

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MIND SET OF A SEX OFFENDER: A CRITICAL INSIGHT**

MANNAT SOFAT

Om Parkash Bansal Modern School

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i01.008 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2023.v08i01.008>

Received: 2 Jan. 2023 / Accepted: 15 Jan. 2023 / Published: 31 Jan. 2023

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to understand the mindset of a rapist. It is one of the most heinous crimes, and its impact on the victim is extremely deep rooted and difficult to treat. There are several types of rapists who have different reasons for committing such crimes.

Researchers have emphasised on remedial measures that could be adopted such that one can reduce the number of such incidents. There have been increasing numbers of research studies, in recent times, as all citizens are deeply concerned with increasing numbers of rapes that are occurring. The paper concludes with a serious attempt to recognise the symptoms of crime at an early age, which could be effectively treated in the hope that it would result in the reduction of such monstrous episodes.

**RESEARCH QUESTION:** With increasing reports on the abusive nature of men being highlighted in the media and various social platforms, it is essential to undertake an in-depth study in understanding the mindset of such individuals. Why do they resort to such heinous crimes on women, who are naturally not as physically strong as their male counterparts? Is it the environment in which they are brought up or certain incidents in their lives which lead to these unforgivable events? This paper will make a serious attempt to understand the reasons behind such unforgettable and unforgiveable crimes. Are such occurrences limited to a particular age group and or a particular stratum of society or is it across the board. These and many more questions will be attempted to be answered during my study.

### **1. Introduction**

There are two basic type of rapists, rapists that are unknown to the victim and rapists that are known to the victim. Both these types commit rape because they want to, and they can. The type of sex offenders can be either male or female. The female sex offender is likely to commit the

offence with a partner who is normally her romantic partner. A female offender mostly works with a male co-offender. Male sex offenders are most likely to commit the act on their own. The percentage of males working on their own tend to be higher than females. Nearly 70 percent of rapists know their victims and their goal is to have power and control over the victim.

**Figure 1: Image of a victim**



Source: The New Indian Express

Sex maniacs who commit the heinous acts alone, differ in terms of offender, the offence and the characteristics of the victim. The type of offence could be tabulated with respect to:

- The age of the victim
- Performed sexual acts
- Physical and verbal violence
- Victim gender
- Location where the abuse took place

For this there are various theories of typologies which are postulated on what these sex offenders specialise in.

Sexual violence is an extremely serious social problem which has a debilitating and disastrous impact on the mind of the victim. It is not only the victim who is adversely impacted but also the close family related to the victim. The victim must deal with this issue throughout their life. The impact is psychological, social, physical, mental and biological. There are so many adverse effects, that to ask the victim to try and put aside the extremely heinous experience is easier said than done. It requires a mindset and support which is extremely strong and one that does not “give

up". It is important that all citizens must make the society a safer place. For this all resources must be garnered together and used in an extremely effective manner. A study, and an understanding of the different types of typologies and theories behind the mindset of such offenders becomes imperative.

## **2. DEFINITION**

The theories behind the sex offenders are divided into:

- **Child abusers**

These tend to be regressed in their mind. They tend to find victims of either sex. It is possible that they are related to the victim. If they are related, then it is a habitual continuous exercise and if not then they find the victims within and outside the family.

- **Rapists**

These tend to exhibit, that they are all powerful, and they want to be continuously reassured. They are assertive and quick to react angrily, indicating that they might have anger issues and are likely to be sadists.

- **Female offenders**

The rapists in this group are normally teachers and educationists of impressionable children, and who hold them in high esteem and who are role models. The children tend to be of an impressionable age and thus get ensnared by the offender.

- **Internet**

It is a free source, where one can express feelings without any payment and in a secretive manner that need not be divulged to anybody.

Rapists can be further be divided into categories which can be labelled as:

1. Power assertive
2. Anger retaliation
3. Opportunity rapist
4. Sadistic rapist
5. Juveniles sex offenders
6. Women offenders

The most common is the power assertive rapist where, the person has a weapon but uses it

only, to ensure the victim's co-operation.

