

TDI *Explainer*

What is a sex offender?

Sexual offences and offenders take many forms. In this Explainer, we explain some of the law around sexual offending.

Sex offenders are:

People who have been convicted of a 'relevant offence'

(Vanessa George—convicted of sexually abusing children in her care.)



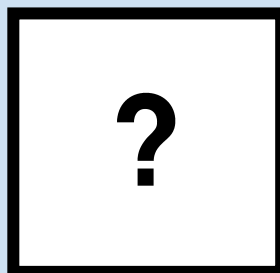
People who have been cautioned for a 'relevant offence'

(Tyler Lockhart— cautioned for a child sex offence.)



People who have been convicted of a 'relevant offence' outside of the UK

(Simon Halabi, convicted of a rape in France.)



People who have committed a 'relevant offence' and not been caught yet.

So, what is a 'relevant offence'?

A 'relevant offence' is one which would cause someone to be subject to Notification Requirements—more commonly known as being added to the sex offenders register.

This is not actually a formal register—there is no big book in which the names of offenders are written. Rather, it is a set of requirements on an offender to register with their local police, inform them of intentions to travel, and so on.

Most relevant offences are legislated for in the Sexual Offences Act (2003). However, a number of other acts are also relevant—including the Voyeurism Act (2019) which made 'upskirting' a criminal offence.

All sexual offences involve, in some way, sexual activity without consent. This may be because consent is refused, or because the victim is not considered able to consent (either because of who they are, or because of the circumstances in which the offence was committed).

Offenders come from many backgrounds...

Offenders come from all walks of life—the offenders appearing on the previous page were, respectively, a mother and care worker, a teenage student, and a school head teacher.

Many offenders are intelligent, respected in their community, and hold responsible jobs. The stereotypes of the ‘dirty old man’ or the ‘dangerous stranger’ are misleading—they don’t cover most offenders.

...and most are already known to the victim

Most sexual offences are not committed by strangers, but by people the victim knows well and that they trust—family members, partners and ex-partners, friends and colleagues.

Offenders will often deliberately build relationships with the victim to obtain access to them, or to children or vulnerable adults in their care. This is called ‘grooming’, and can happen to anyone.

Most offenders are in the community, either because they have served a custodial sentence and are now free, because they were convicted and given a community-based sentence, or because they have never been caught. Not all offenders pose the same risk—many will never commit another offence after their first one, many will not be violent, many will have learned ways of managing their impulses such as through therapy.

As of 2019, roughly one in 1,000 people are registered sex offenders. This covers everyone who has been convicted or cautioned for sexual offences. In addition to their Notification Requirements they may be subject to ongoing management by the Probation Service, or subject to restrictions on their behaviour through civil orders.

Further questions you might want to think about:

What sorts of offences are there? Do different types of people commit different kinds of offences? What about victims—who is at risk of being offended against?



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TDI is a national charity which works to increase public protection by finding practical and creative solutions to the problem of sexual offending.

For over 25 years we have been at the forefront of the field, providing training, research, consultancy and public protection schemes to individuals and organisations across society.

If you've found this explainer useful, you may be interested in learning more through one of our training programmes. Contact us at info@tdi.org.uk to find out more.