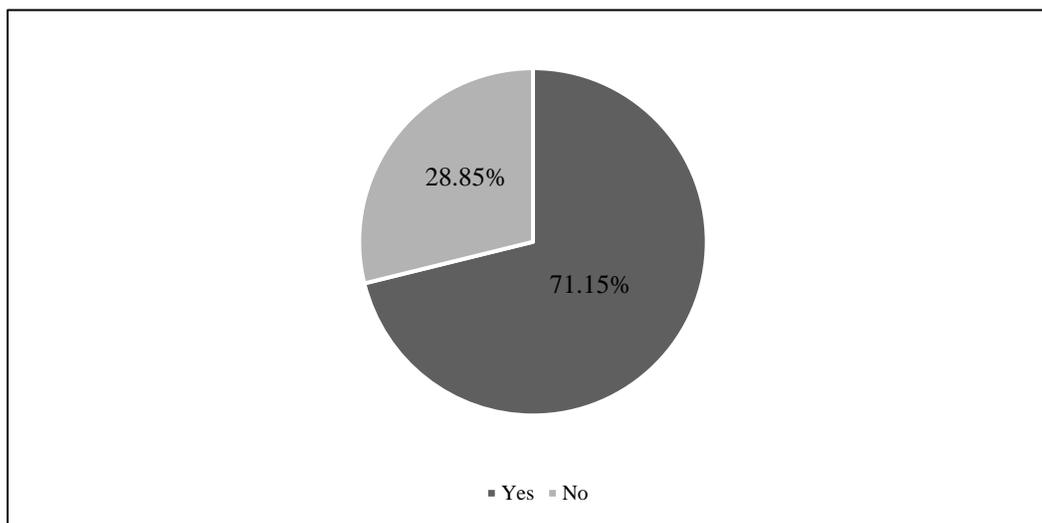


Figure 16. Question 9: Do you believe differences exist for male and female sex crimes?

Question 10. For Question 10 (see Figure 17), participants responded to the query “What has caused/steered your belief of FSOs to be that way?” This question elicited many answers, necessitating categorization into keywords and topics for effective visual presentation.

The primary categories of responses were “societal/environmental bias (21.29%; $n = 33$) “less dangerous/violent” (14.84%; $n = 23$), “media coverage – lack of/exposure to FSOs (6.45%; $n = 10$), “sentencing” (5.81%; $n = 9$), “gender/genitalia” (4.52%; $n = 7$), “no difference between FSO and MSO” (4.52%; $n = 7$), “mental health/psychology – FSO, including emotional attachment (3.87%; $n = 6$),’ “educational awareness/data” (3.23%; ; $n = 5$), “undecided” (25.81%; $n = 40$), and “other” (9.68%; $n = 15$). The percentages totaled 100.02% due to rounding.

The various responses grouped into the “other” category were those that appeared fewer than five times. The themes included “damage caused to victim – mental health” ($n = 4$), “difference in motivations, including abuse avoidance” ($n = 4$), “frequency/type of crime” ($n = 3$), “prior observations” ($n = 3$), and “different number of offenders” ($n = 1$), for a total of 15 responses.

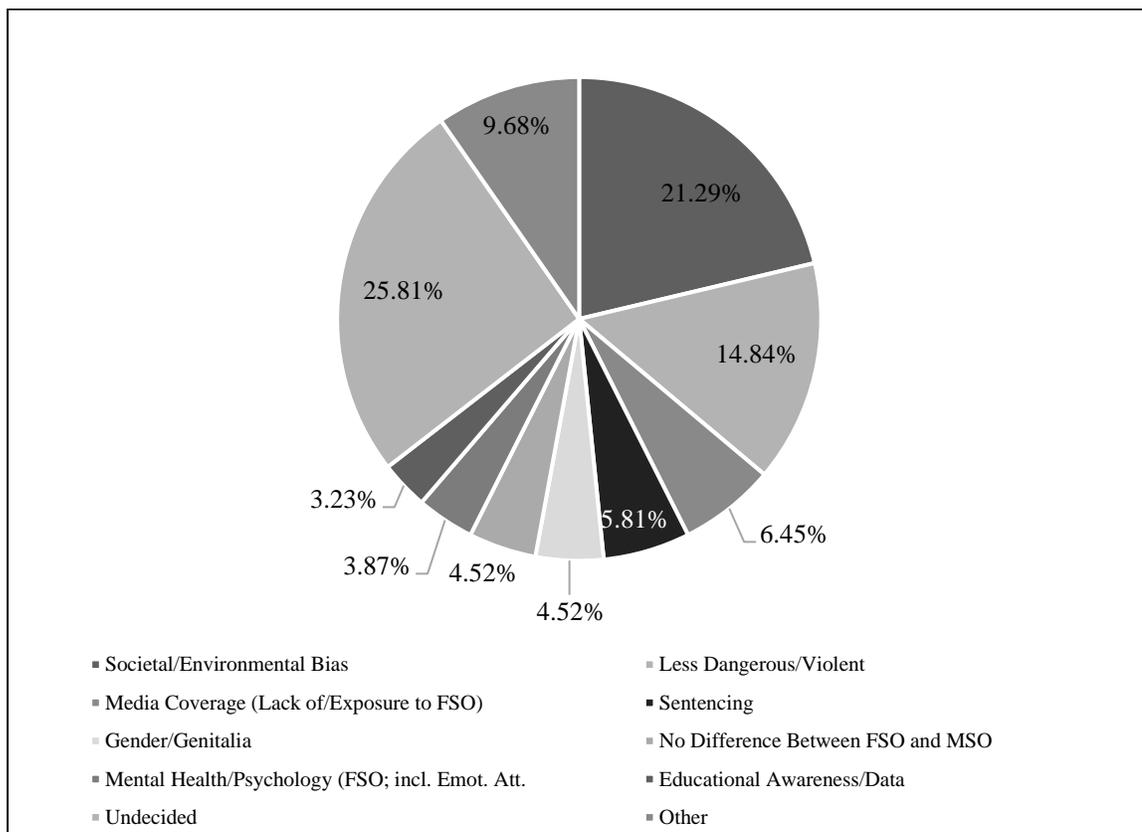


Figure 17. Question 10: What has caused/steered your belief of female sex offenders to be that way?

Question 11. Participants provided open responses to Question 11, which was “If FSOs’ and MSOs’ abuse stems from experiences outside of their control—for example, being abused as a child—should the sentencing be more lenient?” Responses were 24.48% ($n = 35$) *Yes* and 75.52% ($n = 108$) *No* (see Figure 18).

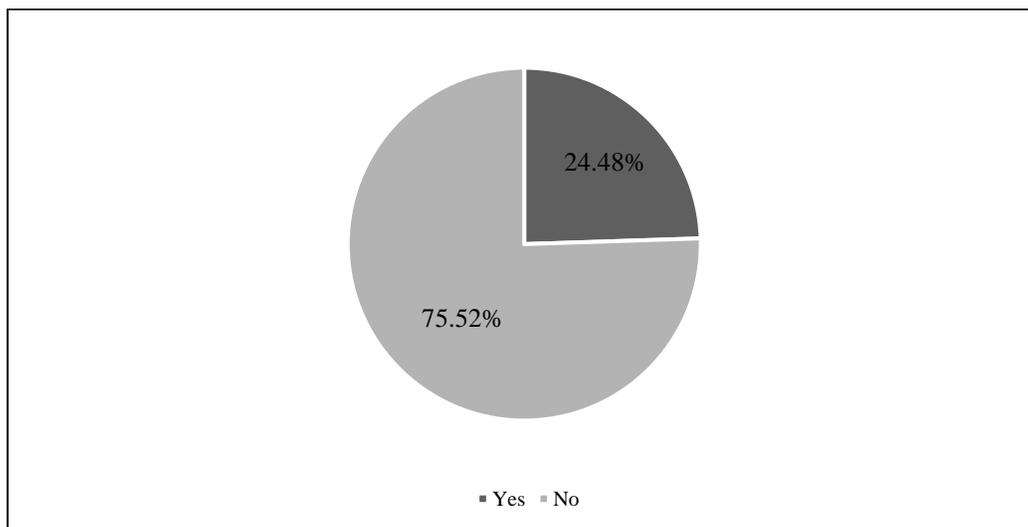


Figure 18. Question 11: If female sex offenders’ and male sex offenders’ abuse stems from experiences outside of their control—for example, being abused as a child—should the sentencing be more lenient?

Question 12. Question 12—“Do you feel that prison sentences should be the same for FSOs and MSOs? If so, why do you feel that way?”—elicited varied responses, condensed, and simplified for presentation purposes. Initial responses included “yes” or the equivalent thereof (72.73%; $n = 104$), “no” or its equivalent (9.09%; $n = 13$), and “undecided” (18.18%; $n = 26$). See Figure 19 for a visual representation of these 153 responses.

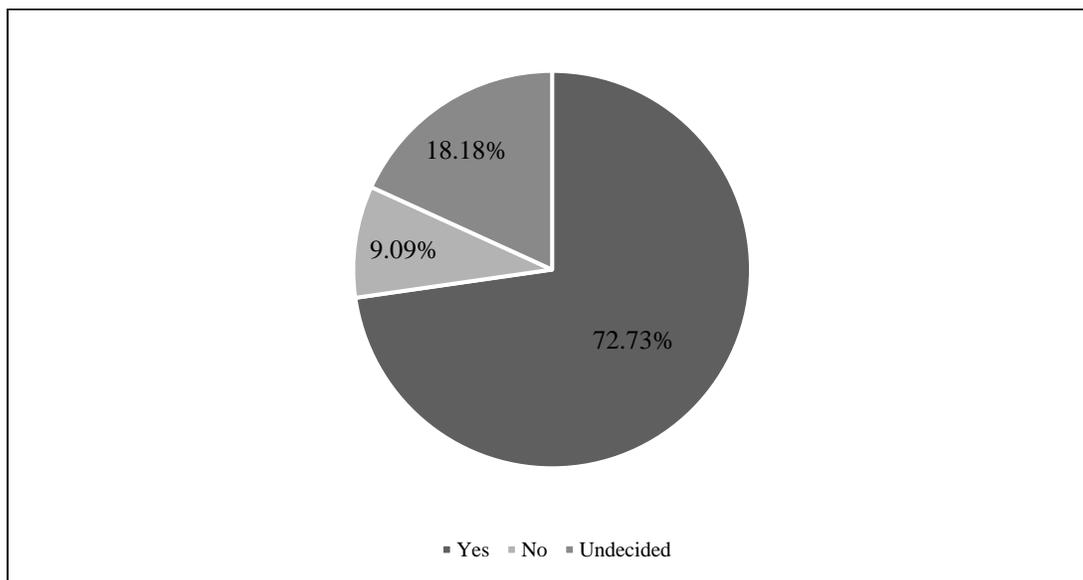


Figure 19. Question 12: Do you feel that prison sentences should be the same for female sex offenders and male sex offenders? If so, why do you feel that way?

