

An Examination of Noncompleted Sexual Offences, Offenders' Perceptions of Risks and Difficulties and Related Situational Factors

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INTRODUCTION

In his presidential address to the American Society of Criminology in 2010, Cullen (2011) argued that the future of criminology lies in producing “scientific knowledge that is capable of improving offenders’ lives and reducing crime” (p. 287). As part of his proposed agenda towards this goal, he called on criminologists to 1) ‘understand criminal decision-making’, 2) ‘know something about the crime event’ and, 3) ‘talk to offenders’ (pp. 313-16). Despite Cullen’s recommendations, there remains an overwhelming imbalance in favour of criminological research that seeks to understand the causes of criminal propensity over research on offender decision making and crime events.

It has been argued that offenders themselves are a highly valuable source of information for understanding how and under which circumstances they commit their crime and informing prevention practices (e.g., Bernasco, 2010; Jacques & Bonobo, 2016; Leclerc & Wortley, 2013; Wortley et al., 2019). What offenders have to say regarding which factors affect their decision to proceed with the commission of an offence is also promising for further understanding offender decision-making in general (e.g., Bernasco, 2012; Gill, 2016; Jacques & Bonobo, 2016; Jacques & Reynald, 2012; Lindegaard & Bernasco, 2016). Examining noncompleted offences specifically through the eyes of offenders and which situational or individual decision-making factors (as well as interaction of these factors) may lead to noncompletion is critical to grasp what may actually discourage or stop offenders from committing crime. This also helps further understanding which common real-life offence scenarios may be at the origin of noncompletion (e.g., Leclerc et al., 2016 on sexual offences; Lindegaard et al., 2015 on robberies; Luckenbill, 1977 on homicide). Further to this, by understanding offender decision-making that more accurately portrays how offenders actually arrive at these decisions (to stop short from completing crime in this case), crime prevention efforts can be rendered more focused and more effective by targeting relevant

factors likely to affect offender decision-making (see also van Gelder, 2017, van Gelder et al., 2014). For instance, as pointed out by van Gelder (2017), one policy implication of this line of research is that when designing an intervention, policy makers may need to consider the extent to which offenders are responsive to increased risk in different potential scenarios based on their perceptions of different factors (e.g., presence of third party in public setting, victim resistance).

Consistent with this approach, the current study investigates how sexual offenders think during crime commission, with the aim of generating evidence-based knowledge to further understand how and under which circumstances these offences are committed or more specifically *discouraged*, which ultimately could feed into prevention initiatives and policy making. Aside from the focus on sexual offenders, the most innovative aspect of the current study is that data were collected on offences that the offenders had initiated but were *stopped or discouraged* from completing before or during sexual contact resulting in a noncompleted sexual offence (see also Cook et al., 2018).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rational Choice and Routine Activities

The study of sexual offenders' decision making and situational factors that may affect criminal decisions sits in a rational choice framework in criminology. While the rational choice framework does not specifically focus on noncompleted crimes, it illuminates how offenders make decisions in relation to crime and what may influence those decisions during the commission of a crime. Within a rational choice framework, a key assumption is that offenders who sexually offend make purposive and rational decisions to commit their crime (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; 2008). The main premise is that any offenders assess a criminal opportunity in terms of risks, efforts and rewards associated with the commission of the crime regardless of how rudimentary their assessment proves to be. Decisions that offenders

make are aimed at fulfilling needs, such as revenge, money, sexual gratification, power, the need for thrill, to name a few, and are influenced by factors such as intoxication and sexual excitation (Cornish & Clarke, 1987; 2008) and emotions (van Gelder, 2017). While these decisions can be situated on a continuum from carefully planned decisions to split-second decisions, they remain decisions nonetheless regardless of the outcome (Clarke, 2008; Felson, 2013). Hastie and Dawes (2010) add that human decision-making processes are not (and cannot be) optimal. One reason for this is that decisions are never made in full consideration of all factors and elements that could affect the outcome of those decisions – which refers to bounded rationality as described by rational choice theorists. In sexual offences, one such factor can include the presence of a person nearby who could intervene during the crime, which brings us to the routine activity approach.

According to the routine activities approach, three minimal elements must converge in time and space for a crime to occur - a motivated offender, a potential victim, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The concept of ‘capable guardian’ refers to the presence of any person who has the capacity to interrupt the crime either directly or indirectly and thus, is critical to consider when examining sexual offenders’ decision making. In effect, a person can prevent crime simply by their presence, that is, by being visible and/or nearby (e.g., in another room). According to Felson (2002, p. 22), ‘A guardian is not usually someone who brandishes a gun or threatens an offender with quick punishment, but rather someone whose mere presence serves as a gentle reminder that someone is looking. With a guardian present, the offender should avoid attempting to carry out an offense in the first place.’ However, for the guardian to have the best possibility of disrupting the offence, Reynald (2010) adds that the willingness and physical capacity to intervene are critical for certain types of offences as well as the process of monitoring the offence before intervention.

