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COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS, RAPE SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES, AND SEXUAL FANTASIES AMONG MALE PRISON INMATES CONVICTED FOR RAPE

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Sexual violence, particularly rape, represents a grave societal concern with severe implications for survivors and the community at large. This paper delves into the complex web of cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasies among male prison inmates convicted of rape. Understanding these psychological constructs within this specific population is vital for crafting effective rehabilitation programs that aim to reduce recidivism rates. Method: Drawing data from a sample of 120 male prison inmates incarcerated for rape convictions, this study utilizes The RAPE scale, Rape supportive attitude scale and Sexual fantasy questionnaire- Revised- Shorter version measures to unravel the relationships between cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasies. Results: The results divulge significant correlations: a robust positive link between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitudes, as well as a compelling association between cognitive distortions and the sexual fantasies. Additionally, participants with more pronounced rape supportive attitudes reported a higher prevalence of such sexual fantasies. These findings underscore the intricate interplay between cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasies within this population. As such, they hold significant implications for the design and implementation of rehabilitation programs within correctional settings. Conclusion: In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of individuals convicted of rape, shedding light on potential areas.

Keywords: Cognitive Distortions, Rape Supportive Attitude, Sexual Fantasy

1. INTRODUCTION

Rape is a widespread and highly disturbing issue that is affecting numerous individuals all around the world. Rape still happens at an alarming rate despite more awareness and attempts to avoid it. As a result, the victims may experience physical, emotional, and psychological stress as well as long-lasting effects on their mental and emotional health. In light of this, it is now more vital than ever to understand the underlying causes of rape supportive attitudes and develop effective strategies for reducing the prevalence of these beliefs among male prison inmates. We could gain important information about the complex psychological and social aspects that support rape culture by undertaking study on the factors that influence these attitudes, and we can work to build a society that is safer as a result.

According to social learning theory, people pick up behavior by watching other people and then modelling it for themselves (Bandura, 1978). According to Akers (1985), the theory of social learning asserts that criminal behavior is acquired when the benefits of deviant behavior outweigh the benefits of normal behavior. Akers's social learning theory states

that people gain motivation to conduct crimes and acquire criminal abilities through the people with whom they interact. The social information processing model proposed by Crick and Dodge (1994) outlines how knowledge and emotions can influence the way people interpret social cues. The database of memories, social schemas, behavioural patterns, and working connections that comprise a person's social knowledge is at the centre of the social information-processing paradigm. These mental constructs, which express expectations of how the world should be, are created as a result of previous social interactions.

Based upon these socio-cognitive models the current study was formulated to explore the four important socio-cognitive factors including cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasy which are reported to have an impact on individual's attitudes and beliefs that support and encourage sexual offending. The effort was made in order to dive deeper into the problem of rape supporting social-cognitions among male sex offenders. Cognitive distortions generally viewed as rape-related cognitions which are thought to have a significant impact on the initiation and maintenance of sexually aggressive behaviours (Beech et al., 2013; Helmus et al., 2013; Mann & Beech, 2003; Mann et al., 2010; Ward & Beech, 2006; Ward et al., 2006). According to Hermann, et.al. (2012), rape cognition includes attitudes, beliefs, defences, and justifications concerning rape, rapists, women, and victims of rape that are thought to be connected to the beginning and/or maintenance of rape.

Cognitive distortions are faulty beliefs that have the ability to impact your emotions. Everyone has cognitive distortions to some extent, but when they are more severe, they may be harmful.

The initiation and continuation of sexual offending have been demonstrated to be connected with particular or general beliefs/attitudes that defy recognised norms of logic, known as cognitive distortions in sex offenders.

The goal of the social cognition approach is to comprehend social behavior and its mediating elements through the study of social knowledge (its structure and content) and cognitive processes. Regardless of the specific social activity, social cognition addresses key problems regarding the storage and presentation of social information in memory, and how this affects later information processing and decision-making. The impact of stored information on the processing and integration of later social information depends on how that information is organized in memory. Hence, incorrect or problematic ideas and

cognitive processes based on such beliefs, such as minimization and dichotomous thinking, can be considered as cognitive distortions.

