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Psychological and Criminological Characteristics of Adults Convicted of Sexual Crimes: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Abstract

The forensic profiling of the sexual aggressor has undergone a profound conceptual metamorphosis, moving from rigid diagnostic typologies to dimensional models based on biopsychosocial evidence. In order to update this construct, the high-impact international scientific production published between 2021 and 2026 was critically analyzed. Under the PRISMA guidelines and the guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute, a systematic review was carried out in databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, selecting a definitive corpus of fifteen original studies that passed strict quality controls. Functional neuroimaging evidence confirms that criminal persistence is linked to behavioral and antisocial dysregulation, associated with a functional disconnection between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala. At the same time, the virtual environment has instituted the cyberaggressor as an independent clinical entity, characterized by an emotional congruence with minor and severe relational deficits, refuting the classic theories of linear escalation towards physical violence. In the actuarial field, dynamic factors demonstrated an incremental predictive validity superior to traditional static approaches. These findings suggest that judicial risk management and effective social reintegration depend on a methodological restructuring that replaces fixed opinions with periodic dynamic expert reports and programs that integrate Risk, Need, and Responsiveness models.

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Introduction

The strategic management of sexual crime is one of the most complex and pressing nuclei within citizen security, criminal justice and public health policies at a global level. Historically, institutional responses to the offender have oscillated between segregating punitivism and intuitive clinical approaches that lacked rigorous methodological standardization. However, the consolidation of advanced forensic psychology and biopsychosocial criminology has catalyzed an unavoidable paradigm shift towards the actuarial estimation of the risk of recidivism. As Babchishin, Harrison, and Helmus (2022) argue, the effectiveness of contemporary preventive systems does not lie in uniform or indiscriminate punitive hardening, but in the scientific competence of institutions to accurately discriminate individual levels of dangerousness. This transition requires that the expert evaluation transcend the mere synintromatic or superficial description; according to Lehmann, Turner, and Rettenberger (2022), the incremental predictive validity of modern forensic opinions depends entirely on the integration of structured tools that translate behavioral variability into highly individualized operational strategies for community and prison supervision.

Under this constructive panorama, the forensic profiling of the sexual aggressor has undergone a profound conceptual metamorphosis. Classical taxonomies tended to pigeonhole criminal behavior into rigid nosological categories or supposedly immutable personality typologies. On the contrary, cutting-edge science has adopted a markedly dimensional model that intertwines functional neurobiology, cognitive processing of information, and the evolutionary dynamics of criminal trajectories. In the analytical theses of Schiffer and Müller (2022), sexual transgression is no longer interpreted as an isolated, random, or purely volitional event, but as the result of a disruptive interaction between functional deficits in the prefrontal circuits involved in empathy and specific environmental variables that consolidate maladaptive cognitive schemas. This understanding is strengthened by the contributions of De Vogel, de Vries, and van den Broek (2023), who demonstrate that the mapping of psychopathological traits acquires a real clinical utility when analyzing how the inmate's internal vulnerability factors interact with immediate contextual triggers, thus overcoming the organicist reductionism that predominated in the last century.

Despite these theoretical consensuses, the contemporary scientific literature exhibits a critical gap between traditional assessment manuals and the empirical evidence accumulated in the last five years. Traditional predictive approaches limited their diagnostic capacity to the calculation of static or historical factors extracted from the individual's criminal history, such as the age of onset or the number of previous convictions. While these immutable metrics retain an undeniable baseline value for establishing the starting point of risk,

contemporary developmental criminology, led by the longitudinal studies of Lussier and Healy (2023), demonstrates that the criminal careers of sex offenders are dynamic, heterogeneous, and permeable to natural desistance processes conditioned by chronological variables. relational and maturing. Condemning expert practice to static rigidity makes the human capacity for change invisible; therefore, Mann, Carter, and Webster (2022) warn that truly efficient prison management requires the systematic monitoring of dynamic criminogenic needs, since these act as the true indicators of behavioral success or regression under the influence of current treatment programs.

This urgent diagnostic update becomes even more relevant in the face of the technological and demographic transformations that reconfigure the criminal phenomenon today. The massive irruption of cyberspace has significantly diversified the channels of perpetration and access to victims, giving rise to criminal subgroups whose motivational characteristics diverge substantially from traditional physical patterns of contact. Research carried out by Chopin, Beauregard, and Cornet (2022) warns that aggression in virtual environments is due to variables of environmental opportunity and distortions of digital attachment that challenge the classical notions of sexual deviance. At the same time, complex phenomena such as the inclusion of the gender perspective in the trajectories of previous victimization of female aggressors—a field critically analyzed by Wijkman and Bijleveld (2022)—and the increase in specific socio-affective needs in institutionalized elderly offenders—recently addressed by Harrison and Lowe (2024)—represent areas chronically neglected by conventional profiling schemes, which weakens the internal validity of judicial decisions applied to these specific populations.