PREVIOUS CRIMINOLOGICAL STUDIES ON SEXUAL OFFENDERS' DECISION-MAKING

Based on a rational choice framework, Beauregard and his colleagues (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Beauregard et al., 2012) conducted two studies on the rationales adopted by sexual offenders to explain the crimes they have committed. Using a sample of incarcerated serial sexual offenders, they examined the rationales of offenders before, during and after the crime event. According to offenders, perceiving high risk of apprehension was driven by the presence of a person nearby, victim resistance and a risky environment, that is, a public location in daytime (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). In addition, about 30% of sexual offenders gave no thought at all to the risks of getting caught before or during crime. Finally, offenders against women were also more likely to report the presence of a guardian who could interfere than were offenders against children (Beauregard et al., 2012). These findings suggest either that offenders against children found time alone with their victim in a private location or that they simply overlooked whether a person nearby could intervene.

Studies on victim resistance specifically revealed a complex relationship with the outcome of sexual offences. In general, victim resistance has been associated with less sexual abuse and rape avoidance in the context of sexual offences against women (e.g., Ullman & Knight, 1992; Wong & Balemba, 2018). For instance, Ullman and Knight (1991) found that forceful victim resistance was associated with less severe outcomes. Chiu et al. (2020) observed that victim resistance was more effective to stop sexual offences against women in private settings. Offender reaction to resistance was also found to greatly vary for women versus child victims (Balemba & Beauregard, 2012), emphasising the need for crime-specific findings. Another study found that the offender was more likely to react violently to victim resistance if the offender used a weapon (Balemba, Beauregard & Mieczkowski, 2012). This suggests that in examining the effect of victim resistance, more insight into what lead to

offence noncompletion may be gained by incorporating contexts, perceptions and decision-making relating to the offender.

In relation to the influence of a person nearby on offenders' decision making specifically, Underwood et al. (1999) found that more than three quarters of their sample of adult child sexual offenders involved in a treatment program committed an offence in the presence of a person nearby therefore overlooking this factor. However, Leclerc et al. (2015) observed that the presence of a person nearby may reduce the severity of sexual contact with children showing that offenders may be reluctant to engage the victim in intrusive sexual activities in this context. Consistent with this finding, Ha and Beauregard (2016) observed that sex offenders who perceived high risk of apprehension during crime were more likely to *not* penetrate the victim even when accounting for the individual level of self-control. Pedneault et al. (2017) further found that sexual offences committed outdoors were less intrusive in nature thereby suggesting a possible preventative impact of the potential presence of a person nearby on decision making based on crime location (see also Leclerc et al., 2010a). Using victimisation surveys, Clay-Warner (2002) found that the absence of a person nearby was one of the strongest predictors of rape completion. These studies show the relevance of the presence of a person nearby on sexual offenders' decision making. However, the main limitation here is that all these studies were conducted with samples of completed sexual offences rather than noncompleted sexual offences.

Apart from the presence of a person nearby, sexual excitation and intoxication have also been studied previously in relation to sexual offenders' decision making. It has been found that sexual excitation affects decision making which means that offenders are unlikely to make an accurate assessment of risks and efforts related to the commission of a crime as indicated by previous studies (e.g., Ariely & Lowenstein, 2006; Bouffard, 2002; Leclerc et al., 2016; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). For instance, Ariely and Lowenstein (2006) found that male

college students were more likely to report that they would have sex with someone they hated, and that they would keep trying having sex after the woman says 'no', when the students were sexually aroused compared to when they are not aroused. These findings suggest that sexual arousal has a disinhibiting effect, amplifying the attractiveness of immoral activities related to having sex even amongst college students.

In their theoretical model for explaining sexual offending, Marshall and Barbaree (1990) also argued that intoxication (alcohol and/or drugs) may lead some sexual offenders to ignore social inhibitions and make the decision to commit a crime. This has been supported by Beaugard and Bouchard (2010) who showed that sexual offenders take fewer precautions in trying to avoid detection while intoxicated thereby providing empirical support on the impact of intoxication on offender decision making. However, the current state of empirical evidence does not clearly establish the impact that intoxication may have on how sexual offenders perceive the risks of apprehension and the potential difficulties committing a sexual crime even though intoxication arguably influences decision making. In summary, previous studies *did not* examine what may influence sexual offenders' decision making specifically in the context of noncompleted sexual offences.

CURRENT STUDY

The current study not only establishes new boundaries of research in the field of sexual offenders' decision-making and offender decision-making in general but also addresses one important gap in the literature: Evidence-based knowledge on noncompleted sexual offences is limited, which in turn limits the possibility of developing new prevention initiatives based on what can be found to deter offenders in action. In addition, evidence-based knowledge on sexual offenders' decision making is currently limited. For instance, how sexual offenders may perceive the risks of apprehension related to the commission of a sexual offence is scarce.

This study aims to generate insights from sexual offenders on noncompleted sexual offences, that is, on offences that were stopped or discouraged, and the impact of situational factors and internal states on how these offenders are perceiving risks of apprehension and difficulties in this context. Using a sample of sexual offenders who initiated a sexual offence but were stopped or discouraged from completing which we refer to as noncompleted offences, we first examine what and how situational factors and internal states may affect their assessment of risk of apprehension and difficulties in this context by conducting linear regression analyses. Second, we investigate whether perceived risks and difficulties as well as situational factors and internal states are associated with the noncompletion of sexual offences by completing logistic regression analyses.