The second most common one (anger retaliation) involves that the perpetrator wants to punish women.

The third one (opportunity rapist) are those offenders who take advantage of the opportunity presented to him or her at the time of committing another crime which could be of the form of a burglary or robbery or kidnapping.

The most dangerous one is the sadistic rapist, for in this case the perpetrator wants the victim to be hurt and generally ends up killing the victim.

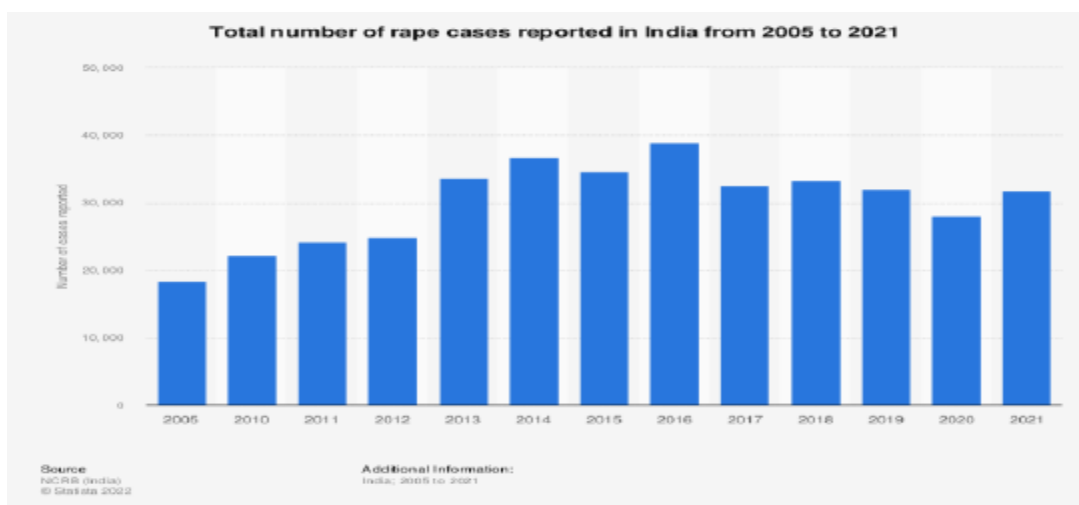
The juveniles sex offenders are those that normally have issues with authority, and they vent out their anger on the victims to punish them. It is sad but there is a rising incidence of such a group

The last one is rare, but it does exist, and these women lure other women to be raped by other.

There is yet another most common one which is on the rise, and these are "date rapes". Increasing use of the internet has led to the mushrooming of "date sites" which has increased the incidence of rapes in recent times. Women befriend males, in the hope that they would find their life partner but often it culminates into rape.

Yet another rape issue that has recently emerged is marital rape. These are serious issues which are being debated upon in society as well as by the judiciary.

**Figure 2: Total number of rape cases reported in India from 2005 to 2021**



Source: NCRB (India)

### **3. PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A SEX OFFENDER**

Sex offenders have some biological foundation of substance abuse. The three common types of characteristics could be divided into mal-adaptive interpersonal behaviour, impulsivity and anti-social behaviours. This analysis is important in the treatment of such people. Such offenders tend to act upon their inner anger, fear or rage and the reactions to such emotions are spontaneous and compulsive. Such emotions can be externalised or internalised. The internalised one can occur through deceit and anonymity. There are also offenders who are paedophiles and child molesters. It is important to understand such aggressors so that one can protect victims.

There are studies by psychologists like Ellis (1991), who have suggested that sex offenders are biologically different from the rest of the population. They display hormonal imbalances. His studies have indicated that aggressiveness, anti-social behaviours, addictive behaviours all indicate some amount of heredity characteristics. Besides this there are symptoms of addiction which could lead to adverse reaction of such offenders.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis has described the psyche of an individual into three functions:

- The id- Unconscious source of primitive sexual, dependency and aggressive impulses
- The super ego- Subconsciously inter checks societal mores, setting standards to live by.
- The ego- This represents a sense of self and mediates between realities

The awareness of the above theory along with the experiences of early childhood can form the basis of certain mental disorders.