The categories of opinions and beliefs conveyed by participants varied. Overarching categories of participant responses included the type of treatment that accompanies the sentence, the sentence concentrated on the crime and not the gender, disagreement because men can get women pregnant, the crime and the punishment should be the same, sentencing should be different because FSOs are less violent, the sentencing should reflect if there is violence included in the offense, FSOs and MSOs are equally abusive, sentences should be different because of the differences in circumstances, and equality for women across the board no matter the offense.

Some other responses given by participants pertained to gender not being a factor if the crime involved children, the victim impact is the same no matter the gender, uncertainty about the sentencing between FSOs and MSOs, setting and enforcing the same laws for everyone, the prison sentence depends on the severity and duration of the

abuse, not a fair outcome to the victims and their families, punishment is a form of inequality, sex crimes merit individual consideration, the same punishment unless they are a serial or violent offender, equity that no further abuse will occur, FSO and MSO behavior stemming from childhood should be a cause for them not to commit sex crimes, the extent of abuse, sentencing applied based on a set of rules, violence and aggression are primary with the sexual crime being secondary, and not hearing about FSOs ever being violent. Other responses included the same sentence for MSOs and FSOs with underage victims, severe punishments for sex offenders, lack of recidivism studies of FSOs compared to MSOs, blanket sentencing is problematic, less punitive and more reformatory treatment is needed despite gender, punishments should not vary, the likelihood of reoffending if penalties and punishments are lenient, victims not knowing the difference, and the need for mental health care to prevent victims from later becoming MSOs and FSOs.

Question 13. For Question 13 (see Figure 20), participants responded to the prompt “What are the positive and/or negative outcomes, both short and long term, when FSOs do/don’t get sentenced the same as an MSO?” This question elicited many answers, necessitating categorization into keywords and topics to facilitate visual presentation. Category responses broke down as follows:

“lack of legal fairness/inequality, including leniency,” (26.57%; $n = 38$), “reoffending” (26.57%; $n = 38$), “social bias/less dangerous, including less stigma” (9.79%; $n = 14$),” and “equality/accountability” (3.50%; $n = 5$), with 28.67% ($n = 41$) “undecided” responses and 4.90% ($n = 7$) “other.”

Within the “other” category were multiple responses worthy of consideration but not common enough to receive their own category. Themes that received fewer than five responses were “upset/tension, including resentment” ($n = 4$), “distrust in the criminal justice system” ($n = 2$), and “lack of previous sexual assault” ($n = 1$).

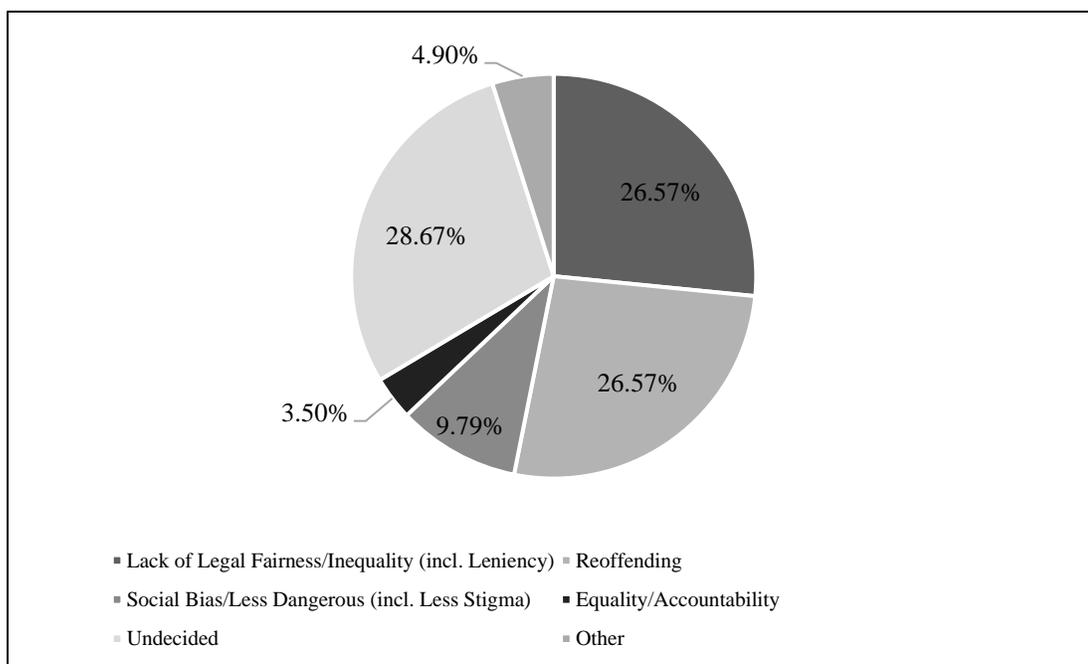


Figure 20. Question 13: What are the positive and/or negative outcomes, both short and long term, when female sex offenders do/don’t get sentenced the same as a male sex offender?

Question 14. As with other survey items, responses for Question 14 (see Figure 21) — “Is it wrong to give a lesser sentence to an FSO, even though they commit the same crime(s) as an MSO? If so, why do you feel that way?”—fell into broad categories based on frequency and theme. Responses for the first part of the question were “yes” or yes equivalent (74.83%; $n = 107$), “no” or no equivalent (9.79%; $n = 14$), and

“undecided/irrelevant” (15.38%; $n = 22$). Figure 21 is a visual representation of participant responses.

The opinions and beliefs provided by participants were varied, thus contributing to overarching categories. The keywords and themes participants identified in discussing reasons for giving FSOs a lesser sentence despite committing the same crimes as MSOs included impartiality, different sentencing is wrong only when enforced as the law is written, other information merits consideration, both are wrong in their own ways, sentencing should be specific to the circumstances and the case, the importance of equality, different sentences are not fair, FSOs are less violent and have less impact on victims, the same crimes should have no leniency due to gender, sentencing should depend upon whether violence is present, sentence to the full extent of the law, despite gender, there are negative victim outcomes despite the offender’s gender, and giving an FSO a lesser sentence.

Some other responses given by participants were related to women likely having offended due to being coerced by a male partner and/or as a result of their own victimizations, it sets a new standard for the offense, different sentencing is wrong due to making society seem more accepting female sexuality as a form of seduction as adults, sentencing should be on a case-by-case basis unless the offender is serial or violent, psychological damage is just as damaging whether by an FSO or an MSO, especially repeat offenders, female sex crimes are not as violent, brutal and damaging crimes should hold the same sentence, feminism has pushed for equality across the board, the sentence

needs to reflect the severity of the crime and the likelihood of recommitment, and the crimes are not likely the same.

Lastly, other responses included the power relationships in U.S. culture, how sexual advances on teens are different based on the offender's sex, physical damage is likely more extreme with an MSO, mitigating factors being the turning point for the crime, equal sentences are needed if the crime and the psychological abuse are the same, balancing the scales may be appropriate depending on specifics, it being wrong, just because it is unjust, no two crimes are the same, lesser sentences does not provide justice for the victim or deter further crimes, dependent on the underlining events, situations, and narratives that shape the crime story, raping a man would require his participation, punishment should be based on the evidence presented at trial, the courts might have more discretion in sentencing FSOs, and a lesser sentence suggests a lesser crime if the sex offender is a woman.

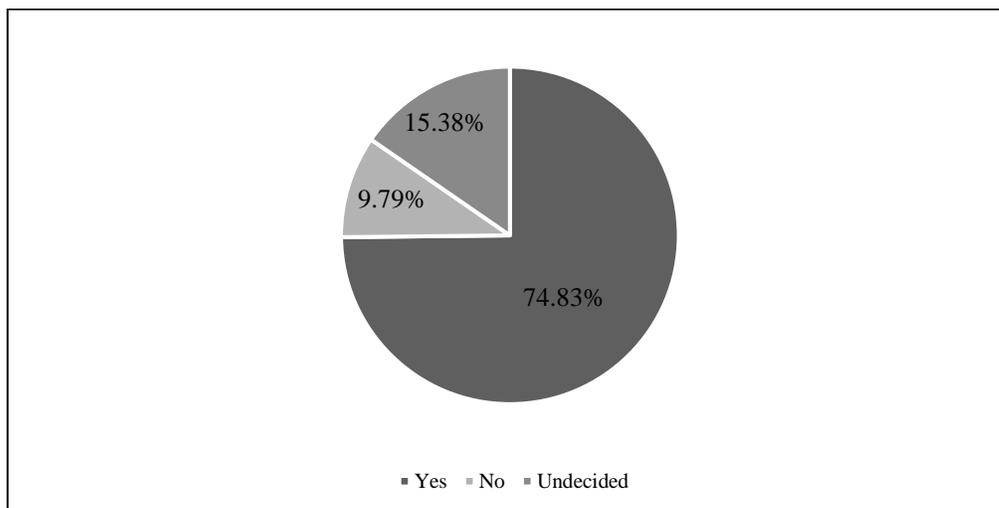


Figure 21. Question 14: Is it wrong to give a lesser sentence to a female sex offender, even though they commit the same crimes as a male sex offender? If so, why do you feel that way?

Question 15. In responding to Question 15, participants answered “What should determine sentencing for FSOs?” As with other questions, responses varied and thus required grouping by keywords or category. Such groupings showed common themes in a way easily represented via pie chart (see Figure 22). Responses categories included “whole concept” (25.17%; $n = 36$), “equality – MSO” (16.78%; $n = 24$), “statutes, laws, and sentencing guidelines” (16.78%; $n = 24$), “specific crime, severity, action, and intent, including malicious” (15.38%; $n = 22$), and “effect on/age of the victim” (3.50%; $n = 5$); 11.89% ($n = 17$) were “undecided” and 10.49% ($n = 15$) provided responses that fell into the category of “other.” Due to rounding, the total percentage was 99.9%. The response category of “whole concept” included exceptions for FSOs who abused as children, childhood treatment programs, the transition from victim to offender when they get older, mental health, the number of offenses, the severity of offenses (including whether there

was violence of any kind, among other similar things), types of crimes committed, number of victims (to include ages), co-offenders, if any, adult treatment programs, recidivism rates, and others. The intent was to capture all participant responses; however, this proved difficult because they provided many answers to this one question. To accurately identify and make sense of responses, I used this category to capture, from beginning to end, all kinds of abuse, treatment programs, and offenses, as elaborated upon by all provided scenarios and possibilities.