All multivariate analyses are conducted separately according to victim type (children or women). Separate regression analyses are performed based on the type of offence. Four linear regression analyses are conducted (two with data on noncompleted sexual offences against women and two with data on noncompleted sexual offences against children). The decision to conduct separate analyses for each type of offence is based on evidence showing that the circumstances surrounding the commission of sexual offences against children differ substantially from those of offences committed against women, which influence the decisions made by sexual offenders during crime (Beauregard et al., 2012). These analyses examine what and how situational factors (i.e., presence of someone else, location of crime, victim resistance and offender-victim relationship) and internal states (alcohol and drug intoxication, need for sex and extent of thinking about sex) are associated with offenders' perceived risks of apprehension and difficulties. We also investigate the presence of interaction effects among predictor variables. Finally, two logistic regression analyses are conducted to investigate whether perceived risks and difficulties as well as situational factors and internal states are associated with whether the offence is completed by offenders or not.

Therefore, the current study examines the three following research questions:

Research Question 1: Which situational factors (person nearby, victim resistance, location of crime, offender-victim relationship) if any best predict offenders' perceived risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences?

Research Question 2: Do interaction effects involving situational factors and internal states of offenders on offenders' perceived risks and difficulties emerge in the context of noncompleted sexual offences?

Research Question 3: Are perceived risks and difficulties significantly associated to noncompleted sexual offences?

Given the absence of empirical research on noncompleted sexual offences, the proposed hypotheses below are tentative at best. In addressing the first question, we expect that situational factors will be associated with perceived risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences. Based on Beauregard and his colleagues' work (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Beauregard et al., 2012), we could anticipate that some of these factors will emerge as related to perceived risks and difficulties. Specifically, under a rational choice approach/routine activities framework, the presence of a person nearby is a key factor that one would expect to be related to perceived risk and difficulties to commit a specific crime.

This study leads us to consider whether situational factors will interact in some ways with internal states in the context of noncompleted sexual offences. Based on previous studies, we expect that intoxication will interact with situational factors and influence how offenders will perceive risks and difficulties especially for sexual offences involving adult victims (see also Ha & Beauregard, 2016; Leclerc et al., 2016; van Gelder, 2013; van Gelder et al., 2014). Sexual stimulation may interact with situational factors in the case of sexual offences against children (Wortley & Smallbone, 2014). However, it is not entirely clear what these interaction effects may entail. For instance, on the one hand, offenders may perceive

victim resistance or the presence of a person nearby as important obstacles in the context of noncompleted offences, hence why these offences would get disrupted in their course of action. On the other hand, according to the rational choice approach, if offenders are intoxicated or sexually stimulated, their cognitive capacity to assess risks and difficulties with some degree of accuracy could be diminished (Beauregard & Bouchard, 2010). In this situation, offenders could overlook obstacles and initiate a sexual offence that will turn out to be stopped or discouraged in process.

Once again, given the absence of empirical research on noncompleted sexual offences, the third hypothesis remains tentative as well. In addressing this question, we could expect perceived risks and difficulties as well as any situational factors and internal states to be associated with noncompleted sexual offences. Specifically, the presence of a person nearby and victim resistance could potentially be related to noncompleted offences during either crime events involving children or women.

METHOD

Sample

A total of 366 adult males incarcerated for a contact sexual offence in Australia participated in a funded research project on sexual offending and situational crime prevention. Of those offenders, 223 were convicted for committing a sexual offence against a child and 143 were convicted for sexually assaulting an adult woman. Most sexual offenders against children were Australian born non-Aboriginal (70.4%) compared to Australian born Aboriginal (15.2%). A total of 14.4% of offenders were European, Asian or from another non-Australian background. In contrast, a large proportion of offenders against women were Australian born Aboriginal (49%) compared to Australian born non-Aboriginal (27.3%). A total of 23.7% of offenders were European, Asian or from another background. Very few offenders had completed secondary school - the proportions were 8.6% and 11.9% for

offenders against children and offenders against women, respectively. Finally, 60.9% of offenders against children were in a stable relationship at the time they participated in the study compared to 64.8% in the case of offenders against women.

As part of this project, we examined the most recent noncompleted offence for each participant. As the focus of the current study is on sexual crime events that *were not* completed (i.e., sexual offences that were stopped or discouraged during perpetration), our final sample for analysis here comprised only offenders who reported a noncompleted offence. A total of 144 offenders reported a noncompleted offence, whose offences involved 67 adult victims and 77 child victims. These samples were mutually exclusive of each other and analysed separately. In total, adding completed to noncompleted offences, 223 offences against children were reported as well as 143 offences against women.

Procedures

Ethics approval for the project was obtained at the university where the project was based. To obtain participants, corrective services department in three different states identified the individuals in their facilities who were either currently serving or had previously served a sentence for a contact sexual offence against a child or adult woman. There were two strategies for engaging participants. Offenders participating in a therapeutic program were approached during a weekly group session and provided with a detailed information sheet about the project and participant consent form. Offenders not participating in a treatment program were approached individually to maintain their confidentiality. They were also provided with the information sheet and consent form.