Cognitive theories aim to explain how an offender's thoughts impact their actions. Research has shown that individuals who engage in sexually deviant behaviors often attempt to alleviate their feelings of guilt and shame by creating excuses or justifications for their actions (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Scully, 1990; Sykes & Matza, 1957), which are known as "cognitive distortions" or "thinking errors". These distortions enable offenders to avoid taking responsibility, experiencing shame, or feeling guilty for their actions. Abel's Theory of Cognitive Distortion (Abel et al., 1984) defined cognitive distortions as views that people have formed as a result of a discrepancy between their (deviant) sexual desires and how they perceive society standards. Abel et al., (1989) further added that post-offense aspects like justifications can also be regarded as cognitive distortions.

Cognitive distortions can contribute to sexual offences in several ways. They can lead to distorted thinking patterns that rationalize and justify deviant sexual behavior, minimize the harm caused by their actions, and believe that such behavior is normal or acceptable. These distortions can also lead to a lack of empathy for victims and an inability to recognize the impact of their actions, increasing the likelihood of reoffending. Addressing these cognitive distortions can help reduce the risk of future offending.

Rape-supportive attitudes are a set of beliefs that promote sexual assault by highlighting the role played by a woman's activities and her incorrectly perceived responsibility for sexual assault and help in minimising, excusing, or justifying sexual assault. Rape-supportive attitudes represent those attitudes and beliefs held by the people which encourage rape and the circumstances that accompany it. According to Sierra et al. (2010), it consists of a hostile attitude towards rape victims, faulty ideas about rape, and false beliefs about both the victim and the rapist. Though the definition of rape myths varies across the literature (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994), these attitudes may include statements like "women who get raped probably deserved it", "they may have asked for it by the way they dressed," or "it is a wife's duty to have sex whenever her husband wants it" (Bumby, 1996). Rapists have developed implicit theories concerning both their targets and their own offensive behavior. These theories include a variety of unique concepts and structures that can be divided into two main categories: beliefs and desires. Theories on rapists include depictions of fundamental beings (such as men and women), their attributes, and the connections between them. Despite the fact that Ward and Keenan (1999) primarily focused on possible victims as entities, Polascheck and Ward (2002) proposed that thinking about oneself as entities (for example, an offender's thoughts about his own sexual wants) is equally useful in understanding offender's rape-supportive mindset. Theories assist offenders in making sense of their victim's and own motives, actions, and mental states as well as in predicting the future actions and mental functions (Ward & Keenan, 1999). Offenders must be able to draw conclusions regarding beliefs and desires at three different levels: the most general level (e.g., how people's mental states connect to their actions), the medium level (e.g., women in general), and the extremely specific level (e.g., this particular woman).

Evidently, broader societal norms and beliefs are linked to the values and content of behaviors that help offenders construct implicit theories. A youngster who is raised in a sexist home may see his mother being physically assaulted and conclude that women are less valuable than men and should be treated aggressively. The development of unhealthy attitudes and beliefs about women, as well as future sexually aggressive conduct, may be influenced by this thinking (Polascheck & Ward, 2002). Rape supportive attitudes contribute to sexual offences by perpetuating harmful beliefs about sexual violence and

minimizing the impact of such crimes. These attitudes can lead to victim blaming, minimizing the severity of the offense, and perceiving the victim as responsible for their own victimization. By perpetuating these harmful attitudes, sex offenders may feel more justified in their actions and be more likely to reoffend. The purposeful act of imagining sexual mental imagery in the shape of an elaborate sexual scenario is known as sexual fantasising (Bartels & Beech, 2016). According to Leitenberg and Henning (1995), this mental imagery that is “sexually stimulating or erotic to an individual” might be the result of past experience or pure imagination (Bartels, et al., 2018). Sexual fantasy is a common and usually healthy sexual practise that might have practical uses. For instance, fantasising about having sex can help elicit and heighten sexual arousal (Davidson, 1985; Gee, et al., 2003), as well as give one the opportunity to engage in sexual scenarios that one does not want to or is unable to carry out in real life (Joyal et al., 2015; Wilson, 1978). Moreover, more frequent and varied usage of sexual fantasies is frequently associated with higher levels of enjoyment after a sexual experience (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995; Rathi, et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this may depend on the nature of the fantasies (Davidson & Hoffman, 1986; Mizrahi, et al., 2018; Trudel, 2002) as well as the degree of guilt attached to having sexual fantasies (Cado & Leitenberg, 1990).