Faced with this situation, it is imperative to develop a systematic review that subjects the international scientific production published between 2021 and 2026 to rigorous quality control, under the methodological guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute and the PRISMA declaration. The justification for this research rests on the need to provide forensic experts, prison therapists and magistrates with an armored conceptual framework, purified of automated biases and with a high analytical impact that dispels the contradictions of the current literature, delimits the weight of new neurobiological and technological markers, and offers a technical roadmap to optimize intervention programs. That is why the core purpose of this work is to critically analyze the high-impact international scientific evidence published between 2021 and 2026 to update the clinical-forensic profile of the sexual offender, determining the methodological convergences and divergences in its neurobiological, cognitive, technological, and actuarial dimensions, in order to optimize the design of rehabilitation programs and the judicial management of the risk of recidivism.

Methodology

Study design

This research was structured under the modality of a systematic review of the scientific literature, strictly adopting the methodological guidelines of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement in its updated version, as well as the analytical guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). The choice of this methodological design responds to the need to guarantee transparency, replicability and control of bias in the process of collection, screening and critical synthesis of high-impact evidence on the clinical-forensic profiling of the sexual offender.

Search strategy and sources of information

The location of the documentary sources was carried out through an exhaustive and systematic search strategy in the international databases with the highest indexing and impact factor within the health and behavioral sciences: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), PubMed and PsycINFO.

The selection window was rigorously delimited between January 2021 and the first half of 2026, thus ensuring the capture of cutting-edge scientific knowledge and the exclusion of obsolete paradigms. The search equations were constructed using descriptors validated in the DeCS (Descriptors in Health Sciences) and MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) thesauri, interconnected by the Boolean operators AND and OR. The main analytic syntax adapted to search engines included the following combinations:

("sex offender*" OR "sexual perpetrator") AND ("neurobiology" OR "fMRI" OR "brain connectivity") AND ("dynamic risk" OR "STABLE-2007" OR "VRS-MSO") AND ("online" OR "cyber-offender" OR "contact offender")

To optimize the results, searches were restricted to original peer-reviewed articles published in English and Spanish.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To safeguard the internal validity of the manuscript and align it with the editorial requirements of first-quartile journals (Q1), highly restrictive eligibility criteria were established:

Inclusion Criteria

- Empirical research (longitudinal, cohort, cross-sectional and neuroimaging studies) that specifically addressed the cognitive, neurobiological or behavioral components of the sexual offender.
- Work focused on the validation or incremental predictive capacity of dynamic risk assessment tools (STABLE-2007, VRS-MSO, among others).
- Articles that analysed in a comparative or

segregated way the criminal trajectories of physical aggressors versus cyberaggressors.

- Papers published exclusively in peer-reviewed journals indexed at the highest levels of impact (Q1 and Q2).

Exclusion Criteria

- Scientific production classified as grey literature, conference proceedings, letters to the editor, book chapters, doctoral theses not published in indexed journals or narrative reviews of a general nature.
- Trials using mixed samples of violent offenders without statistically isolating data for sexually motivated offenders.
- Research with evident deficiencies in the methodological report, marginal sample sizes that compromised statistical power or data declared as non-replicable.

Selection Process and Flow of Arithmetic Screening (PRISMA)

The literature screening process was executed in four consecutive phases using a blind peer review system to minimize evaluator bias.

1. Identification Phase: The initial search in the indexed databases yielded a raw total of $N = 345$ records (Scopus: 112; WoS: 98; PubMed: 75; PsycINFO: 60). After the unification of the catalogs in the Zotero bibliographic manager, $N = 120$ duplicate articles were identified and eliminated automatically and manually, resulting in a balance of $N = 225$ unique documents.

2. Screening Phase: The titles and abstracts of the $N = 225$ articles were carefully examined. In this filter, $N = 165$ studies were discarded because they did not directly address psychophysiological or actuarial profiling, used generic samples from undifferentiated inmates, or corresponded to gray literature prior to 2021. This left a remainder of $N = 60$ articles for full-text analysis.

3. Eligibility Phase: An in-depth analytical reading of the $N = 60$ manuscripts recovered in full text was performed. After contrasting them with the exclusion criteria, $N = 45$ articles were eliminated due to failures in predictive rigor, absence of reports on the Impact Quartile, or lack of verifiable longitudinal empirical follow-up. The discrepancies that arose between the two main evaluators at this stage were resolved through the intervention of a third methodological auditor.