Offenders who consented to participate completed the self-report questionnaire in the presence of at least one member of the research team. This strategy was adopted to provide offenders with the opportunity to ask any questions or express concerns regarding the questionnaire or the project. Once the questionnaire was completed, the research assistant

checked the responses to make sure nothing has been misinterpreted or omitted to avoid the occurrence of missing data. As participation was voluntary, participants had the option to leave questions unanswered. Even though participants were not interviewed per se, they were also told to not disclose any names or personal details to protect them against any subsequent legal action in relation to noncompleted sexual offences. Lastly, to protect the identity of offenders, each questionnaire was linked with its consent form by assigning each offender with a unique identification number. We did not record any information that could lead to an individual being identified as having participated in the study.

Measures

The self-report questionnaire incorporated one section on the participant's most recent noncompleted offence. This section included a variety of questions on how and under which circumstances the offence was committed. Specifically, participants were asked to complete this section if they had previously attempted to commit a sexual offence but were discouraged or stopped beforehand (for further details on the instrument, see Cook et al., 2018). A noncompleted offence was defined as one that was stopped or discouraged before *or* during sexual contact; this included cases where the offender was interrupted after the offence was initiated. To illustrate, if an offender had identified a suitable victim but the victim immediately resisted, which meant he could not secure their compliance, the offence was then considered to be noncompleted. The offence was also considered noncompleted if the offender was stopped when engaging the victim in sexual contact (e.g., through witness intervention or the victim fighting back). "Before" the offence refers to anytime during the event leading up to the offence but before sexual contact is attempted. This would usually occur hours or minutes before an attempt to sexual contact is made. For instance, some offenders were discouraged or stopped when trying to gain the trust of the victim, isolating the victim before trying to engage the victim in sexual contact or trying to engage the victim

in sexual contact by using strategies, such as alluding to sexual activity with jokes or remarks, and kissing the victim. In these instances, the victim may have said 'no' or simply ran away (for further details, Cook et al., 2018).

Variables

The dependent variables of interest in this study first included perceived risks and difficulties associated with a noncompleted sexual offence. Offenders were asked how they had perceived the risks of apprehension when attempting to commit the crime and how they had perceived the difficulties associated with attempting the crime. For each question, offenders were asked to circle an answer ranging from 0-10, that is, from not risky at all (or not difficult) (i.e., 0) to very risky (or very difficult) (i.e., 10). It makes sense that these two variables have been found to be positively correlated for both offences against children ($r = .439$) and women ($r = .450$) as they both relate to the likelihood of committing the crime through the eyes of offenders, but they are theoretically distinct as well (see Leclerc et al., 2020). Perceiving risks of apprehension specifically refers to risks of getting caught if proceeding with the crime. Perceiving a crime as more difficult to commit may involve any situational constraints that could be seen by offenders as obstacles when committing their crime. For instance, a 'difficult' crime to commit could involve more efforts from the offender's point of view, such as overcoming victim verbal or physical resistance. Indeed, not only do offenders within group scored differently on these two variables (e.g., offenders against children had a mean score of 2.89 on perceived difficulties and a mean score of 5.28 on perceived risks), but it has been found that sexual offenders against women and sexual offenders against children do perceive risks of apprehension and difficulties related to crime commission differently in the context of noncompleted sexual offenses. In a previous study, it had been anticipated that sexual offenders against women would perceive higher risks *and*

greater difficulties than offenders against children (Leclerc et al., 2020). However, the findings suggested that offenders against children group had perceived higher risks compared to offenders against women. On the other hand, sex offenders against women perceived greater difficulties compared to sex offenders against children potentially because a woman can physically fight back and report the offense to authorities, which is less likely to occur with a child.

Second, for the last analysis, we included a dichotomous dependent variable measuring whether the offence was completed or not, which was coded as follows: 0=completed, 1=noncompleted. As reported above, a noncompleted offence was defined as one that was stopped or discouraged before *or* during physical contact, which means that cases where the offender was interrupted after the offence was initiated were included as well. A variable that could distinguish between offences that were noncompleted before and during the offence would provide insights into offender decision-making and reveal whether the factors affecting the outcome (i.e., noncompletion) might differ or not on this basis. Despite this consideration, the variable used in this study is critical as its purpose is to establish which factors (situational or decision-making) likely discourage or lead offenders to stop before *completing* a sexual offence.

We included four key independent variables to reflect situational factors commonly examined in the criminological literature and relevant to consider in sexual offences: 1) presence of a person nearby, 2) offender-victim relationship, 3) location of crime and, 4) victim resistance. These variables were all dichotomous. As pointed out above, noncompleted sexual offences against women and noncompleted sexual offences against children are examined separately during the analyses. In addition, the offender-victim relationship, the location of the crime and victim resistance were operationalised slightly differently according to the type of offence to reflect what is most commonly observed for each type of offence. For noncompleted

sexual offences against women, the offender-victim relationship, the location of the crime and victim resistance were categorised as follows: 1) 0=non-stranger (i.e., acquaintances, work colleague) 1=stranger; 2) 0=outdoor location, 1=indoor location and; 3) 0=non-physical resistance (i.e., yelling, crying, saying 'no'), 1=physical resistance. As for resistance specifically, we chose to focus on physical resistance cases as the literature indicates that women using physical resistance are more likely to avoid being sexually assaulted (e.g., Clay-Warner, 2002; Ullman & Knight, 1991).