Conscious thought is that the person is aware of what one is experiencing, for example, what one is reading or what one is understanding. At times when one is listening to music and somebody else is on the phone you can hear both. This indicates that whether the incident is happening in the front or the back of your mind. All are examples of conscious thought.

Pre-conscious thoughts are memories, and these can easily be retrieved. For example, passwords, names etc.

What is important in a criminal is the role of the unconscious. According to Freud this plays a major role in the mental illness of a human being. There are certain memories normally negative which one would like to forget because it causes guilt, shame, pain, discomfort and fear. Leading a normal life is easier if we let such thoughts go. But it is obvious that they do have an impact on the way in which we behave.

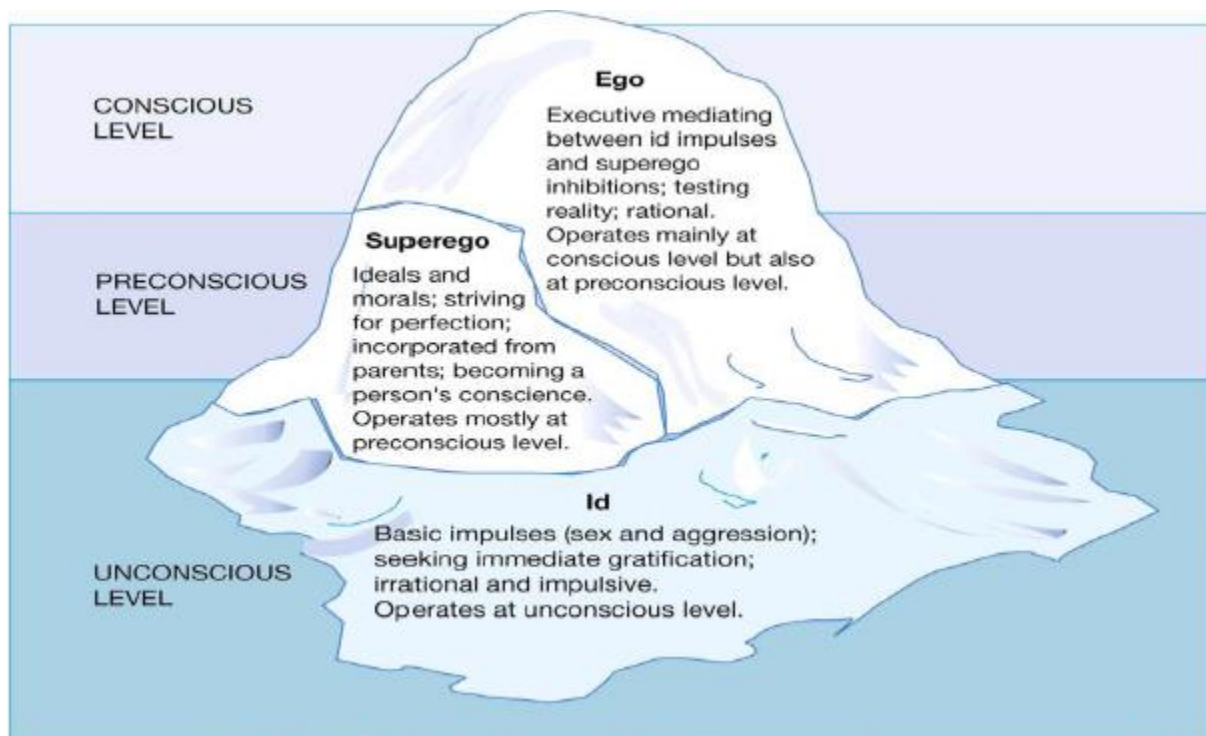
Id is the most basic of Freud's theory which keeps human species alive and responds to our

primitive urges and needs, for example, a new-born crying because he/she is hungry is an example of id.

Ego on the other hand, in this theory is not a sense of self-importance but is a combination of judgement and self-control, for example, if someone decides not to steal, it may not be because they would cause anxiety to another person but mainly because they do not want to get caught.