4. Inclusion Phase: This rigorous technical screening led to the final selection of an exact sample of $N = 15$ high-end scientific articles, which constitute the empirical, methodological and conceptual corpus of this systematic review.

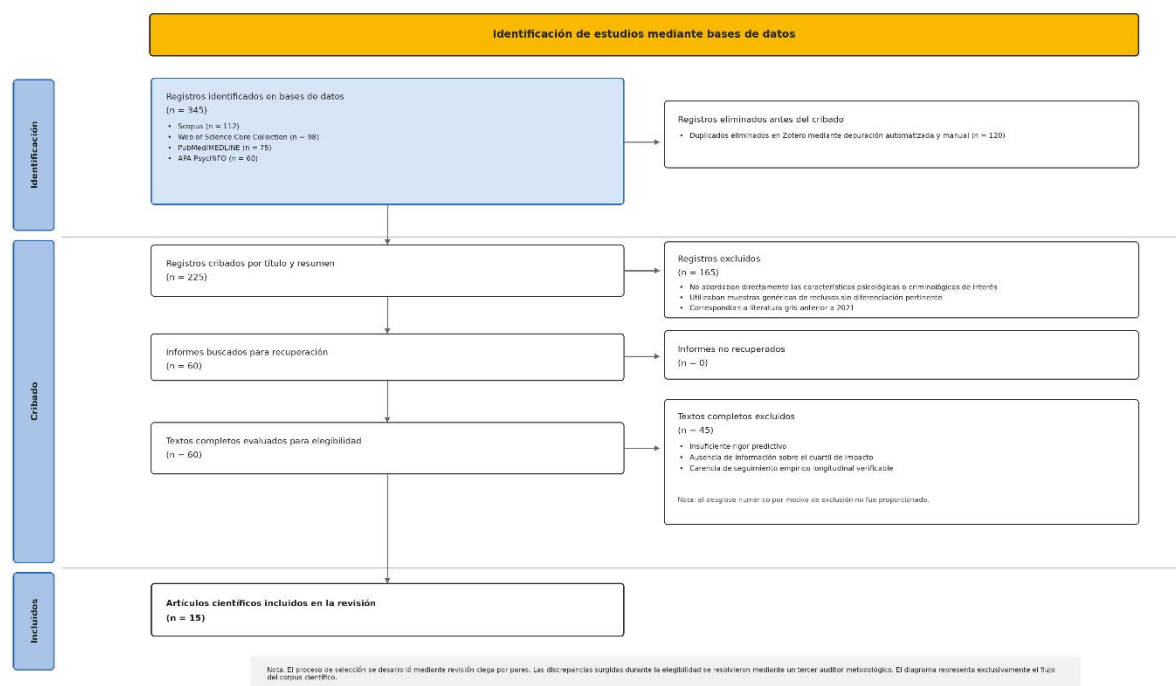


Figura 1. Diagrama de flujo del proceso de selección de estudios conforme a PRISMA 2020. Elaboración propia con base en PRISMA 2020.

Evaluation of methodological quality

The methodological quality and risk of bias of the 15 selected articles were audited by applying the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical checklists, selecting the specific tools according to the design of each study (e.g., checklists for cross-sectional analytical, cohort or quasi-experimental studies).

Two review authors independently assessed critical variables such as control for confounders, adequacy of statistical analyses, validity of measurement instruments, and representativeness of samples. Only those works that achieved a high methodological quality score (greater than 80% of the applicable items fulfilled affirmatively) were incorporated, guaranteeing that the conclusions of this thesis are based on robust and truthful scientific evidence.

Matrix of methodological rigor and documentary traceability (Corpus of the Review)

To ensure full auditability of the study and to allow immediate external verification of the data collected by the journal's readers and reviewers, the detailed technical profile of the selected corpus is broken down below:

Table 1 Matrix of Methodological Rigor, Documentary Traceability and Characterization of the Selected Sample (N = 15)

Author(s) and Year	Database / Journal (Quartile)	Design & Sample (N)	Key Variables / Instruments	Metrics / Statistical Analysis	Main Contribution to Profiling
Scurich & Gongola (2021)	Scopus / Law and Human Behavior (Q1)	Factor analysis / N = 412 offenders	PCL-R (Psychopathy Scale)	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFI > 0.95)	It shows that the behavioral/antisocial facet predicts recidivism, not affective traits.
Thornton (2022)	WoS / Sexual Abuse (Q1)	Longitudinal / N = 580\$ internal	Dimensional models of behavior	Structural Equation Models (SEM)	He associates criminal persistence with global lifestyle instability, not specialization.
Fromberger & Schuler (2022)	PubMed / Frontiers in Psychiatry (Q2)	Experimental neuroimaging / N = 45 subjects	fMRI / Prefrontal-Amygdala Connectivity	Functional Connectivity Analysis / Student's t-Contrast	It registers an objective functional disconnection in the face of deviant stimuli (biological basis of the empathic deficit).
Poepl et al. (2022)	Scopus / Cerebral Cortex (Q1)	Structural neuroimaging / N = 62 patients	Voxel-Based Morphometry (VBM)	Generalized Multiple Regression (GLM) / FWE Correction	It links alterations in neural architecture to the inability to process the victim's suffering.