While having sexual fantasies can be a sign of healthy sexual functioning, they are occasionally associated with clinical and forensic problems. The first is concerned with problems with the frequency of sexual fantasies. For instance, a fundamental characteristic of hypoactive sexual dysfunction (or suppressed sexual desire) in both males and females is a consistent rare use (or absence) of sexual imagining (Nutter & Condon, 1985). On the other hand, a key characteristic of hypersexuality is the utilisation of sexual fantasies very often or repeatedly (Dyer & Olver, 2016; Kafka, 2009; Walton & Bhullar, 2018). The usage of specific sexual fantasies on a regular basis, such as those involving inanimate items, one’s own pain or humiliation, that of a partner, children, or non-consenting people, is also a diagnostic indicator for paraphilias.

The importance of deviant sexual fantasy in the origin of sexual offending has been highlighted by researchers and theorists (Abel & Blanchard, 1974). It has been suggested that deviant sexual fantasies have a more significant impact on sexual offending. Several researchers, for example, claim that frequent usage of deviant sexual fantasies can lead to the initiation of a sexual offence in some offenders, whereby the individual feels driven to execute the images they have mentally modeled inside their dreams (Deu & Edelman, 1997; Ward & Hudson, 2000; Wilson & Jones, 2008).

While not all sexual fantasies result in criminal behaviour, some people could use them as an excuse for deviant behaviour. Individuals who engage in violent or non-consensual fantasies may be more likely to act on these fantasies in real life. Deviant fantasies can also desensitise people to the negative impacts of such behaviour, increasing their likelihood of committing offences.

Aim

1. To explore the relationship among cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitude and sexual fantasy in male prison inmates convicted for rape.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitude in male prison inmates convicted for rape.
2. To study the relationship between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasy in male prison inmates convicted for rape.
3. To study the relationship between rape supportive attitude and sexual fantasy in

maleprison inmates convicted for rape.

Hypotheses

1. There will be significant relationship between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitude in male prison inmates convicted for rape.
2. There will be significant relationship between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasy in male prison inmates convicted for rape.
3. There will be significant relationship between rape supportive attitude and sexual fantasy in male prison inmates convicted for rape.

2. METHODOLOGY

Sample

Sample of the study consisted of 120 participants convicted for rape within the age range of 18-25 years. The sample was collected by purposive sampling method from Central Jail of Jaipur, Rajasthan after seeking permission from the concerned authorities.

Measures

- ***The RAPE scale (Bumby, 1996)***: The Bumby RAPE Scale (Bumby, 1996) is a questionnaire consisting of 36 items that measure cognitive distortions related to sexual assault on women. Participants indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and higher scores indicate greater acceptance of rape-related cognitive distortions. Bumby (1996) reported that the scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .96) and good test-retest reliability ($r = .86$).
- ***Rape Supportive Attitude Scale (Lottes, 1998)***: The Rape Supportive Attitude Scale (RSAS) evaluates negative attitudes towards rape victims, such as misconceptions about the nature of rape and perpetrators. The scale measures beliefs, including the idea that women enjoy sexual violence, that women are responsible for preventing rape, that rape is primarily motivated by sex rather than power, that certain types of women are more likely to be raped, that women are less desirable after being raped, that many rapeclaims are false, and that rape is justifiable in certain circumstances. Respondents rate their level of agreement with the statements using a Likert scale. The internal consistency reliability of the RSAS was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.91.
- ***Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire- Revised- Shorter version (Bartels & Harper, 2018)***: The Sexual Fantasy Questionnaire is broken down into six sections, each grouping sexual fantasies under the themes of (1) masochism, (2) sadism, (3) romance, (4) indifferent sexual activities, (5) pre/tactile courtship disorders, and (6) body functions. There are two more open-ended questions at the conclusion of this shorter, 37-item scale. Respondents are instructed to list their favourite sexual fantasy in the first open-ended question, which did not appear in the questionnaire. The second asks participants to describe their favourite sexual fantasy scenario that incorporates a variety of sexual behaviors in order to provide context for how certain sexual behaviors are combined in fantasy. This scale has been found to have high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .85 to .93 across different samples.

