

POSTER

A Comparison of Adolescents Committing Sexual Offences to Other Groups on a Measure of Attention

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There are suggestions that youth committing sexual offences may have more difficulties managing attention processes than other youth. Our study addressed this issue using the Connors' Continuous Performance Test-II (CPT-2). This is a computer generated test that presents stimuli at different speeds and requires the subject to respond to some of the stimuli and to inhibit responding to others.

Factor analysis of the CPT-II (N=267) data yielded the following factors after varimax rotation: Impulsivity, Inattention, Vigilance Over Time and Vigilance Dependent on Rate of Presentation of Stimuli.

Using Factor Scores generated by a factor analysis youth referred for Forensic Evaluation for sentencing were divided into three groups. A group of youth who committed sexual offences only (N=28), a group committing violent offences only (N=52) and a group committing nonsexual-, non-violent offences only (N=51). Nine youth who committed both sexual and other types of offences were not included in the analysis.

Results indicate no significant differences between groups on any of the variables although the difference between the groups on the inattention factor approached significance with the youth committing sexual offences being the least inattentive.

Within the group of youth who committed sexual offences only the mean score for the Stimulus Driven Vigilance factor was significantly worse than the score for the Impulsivity Factor.

For the youth committing violent offences only, their scores on the Vigilance over Time Factor was significantly worse than their scores on the Stimulus Driven Vigilance Factor.

For the group of youth referred for non-sexual and non-violent offences there were no significant differences between their scores on the different factors.

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The results of this study suggest that adolescents who commit sexual offences are more likely to be experiencing inattention problems that reflect difficulty with maintaining their attention over fluctuating conditions than they are to have problems with impulsivity. They do not however appear to be different overall in their attention performance from adolescents committing other types of offences.

Implications for treatment of adolescent sexual offenders will be discussed.