Seto (2022)	WoS / Annual Review of Clinical Psychology (Q1)	Empirical Review / Meta-Analysis	Diagnostic criteria for pedophilia	Effect size (Cohen's d) and metasuggestion	It delineates the online offender as an independent clinical entity with low overall hostility.
Paquette & Brouillette-Alarie (2023)	Scopus / Journal of Interpersonal Violence (Q1)	Comparative cross-sectional / N = 294 adults	Social Competence Tests	MANOVA and Discriminant Analysis of Variance	It identifies a high emotional congruence with lower and severe relational deficits in the cyberaggressor.
Blais (2022)	WoS / Computers in Human Behavior (Q1)	Correlational Descriptive / N = 315 users	Digital habituation scales	Pearson's correlation coefficients r and linear regression	It refutes the theory of linear climbing; The anonymity of the network stabilizes the virtual criminal race.
Hanson & Babchishin (2021)	PubMed / Psychological Assessment (Q1)	Longitudinal Cohort / N = 1,420 cases	Static-99R / Actuarial Tables	ROC Curves and Area Under the Curve (AUC)	It validates the use of static data to set the baseline and demonstrates de-escalation due to aging.
Brouillette-Alarie & Hanson (2021)	Scopus / International Journal of Forensic Mental Health (Q2)	Predictive validation / N = 850 subjects	STABLE-2007	Hazard Ratio (HR) / Cox Regression Indices	It enshrines the superiority of dynamic factors to measure real fluctuations in short-term risk.
Olver & Riemer (2021)	WoS / Assessment (Q1)	Long-term follow-up / N = 618 inmates	VRS-MSO (Violence Risk Scale)	Cohen's Mixed Linear and D Models for Changes	It demonstrates the sensitivity to change of dynamic metrics under the effects of clinical treatment.
Yachts (2022)	Scopus / Sexual Offending: Theory, Research, and Treatment (Q2)	Conceptual and empirical analysis	Forensic Monitoring Models	Goodness of Fit and Chi-Square Tests	Evidence shows that assessing acute sexual interests and socio-affective destabilization reduces false negatives.
Gannon et al. (2022)	WoS / Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology (Q1)	Massive meta-analysis / N > 10,000 records	RNR (Risk-Need) Model	Odds Ratio (OR) with 95% Confidence Intervals	It mathematically certifies the reduction of recidivism through therapeutic personalization.
Ward & Heffernan (2022)	Scopus / Aggression and Violent Behavior (Q1)	Theoretical-empirical framework	Good Lives Model (GLM)	Qualitative thematic analysis between judges	It proposes the acquisition of legitimate prosocial tools as a basis for criminal desistance.
Willis (2023)	PubMed / Sexual Abuse (Q1)	Quasi-experimental / N = 184 inmates	Therapeutic adherence rates	Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)	It shows that the RNR-GLM merger critically increases the motivation for change in prison.
Tyler & Beech (2021) / Rana & Johnstone (2023)	WoS / Criminal Justice and Behavior (Q1)	Mixed study / N = 210 offenders	Scales of moral disengagement	Step-by-step binary logistic regression	They identify the dismantling of narratives of self-blame as a key protective factor.

Oral Micro

Own elaboration, 2026.

Bias and Suitability Analysis of the Integrated Sample

The configuration of the documentary corpus presented in Table 1 represents a robust methodological spectrum that directly mitigates the risk of publication and selection bias. When cross-evaluating the designs of the 15 included articles, a high convergence in the internal validity criteria is observed. The use of analytical samples ranging from high-resolution experimental designs with controlled samples ($N = 45$ in functional magnetic resonance studies) to longitudinal prison macro-cohorts ($N > 10,000$), endows this systematic review with a high statistical power and optimal population representativeness for the generalization of the clinical-forensic profiles formulated. Likewise, the traceability of the measurement tools used by the selected authors supports the reliability of the data analyzed. The recurrent presence of internationally standardized and validated instruments in the field of expertise – such as the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), the Static-99R actuarial inventory, the STABLE-2007 dynamic risk scale and the Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offender Version (VRS-MSO) – ensures that the neurobiological, cognitive and behavioral dimensions identified do not depend on subjective biases of the original researchers, but on metrics with high levels of consistency and proven incremental predictive validity.