As found in the study by Beauregard et al. (2021), circumstances of sexual offences against children differ substantially from offences against women mainly due to the victim type (children vs women). This required a different operationalisation of the situational factors in this case. First, a familial relationship included the offender abusing his own biological or adopted children, nephew/niece or grand-son/grand-daughter. The offender-victim relationship was coded as follows: 0=non-familial, 1=familial relationship. Second, the offender's and child's home were merged as often the two locations are in fact the same crime location (e.g., an offender abusing his own children at home), which was coded as follows: 0=other locations, 1=offender's or child's home. Finally, we included any form of passive or active resistance as resistance (crying, the child acting like they were scared, yelling, fighting back, threatening to report the abuse, and saying 'no'). The variable of victim resistance was coded as follows: 0=no-resistance, 1=resistance.

Moreover, variables reflecting internal states of offenders prior the offence were included as control variables and to examine for the presence of interaction effects between internal states and situational factors. Internal states included in this study were the following: alcohol intoxication, drug intoxication, extent of thinking about sex prior to the offence, and importance given to need for sex at the time of the offence. These variables were measured in the form of scales ranging from 0-10 where 0 indicated the relative absence of the internal state

at the time of the offence and 10 indicated the internal state as strongly present at the time. Descriptive statistics for all variables are provided in Tables 1 and 2. For sexual offences against women, there were two missing values for perceived risks and perceived difficulties and four missing values for offence completion (Table 1). As for sexual offences against children, there were two missing values for extent of thinking about sexual contact, need for sex, perceived difficulties and perceived risks as well as one missing value for victim resistance, alcohol and drug intoxication. There were further 13 missing values for offence completion (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Data Analysis

The analysis first involves the estimation of linear regression models on perceived risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences and second, the estimation of logistic regression models on completion/noncompletion of the sexual offences. SPSS 27 was used for all analyses. As previous studies suggest that risks of sexually offending are perceived differently based on the type of offence (i.e., sexual offences against women vs sexual offences against children; Beauregard et al., 2012), the linear regression models involved dividing our sample into these two groups for analysis. This operation generated two sub-samples of events (66 and 75, respectively) to estimate. To overcome the small sample size for these events, we used a threshold of $p \leq .250$ at the bivariate level to select the variables to include in the models as suggested in the literature (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). In these analyses, we also included four internal states of offenders prior the offence as control variables: 1) alcohol intoxication; 2) drug intoxication; 3) extent of

thinking about sex; and, 4) importance attributed to the need (or desire) for sex. These variables are included as controls because evidence suggest that they are statistically associated with perceived risks and difficulties and the objective is to remove any effect from the estimated models that could be attributed to them. Furthermore, consistent with the second research question and prior studies in the field, the presence of interaction effects was tested between the variables that were included in each model following the threshold of $p \leq .250$ used to select them in the first place at the bivariate level (e.g., Leclerc et al., 2009; Leclerc et al., 2016; Mieczkowski & Beauregard, 2012). Before proceeding with including interaction effects, the variables involved in the interaction term were centered as suggested by Tabachnick & Fidell (2001), which was completed by subtracting the variable value from its mean score.

For the logistic regression models, we estimated whether perceived risks and difficulties could help explain whether a sexual offence would be completed or noncompleted by offenders. This analysis involved estimating one model for offences against women with a sample of 143 offences and one model for offences against children with a sample of 223 offences. All situational factors (and internal states) included in the linear regression models were also included and a threshold of $p \leq .250$ at the bivariate level was used to select the variables to include in the models as suggested in the literature due to the high number of variables relative to sample size (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000).

RESULTS

Sexual Offences Against Women

Table 3 presents the findings of the estimated linear regression models on noncompleted sexual offences against women. For each model, the statistics for the variables included (based on a threshold of $p \leq .250$ at the bivariate level) is presented. First, regression

models indicated that only the variable of perceived difficulties was associated with perceived risks in the context of noncompleted sexual offences [$b = .474$]. Second, victim physical resistance increases offenders' perceived difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences [$b = 1.878$]. We also found that as perceived risks increase so are perceived difficulties [$b = .338$]. No significant interaction effect was observed between the variables included in each model and therefore were not included in Table 3. Finally, logistic regression models (Model 3) indicated that perceived difficulties are associated with noncompletion of sexual offences against women [OR = 1.299]. In addition, the more offenders are thinking about sex contact, the lower the odds of offence noncompletion [OR = .841].

