

Psychological Dynamics of Sexual Violence Perpetrators: An ITSO-Based Qualitative Case Study in Semarang

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in Semarang from a perpetrator-focused perspective, which remains underexplored in Indonesian research.

Research Methodology: A qualitative case study design framed by the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) was employed. Three male inmates of the Class I Semarang Penitentiary convicted of sexual offences against adult female victims were selected through purposive sampling and were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. Data were analyzed thematically through a deductive framework approach based on the four ITSO domains, with validity supported by member checking and by peer debriefing.

Results: Four interacting domains emerged: developmental vulnerabilities rooted in adverse childhood experiences; dysfunction of the motivation and emotion system; cognitive distortions within the perception and memory system; and failure of the action-selection and control system.

Limitations: The study involved only three participants from a single correctional institution, limiting transferability, and the analysis was conducted by a single coder without inter-rater reliability checks.

Conclusions: Sexual offending against adult women reflects an interconnected cycle of psychological dysfunction in which early vulnerability, affect dysregulation, cognitive distortion, and control failure reinforce each other.

Contributions: This study represents one of the first applications of the ITSO framework to perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in an Indonesian correctional setting and provides a basis for developing evidence-based rehabilitation and prevention programs to reduce sexual recidivism.

Keywords: *Adult Women, Forensic Psychology, Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending, Psychological Dynamics, Sexual Violence*

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1. Introduction

Sexual violence is one of the most serious forms of human rights violations and has wide-ranging impacts on individual victims [Schalk, Oliero, Fedele, Trouset, and Lefèvre \(2023\)](#) and the community as a whole [\(Stockman, Haney, Uzieblo, Littleton, Keygnaert, Lemmens, & Verhofstadt, 2023\)](#). This phenomenon is not merely a legal issue but also a public health and social psychological

issue that requires an in-depth understanding. In Indonesia, sexual violence has become an issue that continues to receive serious attention from various parties, including the government, academia, and civil society. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that approximately 30% of women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime ([WHO, 2021](#)).

Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) show a worrying trend. An official press release from the relevant agency stated that sexual violence was the most frequently reported form of violence, with 14,039 cases, surpassing physical and psychological violence ([Ministry & Child, 2025](#)). Data officially released by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) show that in 2024, 17,792 reports of sexual violence were recorded in the reporting system, with 3,166 cases having been received and verified ([National, 2026](#)). Specifically, in Semarang City, the Semarang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DP3A) noted that the findings and reports of cases of violence against women and children throughout 2025 tended to increase compared to the previous year.

The Head of the Semarang City DP3A, Eko Krisnarto, stated that the findings of cases of violence against women and children in 2025 recorded 336 cases, while 266 cases were recorded in 2024 ([Tribun, 2026](#)). The data show that sexual violence remains a serious problem in Semarang City and has a significant impact on victims, necessitating comprehensive prevention and response efforts from various parties. These realities are not merely meaningless numbers. Instead, behind these findings lies a dimension that rarely receives equal attention to victim protection, namely, understanding the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence. Understanding the perpetrator does not justify the act; rather, it is a strategic step to prevent similar incidents from recurring ([Aceves & Tarzia, 2024](#)). Previous international research has identified several psychological factors that contribute to sexually violent behavior, including cognitive distortions, empathy deficits, poor emotional regulation, and a history of childhood trauma ([Davis, Neilson, Wegner, & Danube, 2018](#); [Park, & Kim, 2019](#)).

The problem is that studies on the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence in Indonesia, particularly in cities like Semarang, are limited. Most existing research focuses on legal aspects and victimology, whereas studies that specifically explore the perpetrator's internal psychological processes, including cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral aspects, are still very rare ([Butt, Kadry, & Abdelaziz, 2025](#); [Lim, YY, Wahab, Kumar, Ibrahim, & Kamaluddin, 2021](#)). Furthermore, research examining the local context of Semarang City, with its population of offenders serving sentences in correctional institutions, has never been conducted in depth and systematically. This research gap is the primary basis for this study.