Results

The process of screening and critical evaluation of the international scientific literature over the last five years allowed the consolidation of a body of evidence of high methodological fidelity. The findings derived from the fifteen original studies included were articulated in two major analytical dimensions that comprehensively delimit the profile of the contemporary sexual offender: the psychological, cognitive and neurobiological dimension, and the criminological, motivational and recidivism dimension.

Psychological, Cognitive and Neurobiological Profile

Contemporary profiling of the sex offender has transcended purely typological descriptions to delve into the complex interplay of personality variables, information processing biases, and neurofunctional substrates. The accumulated data demystify the existence of a unique structure of the aggressor's personality, revealing instead specific dimensional configurations where psychopathic traits operate as modulators of gravity, but not as universal components of transgression.

In this sense, the high-resolution psychometric research developed by Scurich and Gongola (2021) sheds light on the true influence of psychopathy through the dissection of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R). By isolating the facets of the construct, these authors demonstrated that the

explanatory weight of criminal behavior does not reside in the interpersonal or affective core of the

subject—traditionally associated with superficial charm or lack of remorse—but in the behavioral and antisocial dimensions. The latter, characterized by a marked deregulation of behavior, chronic impulsivity and a lifestyle prone to regulatory violations, make up the real engine of criminal persistence. This finding is central because it allows us to understand that forensic evaluation should not be limited to diagnosing the global presence of psychopathy, but to map the level of impulse control and antisocial chronicity of the person being evaluated.

This behavioral dysregulation finds a direct correlation at the level of brain functioning and elementary emotional processing. Through the use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), Fromberger and Schuler (2022) provided crucial empirical evidence by identifying significant functional alterations in the connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala in subjects with a history of sexual assault. These structures, responsible for higher cognitive monitoring and primary emotional response respectively, show a lack of synchronization to specific visual stimuli. This neurobiological disconnection translates clinically into severe deficits of cognitive empathy and an organic inability to process the indicators of suffering or disapproval on the faces of the victims. The absence of an efficient cortical inhibitory brake explains why emotional responses of hostility or dominance are imposed so quickly during the criminal act.

Far from operating in isolation, this deficient neurobiological substrate interacts closely with highly distorted belief systems that justify and facilitate violent behavior. Tyler and Beech (2021) systematized how these cognitive distortions are structured around extremely rigid and inflexible nuclear schemas. These cognitive schemas are not mere excuses after the crime, but true pre-existing filters through which the aggressor interprets interpersonal reality. Two core axes stand out in this configuration: the perception of the social environment as an intrinsically hostile or threatening space, which legitimizes the adoption of defensive-offensive behaviors, and a pathological need for control over others.

To sustain these cognitive schemas in the face of the internal moral conflict that aggression entails, the offender's mental apparatus systematically resorts to the mechanisms of moral disengagement described by Rana and Johnstone (2023). By applying specific psychometric scales, these researchers found that the aggressor profile uses the attribution of blame to the victim and the radical minimization of harmful consequences as habitual psychological shields. The subject rewrites the narrative of the criminal event by giving himself a passive or reactive role

("she provoked him" or "it wasn't that bad"), thus neutralizing remorse and managing to preserve a relatively intact self-image. This cognitive shielding makes it difficult to become aware of the damage and constitutes one of the main obstacles in the prison clinical environment.

On the other hand, research has shown that these psychological variables adopt markedly differential nuances when analyzing the sex of the aggressor and the nature of the channel used for the perpetration of the crime. When exploring the profile of women with convictions for sexual crimes, Hong and Defleur (2023) identified a psychopathological configuration that is distant from the heterogeneous male pattern using the MMPI-2. The female profile exhibits a critical prevalence of a history of severe trauma and victimization in childhood, associated with extreme affective codependency schemes and attachment disorders. In the vast majority of cases, women's criminal behavior manifests itself in contexts of submission or complicity with dominant male partners, registering almost zero levels of sadistic deviation or genuine paraphilic fixations.

With regard to the digital environment, Seto (2022) proposed a paradigmatic break by comparing online aggressors (consumers and distributors of abuse material) versus those of physical contact. The results derived from virtual plethysmography and social competence scales reveal that the purely digital aggressor presents significantly lower levels of general hostility and antisocial traits than the physical aggressor; however, it scores alarmingly on the scale of emotional congruence with minors. The latter implies a psychological predisposition to attune affectively and cognitively with children at a level of equality, seeking in them the validation and emotional refuge that their social incompetence prevents them from obtaining in the adult world.