The category of “other” incorporated multiple responses in need of capture but not common enough (i.e., mentioned fewer than five times) for delineation on Figure 22. Topics that fell under the 15 “other” responses were “history of violence to FSO” ($n = 3$), “prior offenses/reoffending” ($n = 3$), “courts/evidence” ($n = 2$), “male versus female judges” ($n = 2$), “societal bias” ($n = 2$), “violence” ($n = 2$), and “hospital medicine” ($n = 1$).

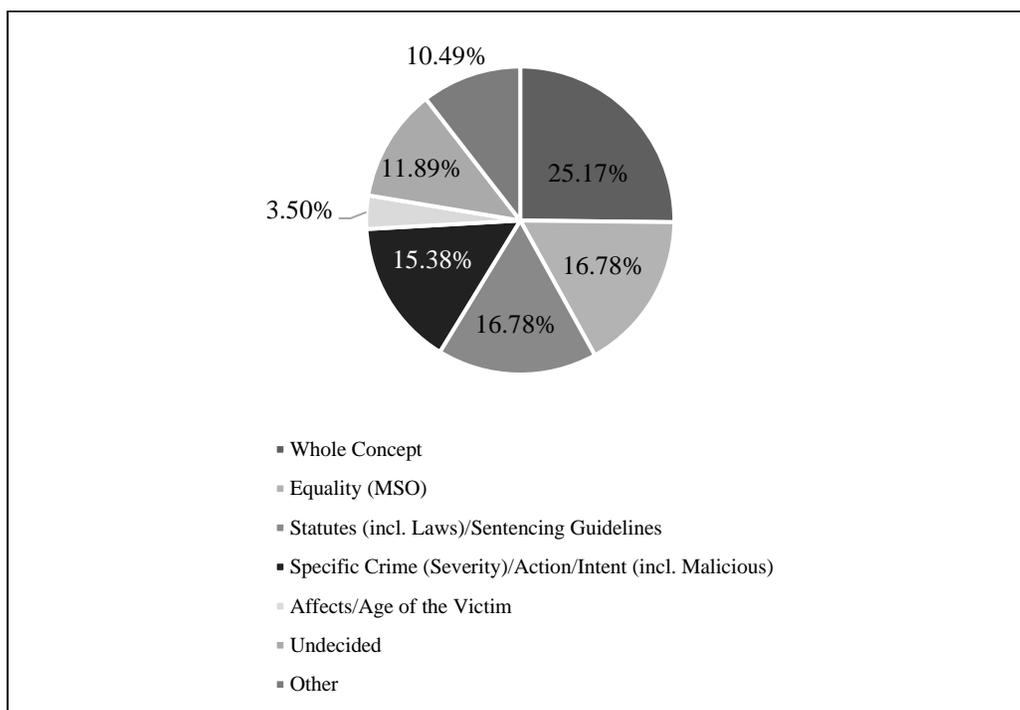


Figure 22. Question 15: What should determine sentencing for female sex offenders?

Question 16. In answering Question 16, participants provided their opinions on the query “Is it enough to sentence FSOs when they commit sex crimes? Or should there be added measures to stop recidivism?” This question brought many answers, thus necessitating categorization by keywords and topics to more clearly present responses visually (see Figure 23). The categories of responses were, “added measures/restrictions” (19.58%; $n = 28$), “court-ordered therapy” (18.18%; $n = 26$), “equality (MSO)” (9.79%; $n = 14$), “jail/rehabilitation, including reform” (6.29%; $n = 9$), “whole concept” (5.59%; $n = 8$), “mental health,” (3.50%; $n = 5$), “undecided” (30.07%; $n = 43$), and “other” (6.99%; $n = 10$). Due to rounding, the total percentage was 99.9%.

I created the category “whole concept” to include as responses from whether someone was a victim of child abuse, childhood treatment programs, becoming an offender themselves when they get older, mental health, number of offenses, the severity

of offenses (including if there was violence of any kind, among other things), types of crimes committed, number of victims (to include ages), co-offenders, if any, adult treatment programs, recidivism rates, and more.

Within the category of “other” were multiple responses that merited consideration yet were not feasible to stand alone visually due to the small number of responses ($n < 5$). Topics that fell into the “other” category were “specific crime” ($n = 4$), “medical treatment” ($n = 2$), “prevention – minors” ($n = 1$), “probation/community service” ($n = 1$), “restrictions after second offense” ($n = 1$), and “sentencing is enough” ($n = 1$).

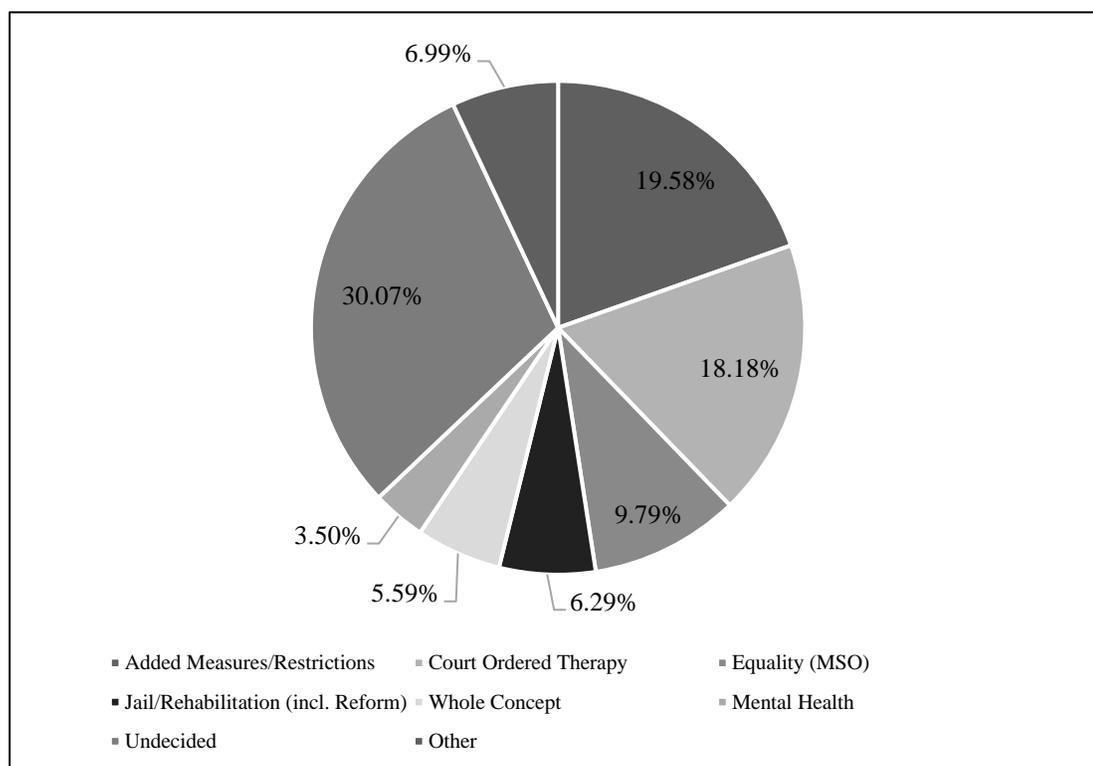


Figure 23. Question 16: Is it enough to sentence female sex offenders when they commit sex crimes? Or should there be added measures to stop recidivism?

Question 17. Question 17 was “Do people’s religious beliefs, political persuasions, how they were raised, as well as other influences, play a part in how they view FSOs when compared to MSOs?” Of the 143 responses, 80.42% ($n = 115$) were “yes” and 19.58% ($n = 28$) were “no” (see Figure 24).

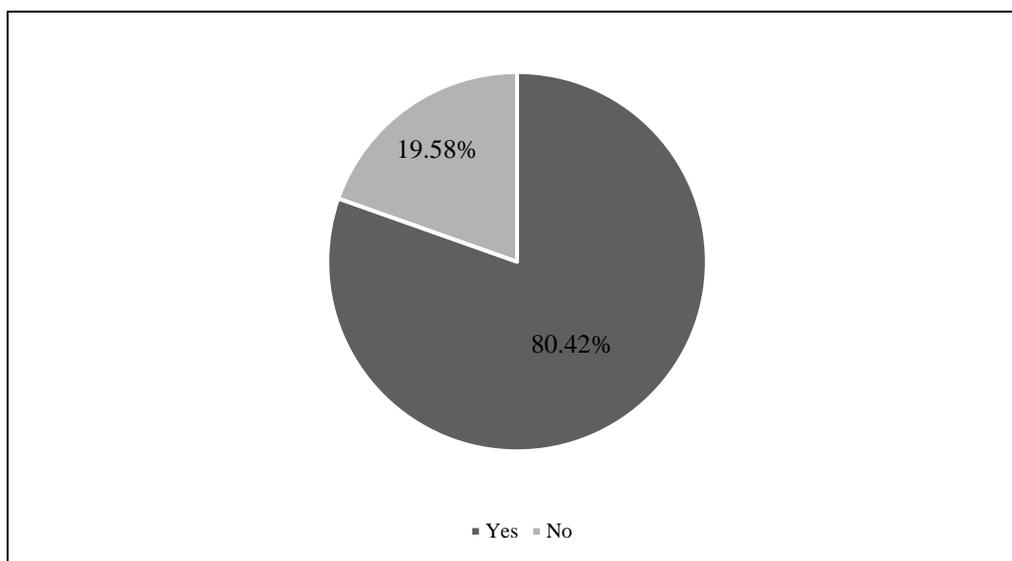


Figure 24. Question 17: Do people’s religious beliefs, political persuasions, how they were raised, as well as other influences, play a part in how they view female sex offenders when compared to male sex offenders?