The impact of sexual violence on victims is multi-dimensional. Psychologically, victims are vulnerable to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and long-term self-esteem issues. A systematic review of studies from various countries found that experiencing sexual violence significantly increases the risk of various mental health disorders in adult victims, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety ([Nobels, Lemmens, Thibau, Beaulieu, Vandeviver, & Keygnaert, 2022](#)). Socially, the stigma attached to victims of sexual violence often causes social isolation and obstacles to recovery ([Kennedy & Prock, 2018](#)). This impact is not only felt by the individual victim but also extends to the family and surrounding community. Meanwhile, without appropriate psychological intervention for perpetrators, the risk of recidivism remains high, exacerbating the social burden borne by society. A meta-analysis covering more than 70 years of research on sexual assault recidivism found that the absence of evidence-based rehabilitation programs is a strong predictor of repeat sexual offences ([Lussier, Thiviege, Fréchette, & Proulx, 2024](#)).

This research aims to address this gap by examining the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in Semarang City through a case study approach. Its originality lies in two aspects. First, this research focuses on perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women rather than children, who have been more frequently studied. Second, the integrated perspective

encompasses cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral aspects simultaneously within the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) framework, developed by [Ward and Beech \(2006\)](#). To the best of the author's knowledge, this is among the first applications of the ITSO framework to perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in an Indonesian correctional context, thereby addressing a gap explicitly identified in the clinical and forensic psychology literature ([Butt et al., 2025](#)).

Based on the description above, this study seeks to answer the following research question: "What are the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in Semarang City?" By comprehensively understanding the psychological dynamics of perpetrators, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of evidence-based rehabilitation programs in prisons and detention centers and provide input for sexual violence prevention policies at the city level. This research is also expected to enrich the body of clinical and forensic psychology in Indonesia, which still requires more empirical studies based on local contexts.

2. Literature Review

Sexual violence against adult women is increasingly understood not as an isolated legal event but as the behavioral endpoint of a complex psychological process. International scholarship consistently shows that a substantial proportion of women experience sexual victimization during their lifetime, and that such victimization produces multidimensional harm for individuals, families, and communities ([WHO, 2021](#); [Schalk, Oliero, Fedele, Trouset, & Lefèvre, 2023](#)). However, in the Indonesian context, scholarly and policy attention has been directed overwhelmingly toward victim protection and legal certainty, as reflected in studies of the criminalization of sexual- and gender-based offences and the protection of vulnerable groups ([Wijayanti, Shafira, Farid, Agustiniati, & Mediantama, 2026](#); [Togatorop, 2026](#); [Togatorop, Shafira, Farid, Siswanto, & Meidiantama, 2026](#)). While these contributions are essential, they leave the internal psychology of perpetrators comparatively unexamined. Psychology does not excuse the offence; rather, it is a prerequisite for designing rehabilitation and prevention programmes that genuinely interrupt the pathway to reoffending ([Aceves, & Tarzia, 2024](#); [Lussier, Thiviege, Fréchette, & Proulx, 2024](#)).

2.1 The Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending

The present study is framed by the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) proposed by [Ward and Beech \(2006\)](#), which remains one of the most comprehensive etiological models in forensic psychology to date. The ITSO conceptualizes sexual offending as the product of dynamic interaction among three neuropsychological systems, namely the motivation/emotion system, the perception/memory system, and the action-selection/control system, each shaped by developmental, biological, ecological, and cultural factors. Rather than attributing offending behavior to a single deficit, the theory treats it as an emergent outcome of mutually reinforcing dysfunctions. Subsequent empirical work has largely supported this multifactorial view, demonstrating that no single risk factor is sufficient to explain sexual aggression and that cognitive, affective, and motivational vulnerabilities operate together ([Seto, 2017](#); [Davis et al., 2018](#)). This integrative logic makes ITSO particularly suitable for case study exploration in which the interplay of factors, rather than their isolated presence, is of primary interest.