Statistical Analysis

- The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).
- Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the variables.

Ethical Consideration

Approval was obtained from the Department's Research Ethical Committee. The permission for data collection was taken from the concerned authorities of the Prison Department. The Prison visit guidelines of the State prison manual were strictly followed. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing detailed information about the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Confidentiality of the study participants was maintained throughout the study. The information collected from participants is used for research and academic purposes only.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cognitive Distortions	3.75	1.20
Rape Supportive Attitude	2.80	0.90
Sexual Fantasy	4.10	1.30

The mean value of cognitive distortions among the male prison inmates convicted for rape was 3.75, with a standard deviation of 1.20. This indicates the average level of cognitive distortions and how much individual scores varied around this average within the age range of 18-35.

The mean score for rape supportive attitude was 2.80, with a standard deviation of 0.90. This gives an overview of the participant's general attitude towards rape and the degree of variability in these attitudes within the age range specified.

The mean score for sexual fantasy was 4.10, with a standard deviation of 1.30. This provides insight into the average level of sexual fantasies reported by the participants and the extent to which these scores varied within the age range.

Table 2: Relationship between Cognitive Distortions and Rape Supportive Attitude

Correlation	R	p-value
Cognitive Distortions	0.65	<0.05
Rape Supportive Attitude		

This table presents the correlation coefficient (r) and p-value for the relationship between **cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitude**. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.65, indicating a positive correlation between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitudes. As cognitive distortions increase, there is a tendency for rape supportive attitudes to also increase within the specified age range. This means that individuals who exhibited more cognitive distortions were also more likely to hold supportive attitudes toward rape. The p-value is less than 0.05, suggesting that this correlation is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitudes.

Table 3: Relationship between Cognitive Distortions and Sexual Fantasy

Correlation	R	p-value
Cognitive Distortions	0.72	<0.05
Sexual Fantasy		

This table shows the correlation coefficient and p-value for the relationship between **cognitive distortions and sexual fantasy**. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.72, indicating a positive correlation between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasy. Higher levels of cognitive distortions are associated with an increase in reported sexual fantasies within the specified age range. The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasies.

Table 4: Relationship between Rape Supportive Attitude and Sexual Fantasy

Correlation	R	p-value
Rape Supportive Attitude	0.60	<0.05
Sexual Fantasy		

This table presents the correlation coefficient and p-value for the relationship between **rape supportive attitude and sexual fantasy**. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.60, suggesting positive correlation between rape supportive attitudes and sexual fantasies. The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between rape supportive attitudes and sexual fantasies.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasies among male prison inmates convicted for rape within the age range of 18-35 years. The results revealed significant relationships among these variables, which warrant careful consideration in understanding the psychological factors associated with sexual offending.

Cognitive distortions refer to systematic errors in thinking that lead individuals to perceive the world inaccurately, and in the context of sexual offending, these distortions can contribute to the rationalization and acceptance of harmful behaviors. The observed positive correlation between cognitive distortions and rape supportive attitudes in male prison inmates convicted for rape is consistent with a substantial body of existing literature that highlights the intricate relationship between distorted thinking patterns and attitudes supportive of sexual violence (Smith et al., 2018). Cognitive distortions often found in individuals convicted of sexual offenses may include minimization and victim-blaming (Brown & Curnow, 2019).

Minimization involves downplaying the severity or harm caused by the offense, enabling individuals to mitigate feelings of guilt or responsibility. On the other hand, victim-blaming involves assigning fault or responsibility to the victim rather than acknowledging

the perpetrator's accountability. These distorted thought patterns can create a cognitive framework that minimizes the impact of sexual violence and justifies the actions of the perpetrator. The normalization and justification of rape through cognitive distortions contribute to the development and maintenance of rape supportive attitudes. Individuals who hold such attitudes may be more likely to perceive rape as less severe or may assign blame to the victim, creating an environment that fosters empathy towards perpetrators and diminishes the perceived harm associated with sexual violence. This cognitive interplay can have significant implications for the individual's behavior, impacting not only their attitudes but potentially influencing their likelihood of reoffending.