Question 18. In Question 18, participants gave their opinion to the following prompt: “Should the prevalence of FSOs sex crimes be exposed more to the media?” Responses were 79.72% “yes” ($n = 114$) and 20.28% ($n = 29$) “no” (see Figure 25).

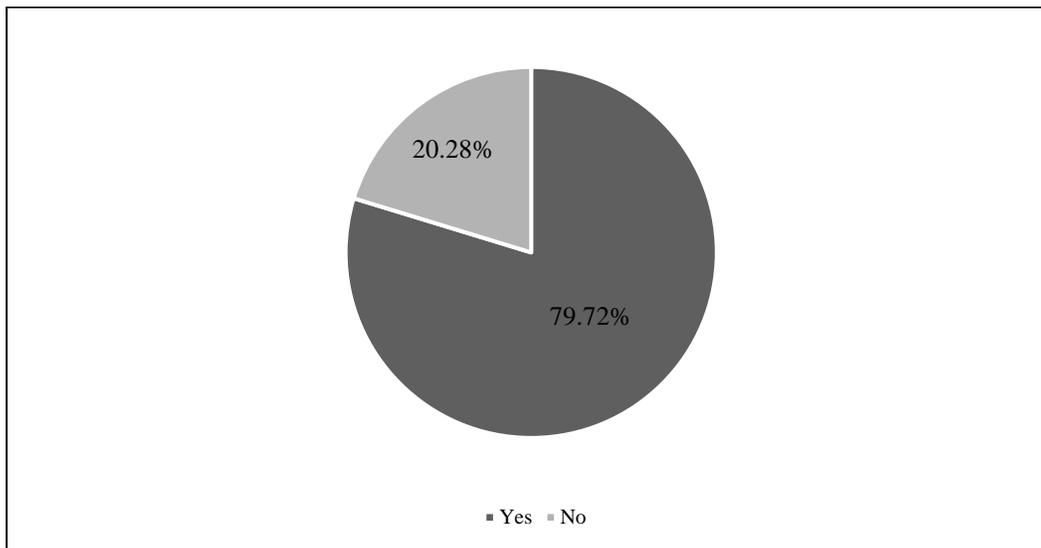


Figure 25. Question 18: Should the prevalence of female sex offenders' sex crimes be exposed more to the media?

Question 19. Next, participants responded in either the affirmative or the negative to the question “Should FSOs be in the news as much as MSOs, in order to expose the frequency of their crimes and what they do?” The vast majority of participants (80.42%; $n = 115$) answered “yes,” with 19.58% ($n = 28$) responding “no” (see Figure 26).

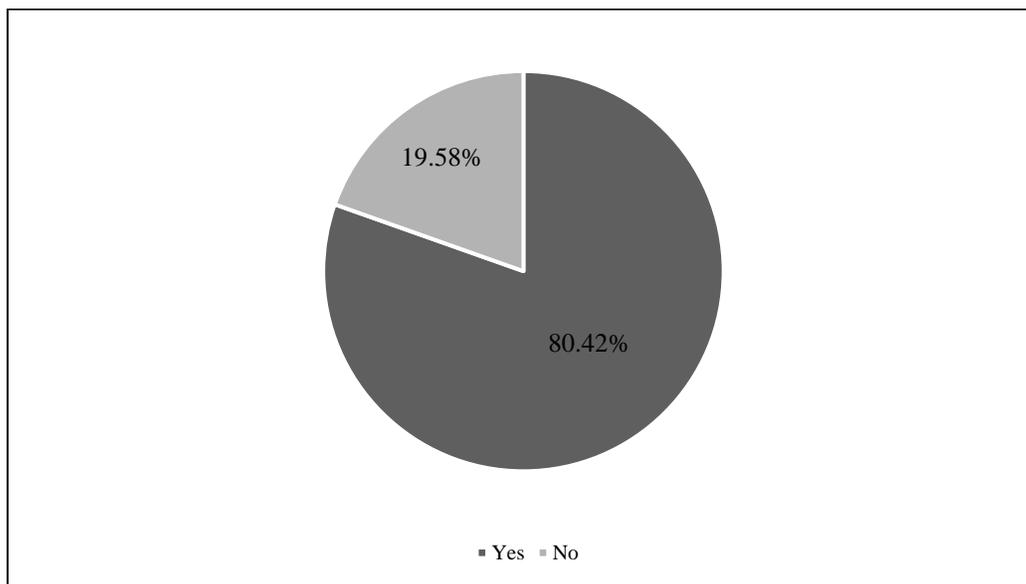


Figure 26. Question 19: Should female sex offenders be in the news as much as male sex offenders in order to expose the frequency of their crimes and what they do?

Question 20. The final question was another dichotomous query: “Would exposing FSOs more to the public, in the media, make a difference in how people view them? Or would it cause more of a negative impact on society?” For presentation purposes, the responses fell into one of five categories: “yes” or “yes” equivalent (52.45%; $n = 75$), “no” or “no” equivalent (18.18%; $n = 26$), both “yes” and “no” (5.59%; $n = 8$), “neither” or “neither” equivalent (2.10%; $n = 3$), and “undecided/no indication” (21.68%; $n = 31$). See Figure 27 for a visual representation of participants’ thoughts regarding this question.

The categories of opinions and beliefs varied, with subsequent sorting into overarching categories. Participants reported either agreeing or disagreeing with sensationalizing news and negative news, the media being detrimental to the case,

exposing FSOs as a threat to society so people will know they exist, making known the truth about FSOs, and believing there would be no negative impact to society.

Some other responses given by participants pertained with how media coverage would change the way people view sex offenders, abuse occurring when people least expect it, viewing the prevalence of the crimes as the motivation for exposure, understanding the severity of the problem, greater exposure would be negative, being unaware or unsure about FSOs and the media, exposure being necessary to develop standards, helping others see what is happening in society instead of trying to hide it, the importance of educating people, society being unpredictable, the frequency of FSO crimes would change perspectives on the subject, further exposure was unnecessary, FSO exposure helps to enable further study through patterns, exposure of FSOs will reinforce the stereotype that women are supposed to be chaste, pure, and frigid, and bringing an awareness that women can be sex offenders.

Less-common responses included knowledge that FSOs posed a threat to children and youths, the inequity of focusing on the low number of FSO cases for the sake of coverage, determining media exposure of sex offender cases with the victims first in mind, the only news for FSOs is teachers sleeping with students and viewed as harmless, erase the stigma around FSO victims, especially men, if the frequency rates for FSOs are lower than MSO, the media should reflect that, media coverage could deter women from committing sex offenses, negativity in the news breeds fear and “living room judges,” negative influence from news reporters about FSOs, leads to negative public outlooks, awareness is important in the form of statistics, but exposing individuals does not solve

the problem and can cause more issues, people do not want to hear any more negative news, and refusal to believe that FSOs exist.

A few more responses pertained to changing perceptions, how women continue to appear as victims because society presents them as the weaker sex, the belief that women are incapable of harming others, men might make stupid jokes about FSOs, publicity creating copycats and encouraging notoriety, exposure empowering victims, people having a false sense of security, women would argue that men are commit more severe crimes, the Internet glorifies FSOs, media coverage might shock and disturb people, if the media aligned with “Lady Justice,” there would be a different society, talking about FSOs shows it happens, and reporting FSO crimes would let victims know they are taken seriously.

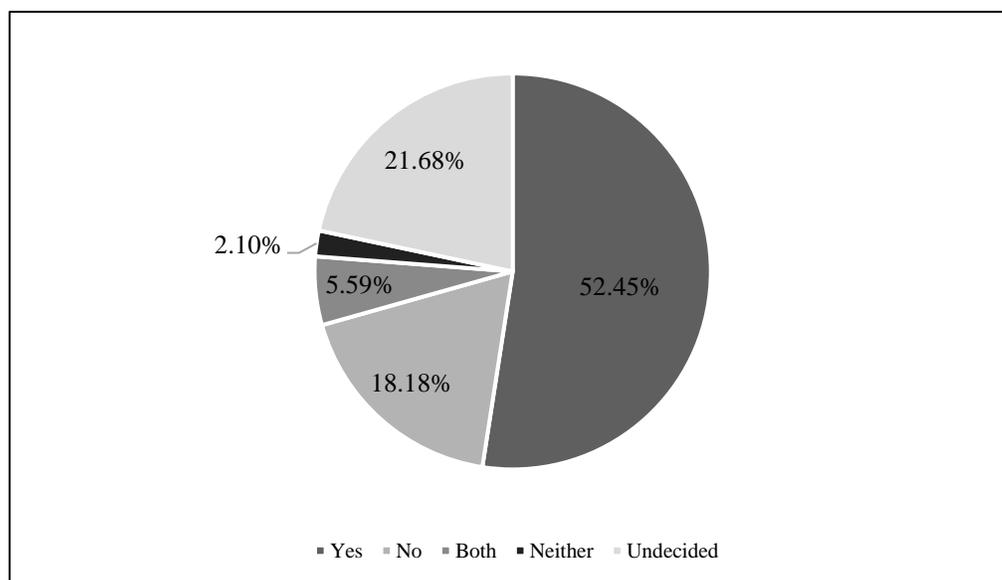


Figure 27. Question 20: Would exposing female sex offenders more to the public, in the media, make a difference in how people view them? Or would it cause more of a negative impact on society?

Questions Answered and Participation

Participants completed a survey comprised of 20 questions administered via SurveyMonkey; however, not all participants responded to all questions. Table 2 presented the number of responses per question out of a possible 157. Figure 28 shows in graphic form the responses given and not provided for all 20 questions.