Super ego on the other hand is when one is brought up to believe that stealing is wrong. Human belief and culture depend on the capacity of human super-ego. For a lot of us, it is our parents who are a source of super ego development. But as we grow up and their influence reduces it is teachers, colleagues and friends who are then responsible for a large section of our thought process. Super ego is rarely selfish, and it is the opposite of id. It is the id which is a part of the unconscious mind and at times we are not aware of these thoughts and what effect they have on our behaviour.

**Figure 3: Pictorial depiction of Freud’s psychoanalytical theory**



Source: Google images

Besides Freud there were theories by Groth (1979) who created a typology which was based upon the degree of aggression as the underlying reason of the perpetrator which resulted in rape and

the existence of other anti-social behaviours. Besides him, there were theories by Howard Barbaree, a psychologist from Queen's university in Kingston, Ontario who researched and concluded that most rapes are impulsive and opportunistic, and they only show anger if the victim resists. He also indicated that "power rapists" have a fixed sexual fantasy. In such cases they force the victim to have sex and may fall in love. These are the least aggressive and are most likely to flee if the victim puts up a strong resistance.

#### **4. REASONS BEHIND THE PERPETUATOR'S ACT**

There are various reasons behind the offender raping the victim all of which could be studied under the causes of sexual violence. Some of these theories include military conquest, socio-economic factors, anger, power sadism, evolutionary pressures to name a few. The word sexual violence would include acts such as rape, molestation, sexual harassment and stalking. A detailed analysis on the factors that influence the mind of a rapist:

##### **4.1 Environment**

Environment is an important factor that impacts the development of a child's mind towards crime. This may eventually lead them to commit even more heinous crimes once they reach adulthood. The factors which are prevalent in the home environment include violent and permissive families, unstable neighbourhoods and delinquent peer groups. Early exposure to violence in the family impacts the child at an early age resulting in crimes once they reach adulthood. Childhood memories and experiences regarding alcohol use and criminal activities at home lead to a higher risk of the child moving towards violence in adulthood. Environment of sexual abuse, physical abuse and poverty impacts the child adversely. The manifestation of the fact that the male species is superior in every which way leads to the development of forced sex with a woman. It is most likely that one of the above was prevalent during the perpetrator's childhood. His childhood could have been one of neglect and abuse resulting in him being what he is today.

##### **4.2 Influence of peers**

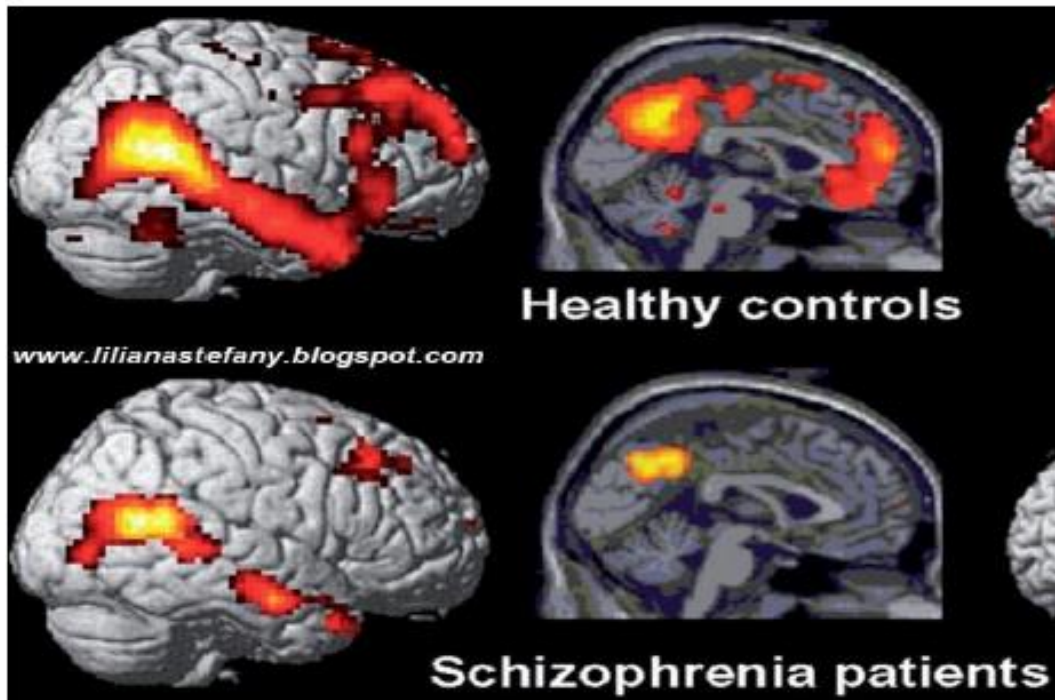
After a point in a child's life the parents influence declines and that of friends and peers increase. The influence of traditional masculinity, the attitudes towards sexual violence does play an important role in shaping the mindset of individuals. Once teenagers become aware of their sexual needs it is then that their peers have the greatest influence on them. A few research studies have indicated an increasing level of sexual activity in high school. This must be recognised and addressed by all stake holders such that one can control the animal instincts which lead to male students resorting to acts of rape.