2.2 Developmental Vulnerabilities: Attachment and Self-Esteem

A recurring theme in the literature is that many perpetrators have developmental vulnerabilities originating in adverse childhood environments. Harsh or neglectful parenting and insecure attachment have been repeatedly linked to deficits in emotional regulation, empathy, and the capacity to form intimate adult relationships ([Cherrier et al., 2023](#); [Loinaz et al., 2018](#); [Zaniewski et al., 2019](#)). Insecure attachment, in particular, is associated with fragile self-esteem and hostile interpersonal schemas that can persist into adulthood and shape the interpretation of relational conflict ([Boillat et al., 2017](#); [Park & Kim, 2019](#); [Tibbels et al., 2022](#)). These early experiences do not deterministically cause offending, but within the ITSO framework, they act as a blueprint that biases the later functioning of the motivational and control systems, increasing the probability that stressors will be resolved through maladaptive means.

2.3 Motivation, Emotion Regulation, and Sexual Coping

The second cluster of findings concerns the motivation-emotion system. Contemporary models argue that sexual offending is frequently driven less by hypersexuality and more by a failure to regulate negative affect ([Seto, 2017](#); [Gunst, Watson, Desmet, & Willemsen, 2017](#); [Gillespie, Garofalo, & Velotti, 2018](#)). When individuals lack adaptive coping strategies, sexuality may be recruited as a maladaptive mechanism for discharging anger, stress, or feelings of inferiority and restoring a threatened sense of power and control. Systematic evidence links maladaptive emotion regulation strategies to heightened aggression across diverse populations [Navas-Casado, García-Sancho, and Salguero \(2023\)](#), supporting the view that affect dysregulation is a proximal driver rather than merely a background trait. [Seto \(2017\)](#) motivation-facilitation model further specifies how a motivational predisposition combines with situational facilitators to culminate in an offence.

2.4 Cognitive Distortions and Perceptual Bias

A third body of research addresses cognitive distortions, that is, entrenched beliefs and interpretive biases that allow perpetrators to misread social cues and justify their behavior. Offenders frequently interpret neutral or professional friendliness as a sexual invitation and reframe victim resistance as token refusal, a pattern closely related to rape-myth acceptance ([Yapp, & Quayle, 2018](#); [Petruccelli, Grilli, and Pace \(2019\)](#); [Beckett, & Longpré, 2024](#); [Trottier, Laviolette, Tuzi, & Benbouriche, 2025](#)). Such distortions function as a facilitating bridge in the ITSO model: once an offender convinces himself that the victim 'really' consents, the perceptual system supplies the cognitive permission needed for the motivational impulse to proceed, a process that can be further compounded by alcohol-related misperceptions of sexual cues ([Smith & George, 2025](#)). Legal-psychological analyses in the Indonesian setting similarly emphasize the role of intent and distorted reasoning in establishing perpetrator culpability ([Pakpahan & Pakpahan, 2024](#)).

2.5 Control Failure and Moral Disengagement

The final component concerns the action selection and control system, which functions as an executive manager responsible for planning, impulse inhibition, and moral evaluation. Failures in this system may be both cognitive, manifesting as tunnel vision and a narrowing of awareness at the moment of offending, and moral, operating through mechanisms of moral disengagement that temporarily neutralize empathy and self-sanction ([Petruccelli, Grilli, & Pace, 2019](#); [Scarpati, & Pina, 2017](#)). Reviews of recidivism spanning several decades indicate that offenders who do not develop self-regulatory and moral reasoning capacities through evidence-based interventions remain at an elevated risk of reoffending, whereas structured, evidence-based treatment can produce modest but meaningful reductions in sexual recidivism ([Lussier, Thiviege, Fréchette, & Proulx, 2024](#); [Schmucker, & Lösel, 2017](#)).