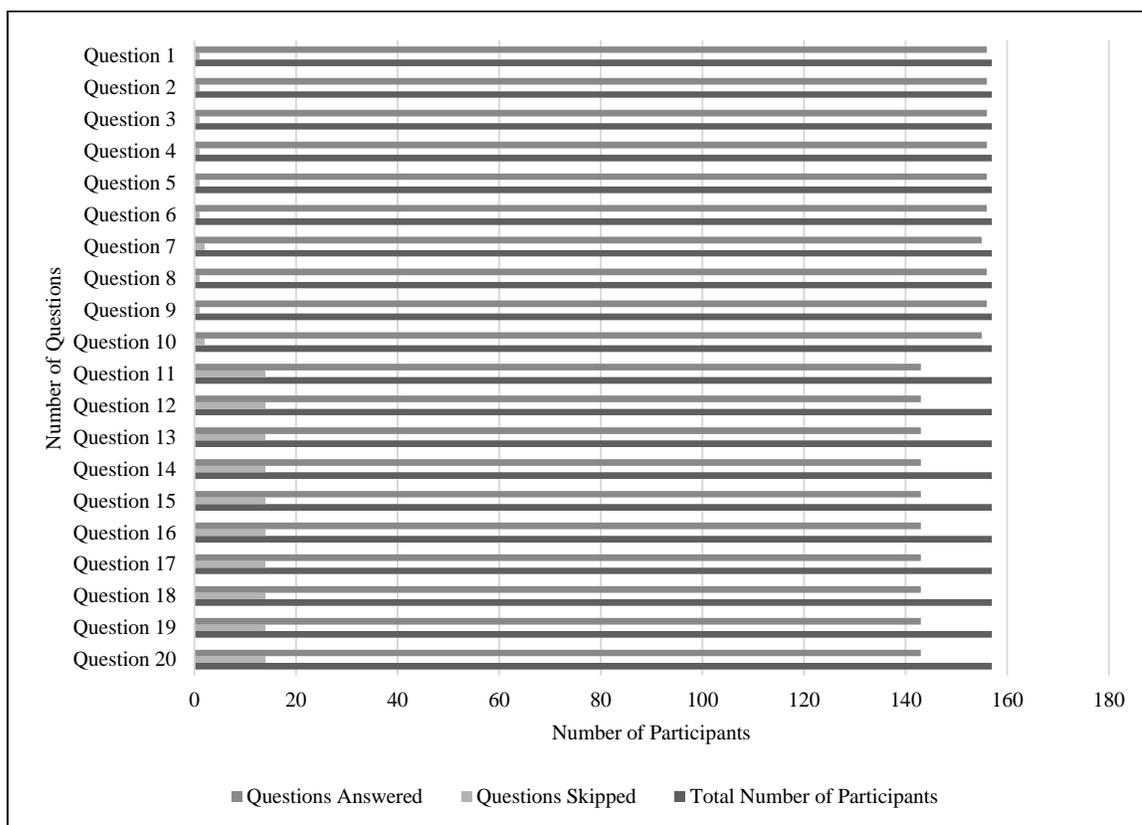


Figure 28. Questions answered and skipped.

The target population for this study was random members of the public who saw the posts for participants and clicked to complete the survey. Random individuals were an appropriate audience, as the purpose of the study was to examine the differences in public perceptions of MSOs and FSOs as it relates to their crimes and differences in sentencing. The study entailed collecting data via an online survey from all members of the public choosing to take the survey.

Summary

Answering the study's three research questions entailed gaining knowledge about how the public perceives FSOs differently from MSOs. Answering the research questions were possible from the survey responses of 157 individuals who saw the post for the study on LinkedIn or Facebook and clicked to complete the survey; as such, the findings do not represent the belief system of the total population of the United States.

Answering Research Question 1, How is the public's perception about FSOs different from MSOs?, showed the public regarding FSOs at the same level as MSOs. Many responses addressed how U.S. society is responsible for the lack of knowledge, understanding, and serious consideration of FSOs. Participants largely believed FSOs received lighter treatment than MSOs. Some participants did not believe that women could sexually offend due to their anatomical differences.

Keywords and phrases in participants' responses showed their beliefs, opinions, and reasons therefor. The majority of keywords and topics in participants' responses commonly related to society, environment, education and awareness, mental health, and

child abuse, among other things. There was a sense throughout that many participants did not elevate the severity of FSOs to the level of MSOs.

Many of the survey responses used to answer Research Question 2, What factors have influenced these differences in public perceptions?, presented in the form of a societal outlook instead of other things. Various keywords and phrases contributed to what encompassed the term “society,” with new themes created to incorporate outlying responses. Other topics that arose in participants’ responses as influencing their perceptions pertained to political outlook, views of the justice system, and religious beliefs.

Answering Research Question 3, How do public perceptions differentially influence the sentencing and punishment of MSOs and FSOs?, was not as easy as anticipated. Participants provided viewpoints related to Research Question 2, having to do with politics, the justice system, and religion. In comparison, participants’ responses aligned with present-day situations with FSO sentences and punishments, as shown the media.

There was a clear difference in participants’ perceptions of FSOs and MSOs; however, an unexpected viewpoint emerged not necessarily specific to influencing the sentencing of an FSO, but the public’s opinion on the sentencing handed down. As participants indicated, despite believing FSOs deserved punishment, their sentencing should be lighter than MSOs.

Chapter 5 will present a discussion of key findings from the study. An analysis of responses to the 20 questions, along with participant demographics, indicates what

members of the public believe about FSOs. Keywords and topics from each question will provide a better understanding of the 157 participants' perceptions on FSOs overall.

There will be specific analysis and interpretation of the theoretical framework used in support of the data collection. Also discussed in Chapter 5 will be the interpretations of the data, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research on FSOs, and implications for positive social change and the impact on society.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine how the public differentiates between FSOs and MSOs and their crimes as well as the sentencing that takes place afterward. Societal factors were also a focus to determine what influenced the public's views of FSOs and MSOs overall and punishment or treatment assigned by the courts. A review of prior research on the topic of FSOs showed only limited data (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016; DeCou et al., 2014), which was the drive in this study to focus on the public's perceptions regarding FSOs. FSOs are a part of U.S. society; however, public awareness is often lacking. Giving members of society the opportunity to look at FSOs through a different lens may contribute to equal treatment for MSOs and FSOs (Turchik et al., 2016).

Among the public perceptions presented in this study were equality in sentencing, punishment, and treatment, viewing FSOs the same as MSOs through a societal outlook instead of a judicial outlook, the need to take seriously FSOs and not to glamorize them, and an understanding of anatomical beliefs and capabilities. Other findings encompassed in key areas that included society, environment, educational awareness, mental health, and child abuse. In their responses, participants showed that they did not always view FSOs on the same level as MSOs. Often, participants provided a society-based answer compared to responses motivated by politics, judgment, or religion. An analysis of findings showed the public's perceptions of FSO sentencing and punishment aligned with

past views in the media. Participants were varied in reporting whether they agreed or disagreed with the sentencing and punishment handed down.

Interpretation of the Findings

After looking at the data collected from the online survey, similarities become apparent; however, some responses provided a new outlook on how the public perceives FSOs compared to MSOs. Focusing on participant responses in accordance with the literature review presented in Chapter 2 indicates where the public is currently and how far they have come over the years in their views of FSOs.

For Question 1, “Do you believe that there is a cause for concern for FSOs in society today?”, out of 156 participants, 117 participants (75%) stated that there was a cause for concern. With this question requiring a *Yes* or *No* response, there was a clear distinction of where the public stood. With the remaining 39 participants (25%), there was no cause for concern. If this question allowed for participants to expound on their answer, it may have opened up a dialogue of what participants thought their concerns were or why they were not concerned.

In response to Question 2, “Do you feel that FSOs are treated differently than MSOs when compared to crimes they commit? If so, why do you feel that way?”, 99 of 156 participants (63.46%) answered in the affirmative; however, the interpretation was unclear. Did this response mean FSOs receive harsher or more lenient treatment than MSOs? Without measuring more for this question, it was hard to definitively interpret the responses; however, the survey showed that a significant number of participants perceive a difference between FSOs and MSOs specific to treatment for the crimes they commit.

The number of *yes* responses was considerably higher than other responses combined. More participants were undecided (22.4%; $n = 35$) than answered *no* (14.10%; $n = 22$), but being undecided did not necessarily mean participants were without an opinion; they were just not able to fully commit to an answer in which they believed. The interpretation of responses to this question was that participants were more willing to provide a neutral answer than give a definitive *yes* or *no* response. Participants who answered *no* essentially believed that FSOs receive the same treatment as MSOs specific to the crimes they commit.

Next examined was why participants felt as they did about the treatment of FSOs compared to MSOs for similar crimes. Participants shared beliefs centered around societal norms. A common opinion was that the media glorified female teachers who are FSOs as a sexual “fantasy” for young victims. Alternately, other participants felt that there was not enough exposure of FSOs in the media when compared to MSOs. Some participants addressed women’s societal roles as caregiver, protector, and nurturer. Other responses indicated a difference in aggression and violence between FSOs and MSOs and how that translated into being in a female prison versus a male prison. Some participants focused on the victim, believing that an FSO’s victim was not as traumatized as an MSO’s victim. There were even comments identifying FSOs as being past victims themselves yet receiving treatment for their crimes was less harsh than MSOs. Some participants suggested a double standard between FSOs and MSOs, with one individual discussing professional experience with disparity in favor of female defendants. Additionally, anatomy emerged in conjunction with the comment that females were not

capable of committing rape. Despite the introduction of gender and race into the responses, there were no details on either factor. Some participants reported beliefs opposite to the majority, asserting alternately that FSOs and MSOs received equal treatment or that women would not commit sex crimes. Others indicated knowing very little about FSOs or not having a “clue” that they existed.

In response to Question 3, “Do you feel there is a difference in dangerousness between MSOs and FSOs?”, two thirds as many participants answered *no* (41.03%; $n = 64$) as answered *yes* (58.97%; $n = 92$), indicating the variation in how people view MSOs and FSOs. Whether this difference tilts in favor of MSOs or FSOs is not the point so much as that the public perceives a difference in dangerousness between the two groups.

Question 4, “What do you believe, if anything, has caused a difference between FSOs and MSOs?”, provided room for participants to give open-ended answers, further revealing their specific beliefs and perceptions. Responses fell into six categories based on keywords and common concepts. The biggest category that emerged showed that participants attributed more “violence, strength, and aggressiveness” to MSOs than FSOs. Other participants felt there was a “lack of awareness and media coverage” of FSOs; rather, news coverage was more likely to indicate the numbers and identities of MSOs, how many sex crimes they committed, and anything else specific to their acts. The next highest category, “societal bias,” showed that participants’ outlook on genders led them to attribute even sex offenses to that divide. Responses included terms such as “genetics” and “genitalia” (anatomy). The same number of people who gave answers pertaining to “societal bias/public perception” had responses fall into the category of “undecided” ($n =$

29; 18.59%), so they remained neutral. What is unknown was whether those members of the public did not want to provide their opinions on such a specific question or just did not have an opinion at all.