### 4.3 Mental imbalance

There could be serious mental health issues that could be the reason for the perpetrator to commit the heinous crime of rape. It could be the result of learning disabilities and disorders. Violent and sexual activities originate from the same part of the brain structure. This could be due to differences in hormonal functioning. A small percentage of rapists were found to have head injuries, some of them had been known to have abnormalities within the temporal part of the brain, others may suffer from schizophrenia etc. The act of rape might well be related psychosis and hypomania. The other type of mental disorders could be dementia, head injury or substance abuse.

**Figure 4: Visual depiction of a healthy brain vs a schizophrenic and psychosis brain**



Source: [www.lilianastefany.blogspot.com](http://www.lilianastefany.blogspot.com).

## 5. TREATMENT AND TIMELY PREVENTION OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS

There has been a large amount of research which has revolved on both the theory and practice of treatment that has been developed, modified, redefined and eventually proposed over time. The findings have tended to move towards finding and preventing males from such heinous acts. There have been large number of preventive programs which include observing juveniles in their natural environment, the psychological mindset as well as their behaviour at school and amongst



their peers. To reduce numbers, it is essential to take the help at every stage for an effective curtailment of the rape act.

### **5.1 Timely addressal of recognition of childhood tendencies**

School, college and university administrators must work with program facilitators to develop prevention awareness programs whereby students are educated as to how to prevent sexual assault. The fact that this maybe encouraged by online and peer driven reasons must be acknowledged by psychologists and adequately addressed. Establishing positive relationships between students and law enforcement is an important precondition for a safe environment.

Environment conditions in which the child has been brought up is another aspect which should be addressed. There should be several self-help groups and non-profit organisations within the vicinity that consists of psychologists and psychiatrists who recognise the symptoms amongst children at an early age.

### **5.2 Psychological help**

It is the mind of the rapist which must be cured. This essentially requires the essential services of psychiatrists and psychologists. The cure is not by popping a pill, it is by working on the mind and the thought process of the perpetrator. This is a long-drawn-out process as there may be several muddled thoughts and influences which need to be unravelled. This can only be achieved through continuous sessions with the offender.