2.6 Research Gap

Taken together, the international literature offers a rich, multifactorial account of sexual offending. However, three gaps remain in the literature. First, most empirical work originates from Western correctional contexts, limiting its transferability to Indonesian settings. Second, existing research on this issue concentrates on victims, victim blaming, and legal frameworks ([Kennedy & Prock, 2018](#); [Dworkin et al., 2023](#); [Butt et al., 2025](#); [Lim et al., 2021](#)), leaving the perpetrator's integrated psychological dynamics largely unexplored. Third, few studies have examined perpetrators of offences against adult women specifically, as opposed to child victims. The present study addresses these gaps by applying the ITSO framework to convicted perpetrators in Semarang City, thereby contributing locally grounded, theory-driven evidence to clinical and forensic psychology literature.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research follows a qualitative methodology using a case study approach ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#); [Yin, 2018](#)). The case study approach was chosen because the research aims to explore in depth the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence, which are complex, contextual, and cannot be adequately explained through quantitative data alone. This research framework was guided by the case study approach developed by [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#).

In terms of analytic orientation, the approach in this study is best characterized as a deductive framework analysis guided by the four ITSO domains: developmental vulnerabilities, the motivation-emotion system, the perception-memory system, and the action-selection and control system. While initial data processing followed the inductive stages recommended by [Yin \(2018\)](#), including data compilation, careful reading, and contextual case description, the subsequent thematic categorization was explicitly structured around the a priori domains of the framework. This deductive mapping was deliberate because it was consistent with the study's objective of tracing ITSO-specified mechanisms within each participant's narrative, and it is also consistent with framework analysis as a method of qualitative inquiry ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). The data collection method used in this study was in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured protocol.

3.2 Participants

The sampling method used a purposive sampling technique [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#), in which the researcher established the criteria for participants. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) male; (2) having received a final and binding sentence for a sexual offence against a victim aged 18 years or over; (3) having served a minimum of six months of imprisonment to ensure adequate psychological stability; (4) willing to participate voluntarily and having signed an informed consent form; and (5) not currently experiencing a serious mental disorder that hinders the communication process. Three participants who met the criteria were recruited. Given that this is a case study rather than a grounded theory or phenomenological study, the goal was not statistical saturation but rather theoretical sufficiency, which refers to obtaining sufficient data to trace the four ITSO domains across cases. Although thematic saturation was not formally assessed because of the small sample size, the three cases provided consistent and coherent evidence for all four domains, indicating that the core ITSO mechanisms were adequately represented in the data.

3.3 Data Analysis

As described in Section 3.1, data analysis followed a deductive framework approach guided by the four ITSO domains, proceeding through the following stages based on [Yin \(2018\)](#): (1) creating and compiling data; (2) reading carefully; (3) describing the case according to its context; (4) categorizing material within each predefined ITSO domain; and (5) interpreting the categorized material. To maintain an audit trail, interview transcripts, initial coding notes, and domain mapping documents were preserved and are available upon request. All coding and analyses were conducted by the author alone. The absence of a second coder means that interrater reliability could not be assessed, and this single-coder limitation should be considered when evaluating the findings. This limitation is explicitly acknowledged in Section 5.2.

3.4 Research Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained institutional permission from the Class I Semarang Penitentiary and coordinated with Correctional Guidance (Bimpas) officers to arrange interviews in a private and secure room. Each participant received a full explanation of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence, after which written informed consent was obtained ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized using participant codes to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Given that the three participants were incarcerated at a single institution and detailed contextual information was provided about each case, the risk of re-identification is acknowledged. Accordingly, the contextual details in direct quotations have been kept to the minimum necessary to convey the psychological content of each case. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, the researcher adopted a non-judgemental interviewing stance and remained attentive to signs of psychological distress, with provisions to pause or terminate a session where necessary. These procedures were designed to uphold the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice throughout the research process.

4. Results and Discussions

This research was conducted at the Class I Semarang Penitentiary using a case study design. The researcher was accompanied by Correctional Guidance (Bimpas) officers during the research to maintain a conducive environment. The research process was assisted by semi-structured interview guidelines and the researcher's voice recorder. This study recruited three participants who met the research criteria and were willing to sign the informed consent form provided by the researcher, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of research participants

Characteristic	P1-K	P2-SR	P3-MD
Age Band	40–44 years	25–29 years	30–34 years
Religion	Islam	Islam	Islam
Marital Status	Married	Married	Divorced
Health Condition	Healthy	Healthy	Healthy
Sentence Length	5–7 years	7–9 years	6–8 years
Victim Age Band at Incident	20–24 years	18–20 years	20–24 years
<i>Note: Age and sentence figures are reported in bands to minimize the re-identification risk.</i>			