Responses in the category of “other” did not yield a trend throughout the data analysis phase but were important to report and track with regard to what participants thought contributed to the difference between MSOs and FSOs. Responses in this category reflected different beliefs, including sexism, the reported and/or specific crime, cultural views toward men, emotional manipulation and/or coercion by FSOs, unwanted pregnancies, feminist movements, genetic makeup, humiliation for male victims, power for MSOs versus grooming for FSOs, a comparison of the number of victims for MSOs and FSOs, and rationalization. The views of 19 participants (12.18%) varied; however, four participants (2.56%) identified unwanted pregnancies, feminist movements, and multiple victims as the difference between MSOs and FSOs. These answers shed new light on what the public may define as “different.” If more individuals had responded to these questions, there may be more answers outside of the mainstream or what was expected. Another finding to note was that some of the answers in the “other” category were not dependent on the gender of the sex offender but by society or outside influences. Further research might determine whether participants would give the same answers if society were to view men and women as equal. In other words, determining whether society controls people’s beliefs more than what they experience.

In response to Question 5, “Are there any societal factors that you feel have caused FSOs to be looked at differently, when compared to MSOs in society?”, a large

percentage of respondents (67.30%) answered *yes*. This means that the majority of participants found society to be a major component of why individuals perceive FSOs differently. More participants were “undecided” (21.15%) than answered *no*, which again means that some people would rather stay neutral than give a definitive answer. Perhaps this tendency was because they were unaware of FSOs, did believe females could or would commit sex crimes, or did not see society as the cause of the different perceptions of FSOs. Although an in-depth response might have shown other variations, the survey clearly showed that there is a public perception that society is the reason for FSOs being perceived differently than MSOs.

For Question 6, “Does inequality play a role in how FSOs and MSOs are viewed, even when committing the same sex crimes?”, there was an overwhelmingly large responses for *yes* compared to *no*. The 78.85% of participants who said *yes* showed that the public believes there was inequality and that it involves the same crimes committed despite the gender of the offender. With only 21.15% of respondents saying *no*, much remains to be understood as to why individuals feel there was no inequality.

Emerging from responses to Question 7, “If there is equality or inequality in the treatment of FSOs and MSOs, what do you believe brought you to that conclusion?” were “societal bias” (38.06%) and “media coverage” (8.39%). A trend was emerging regarding what participants felt contributed to the treatment of FSOs that was not physical. Both societal bias and media coverage are things controlled by other people, thus determining what the public sees. The category of “sentencing” (9.03%) also developed from this question, providing an interesting outlook on some participants’ beliefs. Of note, 14

participants (9.03%) identified equality or inequality as the sole determining factor for the sentencing of FSOs and MSOs. Interpreting this response indicates public concern with either FSO sentencing or MSO sentencing. Only 3.23% of participants ($n = 5$) brought up “data” as driving their belief in equality or inequality, which included prior statistical analysis and research available to the public.

The category of “other” brought about some interesting responses from participants on what they feel is the reason for equality or inequality of treatment: gender, less power physically for women when compared to men, the difference in the number of offenses/crimes between MSOs and FSOs, the approaches used by MSOs (physical) and FSOs (coercion), crimes going underreported, violence by MSOs, an emotional outlook, there being no different between FSOs and MSOs, the sneaky approach by MSOs, stories of FSOs being caregivers, and wealth. Again, some of these responses could be controlled by societal influences or assumptions; however, this category indicated multiple views regarding how the public perceived FSOs compared to MSOs. The responses show the mindset of participants while allowing a breadth and depth of perceptions regarding sex offenders as a whole.

For Question 8, “What do you feel causes FSOs to commit sex crimes?”, responses were specific to both the FSO and outside influences. The category of “mental health” appeared in the responses of 44 participants (28.21%) as being the cause of FSOs committing sex crimes. This response appeared twice as often as “power” (12.82%; $n = 20$). The mental state of an FSO had more backing than other responses. Being “abused as a child or having an abusive upbringing” may have tied into mental health; however,

upon reflection of both answers, participants clearly identified the difference between an FSOs with mental health challenges versus an FSO who had endured abuse growing up before abusing others as an adult.

One influence reported by participants as the cause of offending was the woman's internal drive to commit a sex crime. This category was the turning point for participants' responses. An analysis of this question showed participants thought outside the box regarding FSOs, not automatically describing motivations associated with society. The top three categories of what motivates FSOs to commit crimes were things that physically affected the women. The categories of "prior observations" and "lust," aligned with previous experiences, may form a belief that FSOs commit sex crimes because of an inward, lustful nature. These two categories received eight (5.13%) and seven (4.49%) responses, respectively. Participants who reported being "undecided" were nearly as numerous as those who attributed FSOs' motivation to "mental health" (21.79%; $n = 34$), a large amount in itself considering that the question was more open for responses than other questions had been. The 12 participants (7.69%) whose responses fell into the "other" category listed factors that were internal to FSOs, such as self-esteem, hormones, issues with men, perversion, attention-seeking, and physical love and affection. "Money" was the only motive over which FSOs may not be in control, but it remains unknown how money was a factor in FSOs committing sex crimes.

The overwhelming response to Question 9, "Do you believe differences exist for male and female sex crimes?", was *yes* (71.15%; $n = 111$), with only 45 participants (28.85%) answering *no*. This finding was interesting because those who answered *no* did

not believe differences existed, which points to the concept of public mindsets toward FSOs.

For Question 10, “What has caused/steered your belief of FSOs to be that way?”, the most common response was “societal/environmental bias.” Only 10 fewer respondents (6.45%) identified FSOs as being “less dangerous or violent,” although the categories might be related in more ways than one. Because participants’ responses were associated with how society views men and women in general, it was no surprise to see these two categories so close to each other. Other categories of answers to this question were specific to “media coverage (lack of/exposure to FSO),” “sentencing,” “gender/genitalia,” “no difference between FSOs and MSOs,” “mental health/psychology of the FSO, including emotional attachment),” “educational awareness/data,” “undecided,” and “other.” Most of these responses centered around things that were outside the FSO’s control, in comparison to what had influenced them, either positively or negatively. Seven participants (4.52%) felt there were “no differences between FSOs and MSOs,” indicating a belief that both groups of offenders are equal across the board. This response stood out because it was unlike anything else throughout the survey. Although only six participants (3.87%) discussed the “mental health and psychology of FSOs, including emotional attachment,” the inclusion of emotional attachment indicates a public perception that females may hold that emotional attachment in high regard, even if it means committing a sex crime.

The “other” category showed different angles of where the public stands with FSOs. Categories of participants’ responses included “damage caused to victims” mental

health,” “difference in motivations, to include abuse avoidance,” “frequency and type of crime,” “prior observation” and “different number of offenders.” Despite only 15 responses (9.68%) falling into the “other” category, the answers represented a different perspective to what drives public beliefs regarding why FSOs are the way they are.

Responses to Question 11, “If FSOs’ and MSOs’ abuse stems from experiences outside of their control, for example, being abused as a child, should the sentencing be more lenient?” showed participants to be not in favor of more lenient sentences for FSOs. This tendency could be due to many different beliefs, but the majority of the public indicated that sentencing should be the same regardless of past abuse or situations outside of the offenders’ control. Another conclusion from this question was that the majority of respondents who answered “no” might feel that experiencing abuse when young, is not necessarily a precursor to becoming an offender as an adult.

Interesting in the responses to Question 12, “Do you feel that prison sentences should be the same for FSOs and MSOs? If so, why do you feel that way?”, was that twice as many participants were “undecided” as responded with “no.” Overall, out of 143 responses, 104 participants (72.73%) responded with “yes,” which means the majority were for equality when it came to prison sentences. In looking at why participants felt prison sentences should be the same for FSOs and MSOs, some of the responses indicated the drive for the response they gave. Participants felt equal sentencing had more to do with the treatment provided, which is why sentencing should be crime-centered instead of gender-centered. Some participants felt that because men can get women pregnant, the sentences should not be the same. Is it possible, then, to assume the

opposite, in that because women cannot get men pregnant, the sentence should be less? The perception of FSOs as less violent could be the reason for a lesser sentence, which again begs the question: Should MSOs get more time because they are seen as being more violent?

Many indicated that crime and punishment should be the same, no matter the gender of the offender. An interesting view was that sentencing should be based on the level of violence, not just the crime committed. Some respondents mentioned that women have always wanted equality when compared to men, which should extend into sentencing for crimes they commit. The responses to this question were specific and sometimes detailed, with participants highlighting things which they felt strongly about, including crimes against children. Other times, it appeared participants were simply unsure about what to write, perhaps due to not knowing enough about FSOs or having a neutral stance they might not have wanted to share.

Another factor that arose in the responses was the severity and the duration of the crimes, which sometimes affected the victim and their family. Specifically, participants identified sex crimes as requiring unique consideration, the reasons for which are unknown. Individuals variously asserted that sentencing should first consider the use of aggression or violence, with the sexual side of the crime being secondary. Other areas of concern reported were the low rates of FSO recidivism, the problem of blanket sentencing, focusing more on reformatory treatment despite gender, the leniency of penalties and punishments, and the need for mental health care for victims, MSOs, and

FSOs. As shown in these responses, participants provided a number of detailed factors that indicate where their mindsets were and what they view as important or imperative.

For Question 13, “What are the positive and/or negative outcomes, both short and long term, when FSOs do/don’t get sentenced the same as an MSO?”, more participants were “undecided” than in any other category. Both “lack of legal fairness and inequality, including leniency” and “reoffending” received 38 responses (26.57%), three fewer than “undecided.” Other responses given by participants included “social bias/less dangerous, including less stigma” and “equality/accountability.”

Seven responses (4.90%) fell under the category of “other,” indicating that participants could have been upset, having tension, resentment, or distrust in the criminal justice system. This category also included one participant who discussed the need to consider a lack of previous sexual assaults when sentencing FSOs and MSOs. These varied responses suggest the need for further consideration as to why FSOs receive lesser sentences than MSOs.

The majority of participants provided similar responses to Question 14, “Is it wrong to give a lesser sentence to an FSO, even though they commit the same crime(s) as an MSO? If so, why do you feel that way?” Of 143 responses, 107 participants (74.83%) believed it was wrong to give a lesser sentence to an FSO; in comparison, fewer than 10% of respondents answered “no,” meaning that 14 individuals felt it was okay to give a lesser sentence to an FSO. Once again, there were more participants who were “undecided” (15.38%; $n = 22$) than answered “no.”