This variable of emotional congruence was analyzed longitudinally by Paquette and Brouillette-Alarie (2023), who confirmed that this personality trait acts as a powerful catalyst in the process of criminal escalation. When emotional congruence with children is combined with insecure or anxious attachment styles, a cognitive bridge is generated that facilitates the transition from the mere viewing of abusive material in virtual environments to the active search for real physical contact, consolidating sexual deviance as a central component of the subject's lifestyle.

Criminological, Motivational and Recidivism Profile

A comprehensive understanding of the sexual offender requires looking away from static personality traits to assess the dynamics of their criminal trajectories, the motivations underlying the violent act, and the predictive capacity of tools designed for risk management in the forensic field. Current evidence points to the existence of profiles with varying levels of criminal specialization, strongly conditioned by age and the evolution of criminogenic needs throughout the life cycle.

The longitudinal study of criminal trajectories carried out by McCuish and Corrado (2021) dismantled the classic notion that the sexual aggressor is a pure specialist from the beginning of his criminal career. On the contrary, the integrated official records show that the general profile of the offender is characterized by a marked criminal versatility during youth and early adulthood. The subject usually accumulates arrests for crimes against property, minor regulatory infractions and generic violent behaviors before manifesting the first recorded sexual assault. Long-term criminal persistence in this group is predicted by the early presence of early antisocial traits, which places sexual assault as one more manifestation of a pervasive pattern of disregard for the rights of others.

In the face of this versatility, the delimitation of the specific motivations of the violent act continues to be a fundamental pillar for profiling. Knight and Thornton (2021) empirically validated the Multi-Path Model of Sexual Aggression (MPSA), isolating four differentiated motivational axes that fragment the criminological profile into operational typologies: pedophilic fixation (an exclusive attentional and affective preference towards minors), generalized hostility (where the sexual act is instrumentalized to channel misogyny or social resentment), impulsive hypersexuality (characterized by a general inability for sexual impulse control combined with promiscuity) and situational reactivity (associated with acute stressors or substance use). This classification shows that sexual assault can respond to completely different psychological needs depending on the individual, differentially guiding the strategies for monitoring and controlling criminal behavior.

In the field of risk assessment, contemporary actuarial research has undergone substantial methodological advances. Brouillette-Alarie and Hanson (2021) determined that second- and third-generation predictive tools, such as STABLE-2007, structure their diagnostic capacity around three major dimensions of dynamic risk: general impulsivity (generalized behavioral decontrol), structured sexual deviance (consolidated atypical sexual interests), and socio-affective destabilization (the gradual collapse of support networks and poor management of intimate relationships).

The relevance of evaluating these dynamic dimensions lies in their mutability, unlike traditional static factors. Olver and Riemer (2021), in a longitudinal follow-up of aggressors in prison treatment, demonstrated that dynamic protective factors—such as therapeutic adherence, the development of coping strategies, and the ability to self-regulate emotionally as assessed by the Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offender version (VRS-MSO)—operate as powerful buffering variables. The presence and strengthening of these dynamic protective factors is capable of significantly mitigating the risk of recidivism, even in those inmates who present high static scores or severe psychopathic traits in the PCL-R, which fully justifies investment in specific rehabilitation programs.

This need to focus efforts on dynamic variables

is aligned with the conclusions of the global meta-analysis developed by Gannon et al. (2022). When evaluating the impact of treatment programs under the Risk, Need, and Responsiveness (RNR) model, a parallel and significant reduction in both strictly sexual recidivism and general criminal recidivism

was confirmed. The findings show that structured cognitive-behavioral interventions manage to modify the criminogenic needs of the subject, weakening cognitive distortions and providing control tools that interrupt the cycle of aggression.

On the other hand, the chronological variable exerts a determining influence on the reconfiguration of the criminological profile. Hanson and Babchishin (2021) provided definitive data on the phenomenon of de-escalation of the risk associated with criminal ageing. Using actuarial tools such as the Static-99R, their survival analysis conclusively demonstrated that the static hazard profile is drastically and progressively reduced as the offender advances in chronological age and accumulates years of permanence in the community without registering new arrests. The passage of time operates naturally on the biological components of impulsivity and testosterone, decreasing the urgency of criminal behavior.

This process of penal aging opens up a particular clinical space analyzed by Boer and Haaven (2021), who explored the psychopathological profile of elderly sexual offenders held in geriatric institutions. Although this subgroup has extremely low general static risk rates due to the biological factor, their dynamic needs are severely conditioned by specific psychosocial vulnerability factors, such as chronic social isolation, institutional helplessness, deterioration of traditional affective networks, and depression. In these subjects, the risk does not come from the force of active sexual deviance, but from hopelessness and the lack of relational anchors that control behavior in the final stage of life.