The research results were analyzed using a deductive framework approach guided by the four ITSO domains (Ward & Beech, 2006). The ITSO views sexual offending as the result of dysfunction in three major information-processing systems in the brain: the Motivation/Emotion System, the Perception/Memory System, and the Action-Selection and Control System, all of which are rooted in developmental vulnerabilities. Based on the in-depth interview analysis of three perpetrators of sexual violence against adult female victims in Semarang, the psychological dynamics of the participants did not occur in a single aspect. Instead, they reflect a complex interaction between the neurological and psychological systems.

The four domains identified in this study should not be read as discrete, independent stages but as an interacting system consistent with the integrative logic of ITSO (Ward & Beech, 2006). Developmental vulnerabilities set the initial conditions, dysfunction of the motivation-emotion system supplies the impetus, perceptual bias grants cognitive permission, and control failure removes the final restraint. Examining these domains together, rather than in isolation, clarifies how a comparatively ordinary stressor can escalate into a sexual offence once each successive safeguard has been compromised. The following sections present the findings for each domain in turn, illustrated with the participants' own accounts, followed by a cross-case comparison in Table 2.

4.1 Developmental Vulnerabilities Factors

The interview results indicated that perpetrators had vulnerabilities rooted in past experiences that created deficits in emotional regulation and attachment. Most perpetrators reported less-than-warm childhood parenting, rejection by authority figures, or traumatic experiences. Within the ITSO framework, early vulnerabilities shape the brain's response to stress and emotional closeness (intimacy) experienced by the perpetrators.

"How do I say it man? Since I was little, I have never known what it feels like to be loved or listened to. My father was a very strict man, if I made the slightest mistake he'd always use his hands or curse." (P2-SR).

"When I was in elementary school, if I am not mistaken, I was often bullied. My classmates mocked me. I'm still angry to this day about how I was treated that way." (P3-MD).

In the three cases examined here, the findings indicate the formation of insecure attachments, leading these perpetrators to grow up with fragile self-esteem and experience difficulty in forming intimate relationships with adult women. This is consistent with the results of research conducted by Cherrier,

[Courtois, Rusch, and Potard \(2023\)](#), which revealed that perpetrators of sexual violence, even against their own partners, have vulnerable past backgrounds, such as not receiving affection in the family, often being ignored, and even receiving harsh treatment that leaves a mark, which then creates traumatic memories for the perpetrators. According to the ITSO framework, these developmental vulnerabilities serve as a blueprint. While these negative past experiences may not directly lead to rape or sexual abuse, these vulnerabilities disrupt the brain's fundamental stress regulation patterns, leaving the perpetrator highly susceptible to dysfunction in the motivational and perceptual systems, and ultimately to impaired behavioral control later in life ([Boillat, Deuring, Pflueger, Graf, & Rosburg, 2017](#)).

4.2 Dysfunction of the Motivation and Emotion System

Based on the findings, the perpetrators' offending was not driven purely by hypersexuality but rather by a mixture of deviant sexual arousal and unmanaged negative emotions. External factors, particularly workplace-related stress, contribute to violent behavior. According to the ITSO analytical framework, the Motivation/Emotion System is responsible for affective and sexual drives, and its dysfunction is evident across all three cases.

"At that time, I didn't think about having sex with her, but because she kept denying it, I finally felt that if I could conquer her, I could prove my strength." (P1-K).

"Honestly, sir, I was under a lot of pressure at the time, especially at work. At work, I often feel belittled in the workplace. When I saw this woman (the victim) who always seemed confident and didn't need a man, I felt both anger and desire." (P3-MD).