In explaining why they felt it was wrong to give a lesser sentence to an FSO despite committing the same crime as an MSO, participants provided detailed descriptions of the areas they felt needed the most attention. Participants alternately believed justice was impartial and asserted that the sentencing is only wrong when enforced as the law is written. The outlook that FSOs are less violent emerged with regard to victim impact. Many participants believed the effects were less for victims of FSOs compared to MSOs, providing insight into the specific mindset of the participants and their beliefs regarding FSOs.

Additional themes emerging from the responses to Question 14 were equality, giving lesser sentences to FSOs, the presence or absence of violence within the sex crimes, and the impact on the victim regardless of the offender's gender. Some of these responses did not reflect the physical differences between FSOs and MSOs, instead focusing on what participants believed was outside the control of the FSO. Participants often reflected societal beliefs about FSOs instead of looking at the crimes committed and what the law states.

Another angle introduced was females being coerced by males to commit sex crimes. Such coercion had a significant impact on FSOs, especially if they had been victims themselves. Along similar lines' is consideration for the mental health of the FSO. Participants noted that psychological harm was just as damaging whether endured by an FSO or an MSO, which may cause reoffending or emotional attachment to another sex offender. When a woman commits a sex offense without violence, should there be a lesser sentence? Would sentencing consideration be different if the FSO had been

aggressive or brutal in her attack, or would the punishment stay the same? Sentencing may create precedence for later FSOs who pass through the criminal justice system. Participants wondered whether weak sentences would lead to reoffending, or perhaps send the wrong message to society.

The American culture is complex, which might explain why participants responded variously regarding sexual advances, especially on teenagers. Overwhelmingly, society views MSOs as being more dangerous than FSOs, often causing increased physical damage during an attack or a crime. When individuals discuss psychological abuse, they often mention “balancing the scales.” On the other hand, if participants believe that no two crimes are the same, then each case is open to interpretation based upon the circumstances, and the outcomes across similar cases may be different. Participants reflected the belief that males cannot be raped without their participation. Responses also indicated that courts might have discretionary powers when trying FSOs, perhaps giving the impression that what women have done is a lesser crime than what MSOs have done.

Many of the responses to Question 15, “What should determine sentencing for FSOs?”, were similar, indicating that despite providing fewer responses to the question, participants were more definitive in their answers. The category of “whole concept” encompassed a range of responses, including the younger years of an FSO leading to offending, their mental health, offenses they committed, and how many crimes they commit, among other things.

Within the “whole concept” category, 36 participants (25.17%) believed there were multiple factors at play in sentencing an FSO. The categories of “equality” and “statutes, including laws and sentencing guidelines” could be closely related; however, each received responses from 16.78% of participants, which could mean that respondents would be open to both responses if presented with both. Other factors participants felt should determine sentencing for FSOs included “specific crime (severity)/action/intent (including malicious),” and “affects/age of the victim”; other participants who were “undecided.”

The “other” category comprised some interesting responses, which highlighted other avenues that participants believed should determine the sentencing for FSOs. These included the “history of violence to FSOs,” “prior offenses/reoffending,” “courts/evidence,” “male versus female judges,” “societal bias,” “violence,” and “hospital medicine.” More responses that were mentioned, could have been their own category.

Most of the responses for Question 16, “Is it enough to sentence FSOs when they commit sex crimes? Or should there be added measures to stop recidivism?”, fell under the category of “added measures/restrictions,” with mentions by 28 participants (19.58%). Only two fewer participants ($n = 26$; 18.18%) contributed to the next category, “court ordered therapy.” Other responses included such topics as “equality for MSOs,” “jail/rehabilitation (including reform),” “whole concept,” and “mental health. In their responses, participants mentioned FSOs being restricted in what they can do and getting help through positive channels.

Ten responses (6.99%) fell under the category of “other,” with participants identifying added measures to be put in place to prevent recidivism of FSOs. Among the suggestions were evaluating the specific crime the FSOs committed, medical treatment the FSOs might need, prevention to help minors, probation and/or community service, restrictions after the second offense, and sentencing being enough for FSOs. There were some unique responses, specific to necessary or recommended efforts; however, the varied responses indicate the need for changes to prevent FSOs from reoffending.

For Question 17, “Do people’s religious beliefs, political persuasions, how they were raised, as well as other influences, play a part in how they view FSOs when compared to MSOs?”, an overwhelming 115 participants (80.42%) stated identified influences that played a part in perceiving FSOs versus MSOs. With 28 participants (19.58%) answering “no,” there was room to understand what else influences people to view FSOs and MSOs differently. It may be that there was no influence and that people just see FSOs and MSOs for what they are.

The majority of participants (79.72%; $n = 114$) responded in the affirmative to Question 18, “Should the prevalence of FSOs sex crimes be exposed more to the media?”, with just 29 participants (20.28%) stating there should not be any media exposure. Based on these results, it appears participants agree that equality in media exposure for FSOs and MSOs was important.

A similar number of responses emerged for Question 19, “Should FSOs be in the news as much as MSOs, in order to expose the frequency of their crimes and what they do?”, indicating a belief that more should be done when dealing with FSOs. The

difference between “yes” and “no” responses was 87 participants (60.84%), with the majority of respondents identifying media exposure of FSOs was a necessity.

Finally, Question 20, “Would exposing FSOs more to the public, in the media, make a difference in how people view them? Or would it cause more of a negative impact on society?”, enabled participants to align their thoughts and beliefs with more options. The majority of participants (52.45%; $n = 75$) responded in the affirmative, with only 11 respondents each (7.69%) choosing “both” or “neither.”. Despite 31 responses (21.68%) of “undecided,” there was still a large gap (44 participants; 30.77%) between this and “yes” responses.

Knowledge Confirmation

An analysis of participants’ responses to the 20 survey questions shows findings that confirm and extend knowledge in this area based upon the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Among the prior research findings confirmed by this study are:

- People not believing or finding it hard to believe that women can sexually offend.
- Disbelief that FSOs existed or, if they did, they were glorified because their victims were male.
- Crimes going underreported or not even being investigated.
- Caregivers of any kind having the ability to sexually offend, which could also appear as part of societal bias or public perception.
- FSOs had been abused as children.

- Women are nurturers and helpers, among other roles, and seen as harmless in many respects. This perception could also be part of a societal bias.
- The role of the female teacher as a sex offender.
- FSOs who are coerced or act on behalf of an MSO.
- FSOs who suffer from mental health challenges/conditions.
- FSOs who target young children.
- The type of sentencing FSOs receive compared to MSOs. The punishments are very different, even for the same crimes.

Knowledge Extension

The findings from this study extend knowledge in the field of FSO research, perceptions, and understanding. Among this study's conclusions are:

- Lack of awareness of FSOs through the media.
- The factors of violence, strength, power, and aggressiveness for MSOs when compared to FSOs.
- Both gender and genitalia contributing to the difference between FSOs and MSOs.
- The amount of data available to the public on FSOs is significantly less than that for MSOs.
- Lust can be a factor in why FSOs commit sex crimes.
- Prior observation or firsthand experience through viewing or being a victim of sexual assault.
- The belief that there is no difference between FSOs and MSOs.

- A lack of legal fairness and inequality, to include leniency for FSOs when they commit sex crimes. This would also include accountability.
- The “whole concept” encompasses FSOs having been abused as children, what they do in their teen years to get more comfortable with sexually offending, the crimes they commit as an adult, the mental health conditions that come from these experiences, along with any prison sentences they serve. Any type of punishment and reoffending falls under the “whole concept” category.
- Specific sentencing guidelines and statutes for laws already in place.
- The effects on victims, as well as their age at the time of the sex crime.
- The specific sex crime committed and the severity of that crime. This concept would also involve the action and intent of the FSO, to include the malicious nature of the act.
- The ability for an FSO to re-offend as a negative outcome for insufficient sentencing and punishment.
- FSOs being less stigmatized than MSOs.
- Equality for MSOs compared to FSOs.
- Added measures and restrictions for FSOs upon the commission of sex crimes.
- Jail time and rehabilitation for FSOs, to include reform.
- Court-ordered therapy for FSOs as part of their punishment and sentencing.

Grouping participants' responses into categories using keywords and topics showed support for Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Social learning theory applied not just to the offenders, whether male or female, but also to judges, and caseworkers following the examples of other judges and caseworkers. Social learning theory was not just actions, but included both words and thoughts, as well (Bandura, 1977). Categories of participant responses that support social learning theory included cultural views, sexism, humiliation for male victims of FSOs, power for MSOs and grooming/coercion for FSOs, the avenue of approach for MSOs, lack of media coverage, violence and aggressiveness, society in its entirety, gender, the whole concept of the FSO, an FSO seeking attention from other FSOs or MSOs, physical love and affection, distrust in the criminal justice system, abuse avoidance, the frequency and type of crime committed, FSOs enduring abuse in the home as children, FSOs reoffending by committing the same or other crimes, FSOs being sentenced to prison or going through rehabilitation as part of their punishment or treatment, and sentencing guidelines for FSOs and MSOs.

Limitations of the Study

The chief limitation encountered during data collection was that some participants did not answer all questions presented. Participants may have attempted to alter information during the survey, but it would not have been apparent during data collection or analysis. Even so, periodic checks and continuous evaluation occurred in an attempt to eliminate or reduce limitations. Another limitation came from SurveyMonkey pausing the survey multiple times during the week, requiring attention and restart requests.

Based on the survey, it was apparent that some participants were not aware of the presence of FSOs. This lack of knowledge could be apparent through the unanswered questions, which affects the internal validity of the study.

Because the participants were random members of the public, this study had external validity in that the results could be generalized to other individuals and settings. No confounding variables came out of this online survey, even after data collection and analysis. The original sample size projected was between 50 and 60 individuals; however, there ended being 157 participants, a considerable increase due to engaging SurveyMonkey's help in reaching potential participants. This increased sample size did not affect the outcomes of the study.

Dr. Laura Hamlett Schlater reviewed the interview data through a written summary and verified the information through electronic copies of the survey's results. The individual reviewing the completed work also made sure no bias occurred in the representation of participants' answers. Credibility is an integral part of quantitative research, which requires reporting to be neutral and accurate (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Triangulation strengthens results, which provided a good foundation for identifying differences in perceptions of FSOs and MSOs. Being conscious of, and keeping personal beliefs away from the online surveys, helped to ensure they did not enter into the study at any point, including the data analysis portion.