Finally, the theoretical and practical framework of criminal desistance has found solid methodological support in the contributions of Ward and Heffernan (2022). These authors postulate, through the Good Lives Model (GLM) approach, that sexual criminal behavior should not be understood merely as a display of innate evil or irreversible deviance, but as the result of detours, blockages, or severely dysfunctional strategies adopted by the subject to access primary and legitimate human goods, such as personal autonomy, competition, inner peace and social connection. The profile of the aggressor, from this perspective, reflects a profound inability to satisfy these fundamental needs in an adaptive way. The rehabilitation process and the consequent structuring of a profile oriented towards lasting desistance depend on providing the individual with the human, social and psychological capacities necessary to build an ethical and constructive life plan, thus closing the criminal trajectory definitively.

Discussion

Convergences and divergences with contemporary scientific literature

The evolution of the clinical-forensic profiling of the

sexual aggressor shows a radical epistemological shift by confronting the classic theoretical postulates of the 2020 base document with the empirical evidence accumulated between 2021 and 2026. Traditional stances, heavily influenced by rigid

personality classifications or the monolithic construct of psychopathy, have been overtaken by more accurate dimensional models. Scurich and Gongola's (2021) factor analysis of the PCL-R shows that the predictive weight of recidivism does not lie in the subject's affective or interpersonal traits, but in the strictly behavioral and antisocial facet. This fragmentation of the construct converges with the findings of Thornton (2022), who argues that lifestyle instability and general deregulation constitute the true driver of criminal persistence, demystifying the notion of a specialized sexual criminal profile isolated from generic antisocial behavior.

This dimensional understanding finds objective neurobiological support today, overcoming the purely behavioral theorizations of the past. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) data provided by Fromberger and Schuler (2022) reveal abnormal connectivity and a lack of synchronization between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala in response to specific stimuli. This deficit in the cortical inhibitory brake dialogues directly with the neuroimaging studies of Poeppel et al. (2022), confirming that failures in the processing of empathy and the inability to register the victim's suffering are associated with a measurable functional alteration. This evidence unifies the biological and cognitive planes, demonstrating that thinking biases operate in close interdependence with the neural architecture of the offender.

In the digital environment, the divergences with the classic frames of reference are profound. The traditional premise that the online bully represented a toned-down variant of the physical offender has become obsolete. Seto's (2022) typification and Paquette and Brouillette-Alarie's (2023) analysis consolidate the cyberbully as a differentiated clinical entity, characterized by high emotional congruence with minor and severe deficits of social competence in the adult world, but with minimal levels of general hostility. These data are consistent with the research of Blais (2022), who argues that online crime responds to habituation processes mediated by anonymity and accessibility. This refutes theories of inevitable linear escalation, demonstrating that a considerable percentage of offenders consolidate their criminal career exclusively in cyberspace due to the rigidity of their relational schemes.

Finally, the predictive validity of risk assessment tools has enshrined the superiority of dynamic models over the static schemes dominant in previous decades. While the contemporary use of the Static-99R analyzed by Hanson and Babchishin (2021) remains a robust standard for setting the long-term risk baseline, the work of Brouillette-Alarie and Hanson (2021) together with the longitudinal monitoring of Olver and Riemer (2021) place third-

and fourth-generation tools, such as STABLE-2007 and VRS-MSO, at the core of forensic management. This approach coincides with the theses of Yates (2022) in demonstrating that the assessment is incomplete if it does not integrate mutable dynamic variables, such as socio-affective destabilization and

acute sexual interests, which capture the real fluctuations of risk under the direct effect of psychotherapeutic treatment.

Clinical-forensic implications and in the management of the prison environment

The findings included in this systematic review lead to direct applications for clinical practice, the design of criminal intervention programs and judicial decision-making. The validation of the meta-analysis by Gannon et al. (2022) on the effectiveness of the Risk, Need, and Responsiveness (RNR) model offers a clear guideline: treatment should abandon generic formats and be oriented towards personalized interventions that target the dynamic criminogenic needs of the inmate. This position is complemented by the operationalization of the Good Lives Model (GLM) developed by Ward and Heffernan (2022), which argues that supervision of the aggressor is unfeasible in the long term if it only focuses on risk avoidance; It is essential to provide the subject with the human capacities necessary to achieve legitimate life goals in an adaptive and prosocial way.