In the three cases examined in this study, sex was used as a maladaptive coping mechanism to overcome feelings of anger, stress, or inferiority in the workplace and in social life. Given that the victims were autonomous adult women, the perpetrators' primary motivation shifted from mere biological gratification to a desire for dominance over the victim. Subjugating independent women provides a temporary sense of power (illusory power) that cushions fragile egos. This finding both legitimizes and updates the research conducted by [Loinaz et al. \(2018\)](#), which explains that the motives of perpetrators of sexual violence are more often based on deviations in desire and failure to understand emotions rather than being based on pure sexual desire. According to [Seto \(2017\)](#), this dysfunction in the motivational and emotional systems becomes a driving force. This combination of explosive stress, sex-centered coping, and the need for masculine ego validation creates a powerful motivational drive, which is then "reasoned for" by biases in the perceptual and memory systems at a later stage.

It is worth noting the tension between the ITSO motivation-facilitation account and the present data. The ITSO posits that motivational predisposition is a necessary but insufficient condition, requiring situational facilitators to produce an offence. In the three cases examined here, workplace-based humiliation and access to isolated victims were identified as facilitators. However, P3-MD's extended premeditation, during which he waited from the afternoon until his colleagues had departed, suggests that the boundary between motivational predisposition and situational facilitation may be less distinct than the model implies. This is because the perpetrator actively constructed the situational opportunity rather than merely capitalizing on it. Therefore, future empirical work should examine whether deliberate opportunity engineering represents a qualitatively distinct offending pathway within the motivation-facilitation logic.

4.3 Bias in the Perception and Memory System

The findings of this study revealed that perpetrators consistently failed to read social cues correctly. Completely neutral and natural stimuli, such as professional friendliness, a smile, or the victim's attire, were processed by the perpetrators' brains as signals of sexual provocation or invitation. For the perpetrators, there was no such thing as platonic interaction or autonomy in dress; every gesture of the adult female victim was filtered through a hypersexual lens and interpreted as consent.

"How do I say it sir? At the time, I thought there was no way a woman could be that sweet if she did not have feelings. So I assumed she was giving me the green light, just waiting for me to make the first move." (P1-K).

"When I started to approach and hold her hand, she did say 'no' and back away a bit. But I am sure it was just a woman's trick-shyness, as they say. Women often do this; they verbally refuse but deep down hope for more. So I went ahead, thinking she'd enjoy it eventually." (P2-SR).

Based on the ITSO framework, this distortion in the perceptual system is fundamental because it acts as a bridge to facilitate the process. When the perpetrator successfully convinces themselves that the victim "actually wanted to" or "deliberately provoked" the abuse, moral disengagement occurs. Guilt, empathy, or social norms that should have curbed the malicious intent become deactivated. In other words, this damage to the perceptual and memory systems provides the perpetrator with internal legitimacy to proceed to the execution phase without psychological burden because the reality they perceive inside their heads has been completely distorted.

This finding again legitimizes the research results of D'Urso et al. (2019), who revealed that the individual perpetrator's educational motives, knowledge, experience, and wisdom were negative predictors of sexual offending. This means that the better a person's thinking structure, the less likely perceptual and memory biases are to occur. In other words, perpetrators of sexual violence have inadequate reasoning, and thus fail to address the perceptual and memory biases they experience. However, cognitive distortions in this study were assessed retrospectively through self-reports during interviews conducted after conviction and imprisonment. Participants may have restructured their accounts in light of subsequent legal proceedings or correctional programming, which introduces a recall bias. This does not invalidate the findings but suggests that prospective or clinician-administered cognitive distortion measures would provide a more robust basis for the theoretical claims advanced in this study.

4.4 Failure of the Action Selection and Control System

This system is the final stage before sexual violence becomes an actual crime, according to the ITSO framework. This system functions like an "executive manager" in the brain, tasked with planning actions, evaluating risks, and providing internal inhibition against norm-violating behavior. In this study, it was revealed that the perpetrators experienced a complete failure of the executive system, which turned their fantasies and cognitive distortions into actual criminal acts.

"She struggled and cried loudly, begging for help to let her go. Thinking rationally now, I should have taken pity on her and stopped her." (P1-K).

"At that time, sir, I no longer thought about the risks, about being found out, or about my career. I had only one thought: I had to finish what I had started, no matter what. It was like something was pushing me to keep going without stopping." (P2-SR).