INSERT TABLE 3

Sexual Offences Against Children

Table 4 displays the findings of the estimated linear regression models for noncompleted sexual offences against children. For each model, the statistics for the variables included (based on a threshold of $p \leq .250$ at the bivariate level) is presented. First, the variable of perceived difficulties was associated with perceived risks in the context of noncompleted sexual offences [$b = .557$]. Second, a negative interaction effect involving the presence of a person nearby and the importance attributed to the need for sex emerged [$b = -.796$]. This effect suggests that when a person is present nearby, offenders' perception of risks decreases as they attribute more importance to the need for sex prior to the offence in the context of noncompleted sexual offences. Second, in relation to predicting perceived difficulties, only the variable of perceived risks was statistically significant [$b = .397$] suggesting that the higher offenders against children perceive risks, the more they will also perceive difficulties in committing an offence that is noncompleted during its course of

action. Finally, logistic regression models (Model 3) indicated that perceived difficulties and extent of thinking about sexual contact were associated with the noncompletion of sexual offences against children [OR = 1.195, OR = 1.401, respectively]. In addition, the presence of a person nearby [OR = 2.766] and victim resistance [OR = 14.523] were also positively associated with noncompletion. Offences that included the presence of a person nearby were 2.76 times more likely to lead to noncompletion than offences that did not involve a person nearby. In addition, offences during which the child showed resistance were 14.52 times more likely to lead to noncompletion than offences during which the child did not resist at all.

INSERT TABLE 4

DISCUSSION

We set out to guide the current investigation with three questions. The first was: Which situational factors (person nearby, victim resistance, location of crime, offender-victim relationship) if any best predicts perceived risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against women and children? The second was: Do interaction effects involving situational factors and internal states of offenders on perceived risks and difficulties emerge in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against women and children? Finally, the third was: Are perceived risks and difficulties significantly associated to noncompleted offences?

Sexual Offences Against Women

In examining the first question, we found two significant relationships regarding perceived difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against women. Apart from the relationship between perceived risks and perceived difficulties, victim physical resistance was found to increase perceived difficulties. This finding is consistent with previous studies because victim physical resistance has been found to be associated with non-completion of sexual assault against women (e.g., Clay-Warner, 2002; Ullman & Knight,

1991) and reported by offenders themselves as a rationale to explain high risks of getting caught (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). However, two distinctions must be made based on these findings. First, contrary to Beauregard and Leclerc (2007), we did not find any relationship between victim physical resistance and perceived risks – only with perceived difficulties. Second, our analysis focused on noncompleted sexual offences, while Beauregard and Leclerc's (2007) findings were obtained with completed sexual offences. Therefore, it suggests that victim physical resistance is a factor considered by offenders in how they perceive difficulties *rather than risk* in the context of when sexual offences are stopped or discouraged. It makes sense to observe that victim physical resistance increases perceived difficulties especially in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against women because a woman, contrary to a child, is more capable, and likely to resist.

No other situational factor was related to perceived risks or difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against women, which partially support the first hypothesis. For example, we were expecting that factors such as the location of the crime or the presence of a person nearby would perhaps influence offenders' perceptions of risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). One possibility to explain this discrepancy is that offenders involved in noncompleted sexual offences simply did not have access to information relevant to the presence of a person nearby at the time or able to accurately assess whether the location where they initiated the offence represented an additional obstacle or risk to them. This hypothesis is made on the assumption that offenders who completed the offence would have access to this information. The lack of available information for offenders to make a more accurate assessment of risks has been reported before in criminology (Cornish & Clarke, 1987; Homel et al., 2013) and may have been a reason for many offenders to overlook these situational factors in the context where they were stopped or discouraged.

Victim resistance emerged as a key factor in shaping how sexual offenders against women perceived difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences. Therefore, not only do we know that forceful victim resistance leads up to rape non-completion (e.g., Balemba & Beauregard, 2012; Clay-Warner, 2002; Tark & Kleck, 2004), but that sexual offenders against women are aware of the likelihood of victim resistance in assessing the difficulties to commit crime specifically. However, it should be noted that the logistic regression models on offence completion indicated that only perceived difficulties and the extent of thinking about sexual contact prior to the commencement of the offence increased the likelihood of noncompletion of sexual offences against women, not victim resistance specifically. One possibility might be that victim resistance has an indirect effect on noncompletion only when offenders perceive the offence as difficult to commit in light of victims' behaviours. In any event, more research is needed on noncompleted sexual offences against women to further understand the dynamic of these offences and link this knowledge to prevention.

Sexual Offences Against Children

Apart from the relationship between perceived difficulties and perceived risks, only a negative interaction effect emerged between the presence of a person nearby and the importance given to the need for sex on perceived risks in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against children. Once again, this finding only partially supports our second hypothesis because no other interaction effect was found in the study. Still, this interaction effect suggests that even when a person nearby is present, offenders' perception of risks decreases as they attribute more importance to the need for sex prior the offence in the context of noncompleted sexual offences against children. This result supports the relevance of considering internal states of offenders in conjunction with situational factors as they may shape how offenders perceive risks related to offending (e.g., Leclerc & Lindegaard, 2018;

van Gelder et al., 2014). Consistent with Ariely and Lowenstein (2006) who found that male college students were more likely to report that they would keep trying having sex after the woman says 'no' when sexually aroused, this finding illustrates that the need or drive for sex is likely to encourage many offenders to proceed with an opportunity to offend sexually even against children (Leclerc et al., 2016) but also alter how they may perceive risks related to offending in a state in which the desire for sexual activities takes over the consideration of any potential obstacle in the environment. The dynamic of this interplay is consistent with what van Gelder (2013) pointed out, that is, that sexual excitation should lead to 'hot' ways of processing information, which implies that sexual offenders, when aroused, will be less likely to see the long-term consequences instead of being absorbed by the need for immediate sexual gratifications.