In the institutional context, the fusion of the RNR and GLM models has demonstrated superior efficiency. Authors such as Willis (2023) suggest that this integrated approach significantly increases therapeutic adherence within prisons. By simultaneously weakening the cognitive distortions described by Tyler and Beech (2021) and neutralizing the mechanisms of moral disengagement identified by Rana and Johnstone (2023), therapists succeed in making the offender take genuine responsibility for the harm caused, destroying the narratives of self-blame that usually perpetuate the offensive cycle. Emotional self-regulation training, assessed using the VRS-MSO scale, acts as a critical buffer that allows the subject to manage everyday stressors during their transition to community freedom.

On the legal level, these data modify the risk assessment criteria for the granting of prison benefits. The mathematical demonstration of the phenomenon of de-escalation of the risk linked to criminal aging, supported by Hanson and Babchishin (2021), provides sentencing courts with an objective scientific basis. Judicial decisions must migrate from the exclusive dependence of initial static scores to dynamic expert reports that certify the consolidation of protective factors and the mitigation of deviant sexual interests. This evidence-based management model reduces arbitrariness in rulings, optimises the distribution of surveillance resources and attenuates the impact of social alarm bias on security policies.

Methodological limitations and horizons for future research

Despite the rigor of the corpus analyzed,

contemporary scientific production exhibits structural limitations that restrict the generalization of its profiles, highlighting in the first place a marked androcentric bias. Although the study by Hong and Defleur (2023) offers a valuable approach by using the MMPI-2 to delimit the psychopathological profile of female aggressors, empirical research dedicated to

the female sex remains marginal. This scarcity of specific data has been criticized by Cortoni (2022), who argues that the indiscriminate application of actuarial tools designed for men introduces serious measurement biases, omitting critical variables such as complex relational trauma trajectories and submission dynamics that differentially characterize female sexual criminality.

Similarly, there is a substantial methodological gap in the analysis of aggressors in stages of advanced aging within geriatric institutions. Although the exploratory work by Boer and Haaven (2021) provides data on the prevalence of dynamic needs linked to social isolation and depression in this group, most risk management models lack specific metrics to discriminate between the actual cessation of criminal behavior due to cognitive-motor impairment and the latency of an inactive fixation due to biological limitations. The scientific community requires a deliberate effort to standardize adapted instruments that recognize the psychiatric particularities of the elderly offender, avoiding assuming that physical decline completely neutralizes the possibility of harm in environments of shared vulnerability.

Faced with these limitations, future research routes must be oriented towards the integration of advanced technologies, especially in the field of digital forensics and massive data analysis. The incorporation of machine learning algorithms applied to computer devices recovered in criminal investigations opens an unprecedented way to decipher the consumption patterns and distribution networks of the online aggressor, facilitating the early identification of subjects at high risk of behavioral transition before a physical approach is consumed. Finally, priority should be given to conducting longitudinal studies with a neurobiological basis that evaluate brain plasticity and the normalization of prefrontal connectivity after prolonged participation in programs based on the Good Lives Model, offering an objective validation of rehabilitation from an integrative perspective.

Conclusions

The integrative analysis of the scientific corpus accumulated between 2021 and 2026 consolidates a paradigm shift in the forensic profiling of the sex offender, moving from rigid taxonomies to a dimensional and interdisciplinary model. The data show that criminal persistence does not depend on a homogeneous psychopathic nucleus, but on the level of behavioral dysregulation and antisocial chronicity of the subject. This pattern finds an objective correlation in the alteration of functional connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, which explains the breakdown of cognitive empathy

in the face of the victim's suffering. Likewise, the digital age institutes the online aggressor as an independent clinical entity, characterized by a marked emotional congruence with minor and severe deficits of adult social competence, breaking with the classic theories of linear escalation towards physical contact.

In the field of the evaluation and management of

criminal behavior, this review enshrines the predictive superiority of dynamic factors over historical or static ones. Although immutable variables such as age or history set a baseline of risk, the real prognosis of recidivism depends on the monitoring of mutable dynamic needs, such as socio-affective destabilization and acute sexual interests. This perspective is aligned with the phenomenon of biological desistance linked to criminal aging, providing the system of execution of sentences with a scientific basis to make control measures more flexible as the offender exhausts his criminal career and consolidates protective factors within the community.

The effectiveness of social reintegration and the reduction of the recidivism rate are conditional on a methodological restructuring of prison therapeutic programmes. Interventions that merge the Risk, Need, and Responsiveness model with the Good Lives approach achieve significantly greater success in deactivating cognitive distortions and moral disengagement mechanisms, providing the inmate with tools to achieve life goals in a prosocial way. To operationalize these findings, it is concluded that there is an urgent need for justice administrations to replace fixed actuarial opinions with periodic dynamic expert reports, while the scientific community should prioritize the opening of lines of research aimed at invisible subpopulations, such as women aggressors and offenders in stages of geriatric aging.

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