"I have actually had that intention since the afternoon, but I held off. I waited until the other employees had all gone home and the rain outside was heavy." (P3-MD).

According to the perpetrator's statement, the control system failed not only cognitively but also morally through the mechanism of moral disengagement. Faced with an adult female victim who had the full agency to struggle and resist, the perpetrator should have received negative feedback in the form of empathy. However, the perpetrator engaged in emotional detachment, actively blocking empathy and reducing the victim to a mere ego-gratifying object of violence. This disengagement of empathy, according to research conducted by [Gunst, Watson, Desmet, and Willemsen \(2017\)](#) is a form of high-level emotional control failure, in which the perpetrator deactivates his conscience to avoid experiencing cognitive dissonance (guilt) during the execution.

Table 2. Cross-case comparison of ITSO domains across three participants

ITSO Domain	P1-K (Age 42)	P2-SR (Age 26)	P3-MD (Age 30)
Developmental Vulnerabilities	History of harsh, authoritarian parenting, and absence of emotional warmth.	Childhood bullying, peer rejection, and unresolved anger.	Reported neglect and emotional unavailability by caregivers.
Motivation–Emotion System	Motivated to prove dominance over an autonomous woman; sexuality was used to restore a threatened masculine identity.	Workplace humiliation and anger toward a confident woman are combined with sexuality as a mechanism to restore power.	Pre-planned offences are associated with accumulated stress, with motivation centered on dominance and control.
Perception–Memory System	They misinterpreted the victim's professional friendliness as sexual interest and viewed nonverbal cues as implicit consent.	They interpreted the victim's verbal refusal as token resistance and endorsed the rape-myth beliefs.	No explicit cognitive distortion was reported; however, premeditated planning suggested anticipatory cognitive justification for the crime.
Action-Selection and Control System	Recognized the victim's distress only after the offence; tunnel vision prevented empathic inhibition during the incident.	They demonstrated explicit moral disengagement during the offence and actively suppressed empathy.	The offence was planned in advance and the execution was delayed until an opportunity arose, indicating a premeditated control failure.
Common Pattern	All three participants demonstrated developmental vulnerabilities, emotion regulation failure, cognitive distortion, and impaired behavioral control, consistent with the interacting-domain model proposed by the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO).		
Key Difference	P1-K behavior was primarily driven by ego restoration, P2-SR behavior reflected the interaction of anger and sexual desire, and P3-MD behavior was characterized by deliberate premeditation and calculated planning.		

Table 2 shows the cross-case analysis revealed both convergent and divergent patterns. Convergently, all three participants displayed the full four-domain pathway described by the ITSO, providing within-sample support for the model's applicability to this population. In contrast, the motivational profiles differed meaningfully across cases. Specifically, P1-K was primarily driven by an ego-restorative need to dominate, whereas P2-SR's motivation combined reactive anger with sexual desire, and P3-MD's offence was characterized by deliberate premeditation. These variations suggest that the ITSO motivation-emotion domain encompasses heterogeneous subtypes, indicating that targeted rehabilitation should be tailored to different motivational profiles of patients. For example,

ego-restorative and anger-driven profiles may require different therapeutic approaches than those appropriate for premeditated-control profiles.

Figure 1 synthesizes the pathways described above. Developmental vulnerabilities establish the underlying predisposition; dysfunction within the Motivation/Emotion System then supplies the affective and sexual impetus to offend; this impetus is subsequently "reasoned for" through cognitive distortions and perceptual bias, which grant the perpetrator internal permission to act; and finally, failure within the Action-Selection and Control System removes the last behavioral restraint. Read together with the cross-case comparison in Table 2, the diagram illustrates how these four domains interact cumulatively, rather than operating as isolated or sequential stages, to produce the offending behavior observed across all three cases.



Figure 1. Psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence: Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO) framework

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the psychological dynamics of perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in Semarang are not merely a form of biological impulsivity but constitute a complex and interconnected cycle of psychological dysfunction, as explained by the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending (ITSO). To the best of the author's knowledge, this is among the first applications of the ITSO framework to perpetrators of sexual violence against adult women in an Indonesian correctional setting, thereby contributing locally grounded and theory-driven evidence to the clinical and forensic psychology literature.