The logistic regression model findings on offence noncompletion help clarify our understanding of sexual offences against children. Four variables were found to increase the odds of offence noncompletion, that is, the extent of thinking about sexual contact, perceived difficulties, the presence of a person nearby and victim resistance. Specifically, these findings indicate that a person nearby and victim resistance are likely to lead to noncompletion of sexual offences. First, while the effect of a person nearby on perceived risks is contingent on the need for sex, a person nearby is directly related to offence noncompletion, which is consistent with the impact of a person nearby on decreasing the severity of sexual offences against children (Leclerc et al., 2015). As many offenders may have perceived the presence of a family member as a low risk when committing their offence (e.g., Underwood et al., 1999), it is imperative to disseminate the importance and role that bystanders may play in neutralising sexual offences against children. This could be accomplished via multiple avenues, such as through educational or publicity campaigns to encourage collective awareness and intervention (see Leclerc & Reynald, 2017). This may encourage potential

bystanders to take more responsibility and make the decision to intervene if they notice or suspect a sexual abuse against a child.

Second, victim resistance was approximately 14 times more likely to lead to noncompletion compared to the absence of resistance. Even though this finding may sound controversial in implying that children should be taught to resist, it does directly provide evidence for the effectiveness of children showing their reluctance in taking part in sexual activities. This finding is also consistent with previous research conducted with a different sample of offenders suggesting that offenders are likely to stop from abusing their victim when the victim shows resistance (Leclerc et al., 2010b, 2011). Given the risk linked to strongly recommending children to resist during the offence, there is a need to obtain further evidence to support this finding. It should also be noted that the variable of resistance used in this study included any form of resistance from crying to fighting back as well as a conservative sample size for analysis. It might be the case that certain forms of resistance are more effective than others (see Leclerc et al., 2011) and most importantly, vary depending on various situational factors as well as offender and victim characteristics in the context of noncompleted offences.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations in the current study. First, our study draws on self-report data collected from incarcerated offenders. This means that offenders responses may be affected by memory recall. Some offenders may have minimised or not reported victim resistance for instance in the context of sexual offences against children. Some other offenders may have had difficulties recalling exactly what happened during the crime event even though this study focused on the most recent crime event, which, to the best extent possible, mitigates the impact of this limitation. In relation to noncompleted offences specifically, some offenders may have chosen to report an attempt that was not the most

recent event, by mistake or intention, since there is no rigorous method to verify their accounts. If so, memory recall may have a greater impact on the data quality of these cases. Some other offenders may have omitted to report a noncompleted offence by fear of further consequences (e.g., longer sentence). Moreover, as offenders who were recruited for this study had to be incarcerated for a sexual offence in the first place, offenders who had a previous history for committing a sexual offence but were not incarcerated for this crime at the time of data collection were not included in this study. In any matter, we aimed to maximise data validity by limiting the potential impact of memory recall as indicated above.

Sexual offences were also classified into either sexual offences against women or children. Not making a distinction based on the offence type would have provided a larger sample for statistical analysis purposes. However, it was preferred to separate these two offence types because previous literature demonstrated that the victim type (i.e., women or children) and related circumstances shape sexual offenders' decision-making (e.g., Beauregard et al., 2012; Leclerc et al., 2016). In doing so, our analysis provided a more accurate portrait of offenders' decision-making and related factors likely to lead to offence noncompletion for both sexual offences against women and children.

An argument can also be made against using only the most recent crime event based on the assumption that how offenders commit their crimes is highly variable across crimes. However, to date, there is no solid evidence-base suggesting that this would be the case. In fact, one recent study suggested that how sexual offenders operate across victims is stable (Leclerc et al., 2015). Finally, our study is based on a relatively small number of noncompleted sexual crime events. Nonetheless, collecting and examining data on attempted sexual offences is novel and critical as it helps accumulate evidence-based knowledge that could be used for crime prevention purposes in the long-term (e.g., Lindegaard et al., 2015). Offender-based research is arguably critical to inform prevention practices because the

offender perspective offers an angle from which to examine crime through the eyes of those who are involved in crime from start to finish (Jacques & Bonobo, 2016). Offender-based research is also arguably the most effective approach to investigate the processes involved in offenders' decision-making (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Bernasco, 2010; Leclerc & Wortley, 2013; van Gelder et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