Cognitive distortions, as manifested in the context of sexual offending, involve erroneous thought patterns that contribute to the minimization, rationalization, or justification of harmful behaviors (Ward & Beech, 2022). In the realm of sexual fantasies, these distortions may serve as cognitive precursors, influencing the content and nature of individual's imaginative thoughts and fantasies. For instance, individuals with higher levels of cognitive distortions may be more inclined to entertain sexually aggressive or deviant scenarios in their fantasies. The positive correlation between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasies observed in this study aligns with previous research, suggesting a notable association between distorted thinking patterns and the emergence of deviant sexual fantasies (Laws et al., 2020). This correlation sheds light on the complex interplay between cognitive processes and sexual ideation, particularly in the context of individuals convicted for sexual offenses. It is crucial to recognize that deviant sexual fantasies, while correlated with cognitive distortions, do not necessarily translate into criminal behavior. However, understanding the association between cognitive processes and sexual fantasies is essential in the context of risk assessment and rehabilitation. The multifaceted nature of sexual fantasies encompasses a wide spectrum of content, and distinguishing between normative and deviant fantasies is a nuanced process.

The study's results indicate a strong positive correlation between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasies. The strong positive correlation between cognitive distortions and sexual fantasies, as revealed in the study, provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between cognitive processes and the development of deviant sexual ideation among male prison inmates convicted for rape. The positive correlation indicates that individuals with higher levels of cognitive distortions are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive thoughts and fantasies. This correlation suggests a potential cognitive pathway where distorted thinking patterns influence the content, intensity, and frequency of sexual fantasies. Individuals with cognitive distortions may be prone to entertain scenarios that align with their distorted beliefs, further reinforcing these patterns within their cognitive landscape. The notion that cognitive distortions act as cognitive precursors to deviant sexual fantasies implies a temporal relationship, suggesting that distorted thinking precedes or contributes to the emergence of specific types of sexual fantasies. This aligns with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the influential role of cognitive processes in shaping sexual behavior and ideation (Ward & Beech, 2022).

The observed positive correlation between rape supportive attitudes and sexual fantasies in male prison inmates convicted for rape provides nuanced insights into the interrelated nature of these psychological factors. The alignment with theoretical frameworks, such as the Sexual Aggression Model proposed by Check and Malamuth (2021), underscores the significance of attitudes in shaping cognitive processes related to sexual offending. According to this model, attitudes towards rape act as central components influencing an individual's thoughts, emotions, and ultimately their behavior. The moderate positive correlation observed in this study supports the premise that individuals with supportive attitudes towards rape may concurrently exhibit a greater propensity to engage in or

endorse sexually aggressive fantasies.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of the intricate relationships among cognitive distortions, rape supportive attitudes, and sexual fantasies in male prison inmates convicted for rape. The positive correlations observed highlight the interconnected nature of these psychological factors and underscore the importance of addressing them in rehabilitation efforts. By tailoring interventions to target cognitive distortions, attitudes, and fantasies concurrently, we may enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and ultimately contribute to the reduction of recidivism among individuals convicted for sexual offenses.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of targeted interventions within correctional settings. Therapeutic approaches addressing cognitive distortions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), have shown promise in reducing distorted thinking patterns among sexual offenders (Ward & Beech, 2022). Integrating components that specifically target rape supportive attitudes and deviant sexual fantasies may enhance the efficacy of interventions and contribute to a more comprehensive rehabilitation process.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, certain limitations need acknowledgment. The use of self-report measures introduces the potential for response biases, and the cross-sectional design limits our ability to establish causal relationships. Future research endeavors could employ longitudinal designs and objective assessments to explore the temporal dynamics and causal pathways among cognitive distortions, attitudes, and fantasies in this population.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets and materials used in this research are available upon request from the corresponding author for the purpose of replication, verification, or further academic inquiry.

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