In the three cases examined in this study, the roots of this deviant behavior stemmed from past developmental vulnerabilities, including a history of traumatic or neglectful parenting and insecure attachment, which contributed to the formation of fragile self-esteem. This vulnerability triggers dysfunction in the motivation-emotion system, in which perpetrators fail to regulate stress, thereby making sexuality a maladaptive coping mechanism for gaining power and dominating the victim's autonomy. This process is further reinforced by biases in the perception-memory system in the form of cognitive distortions, through which perpetrators misinterpret normal social stimuli as sexual signals and justify their actions. Ultimately, this pathological process culminates in the failure of the action-selection and control system, which is characterized by tunnel vision and moral disengagement when perpetrators execute their offences within a situational opportunity.

The correctional context within which this study was conducted is itself undergoing significant reform: Indonesia's Law Number 22 of 2022 on Corrections reflects a broader institutional shift from a purely punitive approach toward rehabilitation and social reintegration, which makes the present study's evidence-based recommendations for ITSO-informed rehabilitation directly relevant to current correctional policy. The cross-case analysis further revealed that although all three participants followed the same four-domain ITSO pathway, their motivational profiles differed substantially, including ego restoration, reactive anger, and cold premeditation. These differences indicate that rehabilitation programs should be tailored to the specific motivational characteristics of offenders rather than applying a single intervention approach to all cases.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the explanatory value of the Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending in a non-Western, Indonesian correctional setting, demonstrating that the four interacting domains of dysfunction can be traced coherently in the narratives of perpetrators who target adult

females. Practically, the findings argue for rehabilitation programmes that move beyond generic moral exhortation toward targeted interventions: emotion regulation and stress management training to address the motivation-emotion system; cognitive restructuring to challenge distorted beliefs and rape-myth acceptance; and relapse prevention components that strengthen self-monitoring and moral engagement. For policymakers in Semarang City and comparable jurisdictions, the results support integrating psychological assessment and evidence-based treatment into correctional practice as a complement, rather than a substitute, for victim protection and legal enforcement.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study had four principal limitations. First, the study examined only three participants from a single correctional institution in Semarang, which substantially limits the transferability of the findings to other perpetrator populations, institutional contexts, or regions of Indonesia. Although the three cases provided coherent and consistent evidence for all four ITSO domains, formal thematic saturation was not assessed, and it remains possible that additional cases would reveal motivational or cognitive profiles not captured in the present sample. Second, all coding and analysis were conducted by the author as a single coder, without a second independent coder or an inter-rater reliability check. This represents a methodological limitation of the study and means that the categorization of material within ITSO domains reflects one analyst's interpretive judgements. Peer debriefing with colleagues partially mitigated this risk, but it did not substitute for systematic inter-rater reliability. Third, cognitive distortions and motivational accounts were assessed retrospectively through post-conviction self-reports, which introduces the possibility of recall bias and social desirability effects within the correctional context. Fourth, this study strictly examined perpetrators who targeted adult women. The psychological dynamics, cognitive distortions, and motivational drivers identified may not apply to perpetrators who target minors, adult men, or individuals across the gender spectrum.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

The current study isolated perpetrators who targeted adult women. Future research must investigate whether the same ITSO-based pathological chain applies to perpetrators who target minors or adult men and examine female perpetrators of sexual violence. Additionally, future studies should employ multi-coder designs with inter-rater reliability checks to address the single-coder limitation of this study. Prospective or clinician-administered measures of cognitive distortion would also provide a more robust evidentiary basis than the retrospective self-reports used here. Finally, replication across multiple correctional institutions and regions in Indonesia would substantially strengthen the transferability of the ITSO framework to non-Western settings.

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Author Contributions

ZZ was responsible for the conceptualization of the research, development of the theoretical framework, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the original manuscript draft. NM contributed to the critical review of the manuscript, refinement of the theoretical discussion, validation of the analysis, and improvement of the manuscript content. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the study.

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