The analysis summary was based solely on what participants said in the completed online survey. To monitor saturation and ensure that the necessary amount of data was obtained to substantiate completion, attentiveness was a major part when

looking at the answers to the questions being asked in the online survey, which helped in determining if saturation occurred. Credibility remains a key component in any research design, no matter the complexity of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The voluntary nature of participation ensured respondents' diversity to create external validity with no preconceived researcher bias. Participant variation came from the random participation of each person. Rather than targeting specific individuals who were believed may make strong contributions to the study, allowing the online survey to be advertised on different social media platforms, increased the opportunity for generalizability of results.

Generalizability was apparent in other studies of a similar nature. Although it was possible to achieve some kind of observation from an online survey, through the amount of time taken to complete the questions answered, compared to not completed, data came more from the internal behaviors and beliefs of each participant, rather than any outward expressions of their answers, if they had been interviewed in public.

Dependability was established through the questions that participants answered and the identification of specific aspects of the online survey. Maintaining a constant input of notes, assisted in triangulation of results. Notes allowed the researcher to keep data as stable as possible and in line with the original argument and theory of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

An ongoing process of confirmation occurred throughout the study, in part by acknowledging and setting aside any researcher biases and opinions and focusing on participants' responses in the online survey (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The only important

subjective input was from the participants; however, there needed to be some consideration regarding the findings of others who have conducted similar studies. Confirmability was only effective if triangulation was a component of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability was driven by subjectivity and reflexivity, where the triangulation methods came into play (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Reflexivity served as an essential part of the process, allowing the researcher to step back and recognize personal beliefs that could potentially affect data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In line with previous reports from other researchers and theories, adjustments were made for procedures as necessary based upon information gathered from participants. Intracoder and intercoder reliability did not apply in this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research stem from the strengths and limitations of the study. Future scholars may wish to control the number of participants. Although more information is normally good to obtain, such a wide range of responses complicates data analysis. Also, SurveyMonkey paused the online survey on a few occasions, preventing data collection. Having more control over survey accessibility would be helpful.

Another area of knowledge would have been knowing where participants resided. This could include regions of the United States, specific states or cities, urban or rural settings, or locations worldwide. Having such knowledge would have helped with demographics, providing more context to the responses given by participants.

Extending data collection to target entities within specific countries could indicate if there are different belief systems based on nationality and not just regions across the

United States. To ensure a greater percentage of completed surveys, it might make sense to remind participants how many questions the survey entailed. Ensuring awareness could have prevented skipped questions and ensured participants provided their full perspectives on all 20 questions.

Posting the survey announcement on social media sites beyond LinkedIn and Facebook could have provided different beliefs and opinions on FSOs than those provided by users of those two sites. It would be advantageous to compare the responses from different social media sites, as not all people use the same sites. Additional considerations include Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Reddit.

Something from the literature review that stood out that could play a key role in furthering this study's findings, was to do with professional attitudes. It might be advantageous to conduct a study of professionals who work with FSOs and MSOs to see if there is any disconnect in the working world. Possible professions would include police officers, psychiatrists, psychologists, jail and prison staff, courthouse staff, hospital staff, parole officers, and anyone involved in the cycle of an FSO's arrest, charge, trial, sentencing, and treatment.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The findings of this study could contribute to positive social change, affecting many people, policies, and society as a whole.

Individual. Implications for positive social change on an individual level are that members of the public could become more aware of the risk of sex offending by women.

Maintaining awareness may include the prevention of becoming a victim or being a witness of a sex crime. With more knowledge about the reality of FSOs, individuals may be able to identify warning signs in others, knowing that an offender's gender does not ensure a victim's safety. Information from the findings of this study could possibly lead to the potential deterrence of individuals' sexually offending and/or seeking help.

Family. Positive social change for a family may influence parents teaching their children of the dangers and warning signs of FSOs and MSOs. When parents take an active role in educating and raising their children, the youth are less likely to turn to criminality and more likely to achieve societal stability. Positive social change for families may enable a greater effort in communities to develop standards that allow for quality of life, which may enhance a greater understanding of self-worth, believing it is appropriate to seek help when needed, and being there to help others.

Organizational. Positive social change for organizations, when using the findings of this study, could come in the form of additions to already existing sexual harassment/sexual abuse trainings in the workplace. There are many workplaces that already have this type of training in place, which might make it easier to implement an addition to help employees understand more regarding females and the potential that is out there for them to be sex offenders. Specifically, in educational settings, this type of additional awareness may help to create a mindset for future professionals regarding the potential for females who may sexually offend. Part of the positive social change could be to help people understand what is right and what is wrong when it comes to their relationship with females in any professional or personal setting.

Society. Positive social change here may enable members of the public to see that FSOs do exist and that both men and women are capable of committing sex crimes, despite gender and societal perceptions. The findings of this study could possibly contribute to local communities by providing an awareness of FSOs, the crimes they commit, the warning signs of female sex offenses, and the need to avoid viewing FSOs differently compared to MSOs. With this community effort, it may enable victims of FSOs to come forward and be taken more seriously by professionals with whom they come in contact. A stronger understanding of the concept of FSOs could contribute to giving FSOs what they need to become more productive members of society again. Awareness of FSO characteristics and sentencing may indicate whether change has taken place, enabling FSOs to contribute and help others in return.

Methodological Implications

The methodology chosen for this study was quantitative, using a non-random sample of participants to complete a 20-question online survey. Quantitative results appeared in the form of numbers and percentages and were thus measurable. Continued quantitative research into FSOs would provide measurable data regarding public perceptions, which could influence how society views FSOs.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications for this study stem from Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. In accordance with social learning theory, individuals observe and imitate thoughts, words, and actions of others, whether consciously or unconsciously. People learn from what they see and hear, including what they view in the media; limited

coverage of FSOs could be responsible for the limited awareness and understanding of this offender population. A populace better informed about FSOs would produce more members of society being aware of the risks, sentencing, treatment, and prevention of FSOs.

Empirical Implications

The empirical implications for this study were the more that members of the public were able to share their thoughts and beliefs about FSOs, the more awareness there will be among society. As participants wrote about their feelings and perceptions, the more likely the chance they will talk about the subject, increasing the awareness of FSOs.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practice would come in the form of media exposure and education. Information delivery could be the form of community groups or sessions led by different government and non-government organizations to discuss crime awareness and prevention. The discussion can include sex offending to highlight that it is not just men who commit sex crimes. Increased understanding of FSO crimes and punishment could enable members of the community to better protect their families and neighbors.

To build upon the public's newfound awareness, community education could incorporate professionals who work in the field, as well. The public's perception of FSOs could change once they have listened to professionals such as police officers, psychologists, social workers, and parole officers regarding their experiences working with FSOs.

One more area that could help put the knowledge gained from this study into practice is introducing education about sex offending into high schools, colleges, and other institutions. Trainers and presenters could work with schools to develop objectives for protecting the campus populace through education and awareness. Colleges and other educational institutions could have annual trainings in place for students, faculty, and staff.

Conclusion

As shown in this study, the public's perceptions of FSOs are alternately limited and quite detailed. This survey was a means to determine public beliefs and opinions; however, the varied responses also showed the need to improve individuals' understanding of FSOs. Education and awareness are prerequisites if members of the public are to have an opinion or belief about FSOs. Many participants mentioned MSOs within their comments, indicating an existing foundation of knowledge about sexual offense. It is necessary to build upon this awareness with information about FSOs, as related through media and other means of dissemination.

Whether people believe in FSOs or not, does not take away from their existence. Providing information from different perspectives through the media, in communities, and from organizations would create a greater understanding and acceptance of the reality of FSOs.

This growing belief may bring increased discussion in the workplace and other settings, which may contribute to greater awareness of this offender population. In equalizing exposure and an understanding of MSOs and FSOs, positive social change

could occur by reminding people that FSO's are still committing crimes, and are held to the law. In the end, gender should not decide the punishment of a crime, but instead, be decided by written law and the punishment(s) attached to.

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Appendix: Online Survey Questions

1. Do you feel that Female Sex Offenders (FSO) are treated differently than Male Sex Offenders (MSO), when compared to crimes they commit? If so, why do you feel that way?
2. Do you feel there is a difference in dangerousness between MSO's and FSO's?
3. Do you believe that there is a cause for concern for FSO's in society today?
4. What do you believe, if anything, has caused a difference between FSO's and MSO's?
5. Are there any societal factors that you feel have caused FSO's to be looked at differently, when compared to MSO's in society?
6. Does inequality play a role in how FSO's and MSO's are viewed, even when committing the same sex crimes?
7. If there is equality or inequality in the treatment of FSO's and MSO's, what do you believe brought you to that conclusion?
8. What do you feel causes FSO's to commit sex crimes?
9. Do you believe differences exist for male and female sex crimes?
10. What has caused/steered your belief of FSO's to be that way?
11. If FSO's and MSO's abuse stems from experiences outside of their control, for example, being abused as a child, should the sentencing be more lenient?
12. Do you feel that prison sentences should be the same for FSO's and MSO's? If so, why do you feel that way?

13. What are the positive and/or negative outcomes, both short and long term, when FSO's do/don't get sentenced the same as an MSO?
14. Is it wrong to give a lesser sentence to an FSO, even though they commit the same crime(s) as an MSO? If so, why do you feel that way?
15. What should determine sentencing for FSO's?
16. Is it enough to sentence FSO's when they commit sex crimes? Or should there be added measures to stop recidivism?
17. Do people's religious beliefs, political persuasions, how they were raised, as well as other influences, play a part in how they view FSO's when compared to MSO's?
18. Should the prevalence of FSOs' sex crimes be exposed more to the media?
19. Should FSO's be in the news as much as MSO's in order to expose the frequency of their crimes and what they do?
20. Would exposing FSO's more to the public, in the media, make a difference in how people view them? Or would it cause more of a negative impact on society?
21. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - Hispanic
 - African American
 - Alaska Native
 - American Indian
 - Asian
 - Pacific Islander
 - Caucasian

22. What age range do you fall into?

- 18-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65+ years

23. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (Please Specify):

24. What is your marital status?

- Married
- Single
- Divorced

25. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?

- High school diploma
- No college education
- Associates degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate

- Other (Please Specify):

26. What is your status of employment?

- Unemployed
- Unemployed/Full time education
- Part-time
- Full-time
- Other (Please Specify):