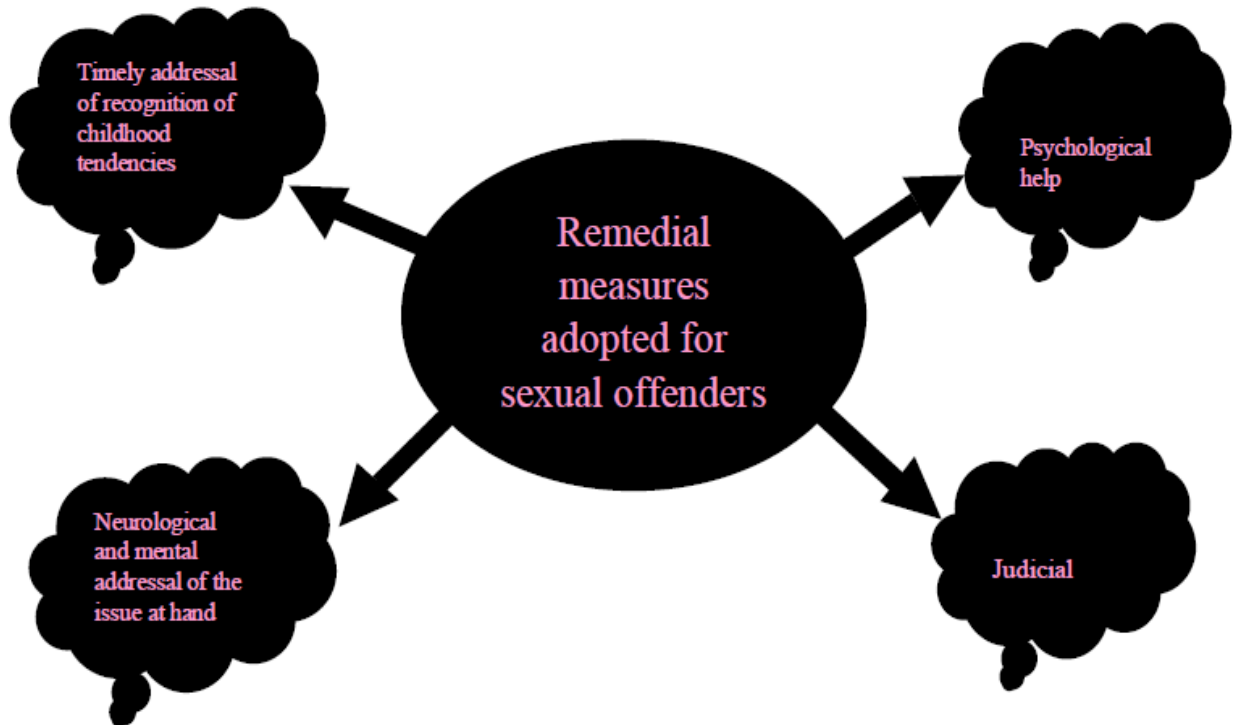
### **5.3 Neurological and mental addressal of the issue at hand**

There are certain offenders who become rapists due to a neurological disorder. This needs to be recognised at an early age and should be treated. This type of disorder would require the help of medicines which effectively suppress and to some extent cure the disorder. There are many medications which could be prescribed to control anger, agitation, nervousness, schizophrenia, fear psychosis, which should be used along with psychological and psychiatric help.

### **5.4 Judicial**

There are several courts in the country which along with pronouncing the sentence to the rapist, encourage the use of self-help groups which consists of psychologists and psychiatrists, to help the offender, to realise their mistake, and to some extent help them to move towards normal behaviour. The courts always look for alternate remedies in trying and helping even the most heinous criminals. The attempt here is to help the convict in the best possible manner. To this effect there are several NGO's (Non-Government Organisation).

Figure 5: Remedial measures adopted for sex offenders



Source: Own source

## 6. CONCLUSION

Dealing with rapists requires a great amount of research with respect to the state of mind of the sexual offender. Besides the offender, it also requires a lot of psychological effort and respect for the victim. It has been observed that the number of rape victims have been on the rise especially with respect to perpetrators being juveniles and victims being very young too. The other area where the increase has been noticed is with respect to 'date rapists'. As the reach of social media has increased so has the number of young men and women trying to find partners through this channel. There should be checks and balances instituted by the owner of such sites as well as the regulations instituted by the government to prevent misuse of such facilities.

To control the incidence of rape, it requires a concerted effort on the part of psychologists and psychiatrists. For this everyone right from parents, to NGOs in disturbed localities, schools, colleges, government and judiciary have to be extremely alert. Wherever there is a medical issue that, should also be taken cognizant of and addressed immediately. A lot has been done in this field and a lot more is required to make the world a better place for women.

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