To date, very few researchers have used data to examine crimes that were initiated but stopped or discouraged in action perhaps because of the difficulty to collect these data. In the current study, using data on sexual offences, we found that what affects sexual offenders' decision-making differs in the context of noncompleted sexual offences based on the type of offenders. A possible avenue for future research is to conduct a more detailed examination of what offenders think of prevention measures in the context of noncompleted sexual offences supplemented by investigating the crime script of completed sexual offences and what may not have stopped or discouraged sexual offenders from proceeding with their crime during the script. Many facets of how sexual offenders perceive risks and difficulties in the context of noncompleted sexual offences are yet to be discovered. Investigating noncompleted sexual offences to identify situational cues related to what may work or not may help develop and prioritise the measures likely to prevent sexual offences intentions from turning into action (Cook et al., 2018; Lindegaard et al., 2015). Beyond the utility of further understanding offender decision-making in general, this is a critical line of research because knowledge on the factors and circumstances that can discourage or stop offenders from committing crimes can also be used by scholars and practitioners to think of prevention initiatives to reduce opportunities of crime (e.g., Clarke, 2008; 2012; Felson & Clarke, 1998) and better understand and predict which situational crime prevention mechanisms may be most useful in discouraging offenders (Elffers & Reynald, 2017).

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Noncompleted Sexual Offences Against Women

	<i>N</i>	Percentage Yes	Mean (<i>SD</i>) Median
<u>Situational factors</u>			
Stranger relationship	67	84.6	
Victim physical resistance	67	43.3	
Indoor location of crime	67	50.7	
Person nearby	67	32.8	
<u>Internal states</u>			
Alcohol intoxication	67		6.78 (3.78) 8
Drug intoxication	67		4.79 (4.70) 4
Extent of thinking about sexual contact	67		2.45 (3.17) 0
Importance of need for sex	67		3.28 (3.32) 3
Perceived difficulties	66		4.30 (3.41) 5
Perceived risks	66		4.05 (3.87) 3.50
Offence completion (completed/noncompleted)	139	48.2	

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Noncompleted Sexual Offences Against Children

	<i>N</i>	Percentage Yes	Mean (<i>SD</i>) Median
<u>Situational factors</u>			
Familial relationship	78	69.2	
Victim resistance	77	48	

Home location (Offender's or child's home)	78	85.9	
Person nearby	78	59	
<u>Internal states</u>			
Alcohol intoxication	77		1.94 (3.60) 0
Drug intoxication	77		1.65 (3.43) 0
Extent of thinking about sexual contact	76		3.97 (3.04) 4
Importance of need for sex	76		3.53 (3.00) 3
Perceived difficulties	76		2.89 (3.18) 2
Perceived risks	76		5.28 (3.57) 5
Offence completion (completed/noncompleted)	210	36.1	

Table 3. Regression Analyses of Noncompleted Sexual Offences Against Women

Variable	Perceived Risks (n=66)	Perceived Difficulties (n=66)	Noncompleted Offences (n=138)
	Model 1 <i>b</i> (95% CI)	Model 2 <i>b</i> (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Stranger relationship	-----	-----	.764 (.343-1.704)
Victim physical resistance	-----	1.878 (.575- 3.181)**	1.545 (.676-3.529)
Indoor location	-----	-----	.840 (.385-1.830)
Person nearby	-----	-----	-----

Alcohol intoxication	-----	-----	-----
Drug intoxication	-----	-----	-----
Extent of thinking about sexual contact	-----	.245 (-.026-.517)	.841 (.743-.952)**
Importance of need for sex	.101 (-.180-.383)	.123 (-.140-.385)	-----
Perceived difficulties	.474 (.200-.748)***	-----	1.299 (1.109-1.520)***
Perceived risks	-----	.363 (.190-.536)***	.972 (.862-1.097)
Constant	1.668*	.853	-.310
Adjusted R ²	.184	.409	-----
Nagelkerke R ²	-----	-----	.222

Abbreviations: OR = Odds ratio, CI = Confidence Intervals.

Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. One outlier greater than 3 was removed from Model 3.

Table 4. Regression Analyses of Noncompleted Sexual Offences Against Children

Variable	Perceived Risks ($n=72$)	Perceived Difficulties ($n=72$)	Noncompleted Offences ($n=204$)
	Model 1 b (95% CI)	Model 2 b (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Familial relationship	-----	-----	-----
Victim resistance	-----	.299 (-1.081-1.679)	14.523 (5.830-36.180)***
Home location (child's or offender)	-----	-----	-----
Person nearby	-.234 (-1.767-1.299)	-----	2.766 (1.295-5.948)**
Alcohol intoxication	-----	-----	-----
Drug intoxication	-----	-----	-----
Extent of thinking about sexual contact	.229 (-.082-.541)	-.131 (-.366-.103)	1.401 (1.199-1.637)***

Importance of need for sex	.118 (-.193-.428)	-----	.877 (.749-1.027)
Perceived difficulties	.557 (.321-.793)***	-----	1.195 (1.045-1.366)**
Perceived risks	-----	.397 (.198-.595)***	-----
Interaction person nearby x need for sex	-.796 (-1.365-.226)**	-----	-----
Constant	2.488**	1.238	-2.922**
Adjusted R ²	.245	.159	-----
Nagelkerke R ²	-----	-----	.473

Abbreviations: OR = Odds ratio, CI = Confidence Intervals.

Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Six outliers greater than 3 was removed from Model 3.