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## **Relationship between low personal morality and impersonal sex with sexual aggression behaviors towards women in a sample of Spanish heterosexual men**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Objectives: to delve deeper into sexual assault crimes by testing two criminological theories (the situational action theory and the*

*revised confluence model). Method: a questionnaire with scales of low morality, low self-control, impersonal sex, hostile sexism, sexually aggressive behaviors, and other demographic data, was administered online to 328 heterosexual men living in Spain. Findings: two pathways to sexual aggression have been found: a) from low self-control, and b) from low morality and a tendency towards impersonal sex. Conclusion: these mechanisms suggest prevention based on education in adolescence: a) of moral rules and emotions; b) for the development of the social ability to exercise self-control; and c) to know the limit of impersonal sex: consent.*

**Keywords:** *Low personal morality; Low self-control; Impersonal sex; Hostile sexism; Sexual aggression; Spain.*

## **1. Introduction**

The problem of sexual assaults, of a global nature, as a criminal issue, requires direct and concrete treatment to the extent that, regardless of the information provided by police, judicial and prison statistics, it causes great social alarm, especially in Western countries. In Spain, the data show a progressive increase in cases in the last 5 years recorded: 3193 in 2017, 3617 in 2018, 3932 in 2019, 3256 in 2020, and 4456 in 2021. That is, a growth of almost 40% in 5 years (Portal Estadístico de Criminalidad, 2023). The only year in which it has dropped with respect to the previous one was 2020, when the confinement occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is of utmost importance, then, to understand what the causes are, and how to prevent these behaviors of sexual aggression. It should be noted, in any case, that the reasons for this increase are still under study, with a general increase in group sexual aggressions - the famous "manadas" (the herds) - as well as sexual aggressions committed by acquaintances, with a significant increase in aggressions within the family environment, which shoot up exponentially in the case of underage victims (Ministerio del Interior, 2021). Both differences should be mentioned but, for

material reasons, they have not been taken into account when selecting the sample for this study, which is undifferentiated. Otherwise, the assessment of this increase by the authorities has to do with "active policies" to raise awareness and reduce social and personal tolerance, which would result in a greater willingness of victims to report, although this argument lacks clear empirical support (Ministerio del Interior, 2022, p. 4).

According to Wikström and his collaborators (2012), criminology would need to develop a series of specific tasks to explain the causes (or mechanisms) of crime, something that so far has only been tentatively achieved:

1. To define explicitly and operationally the object of study of criminology, "crime", which is possibly one of its great "theoretical debts".
2. To specify, through an adequate theory of action, what it is that moves people to engage in criminal acts, bearing in mind that a mere personal attribute (such as being adolescent, male or black) cannot by itself be a cause.
3. Specify what are, and how do they interact with each other, the personal and environmental factors that move people to commit crimes.
4. Specify the broad social conditions and individual development (life histories) that would act in each case as causes of the causes of crime.

From this scheme, already well known and commented, Wikström developed the Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation (SAT), whose foundational articles appeared between 2004 and 2006 (Serrano Maíllo, 2017). This theory has attempted to integrate, within the framework of an adequate theory of action, the main achievements of theoretical formulations and research in criminology, in addition to theoretical and empirical knowledge from the social and behavioral sciences in general. The truth is that much is known about the correlates of crime and crime, but there is

little agreement about what are its causes, which very often appear as an undefined and confusing amalgam of elements, and hence the proliferation of theories that overlap each other with little success. In fact, the emergence of SAT was presented with the need to integrate theoretical visions with relevant empirical evidence, within a framework that could effectively focus research on the causal processes of crime, and their interaction (Wikström, 2006; Wikström and colleagues, 2012; Wikström, Mann, and Hardie, 2018). The most important thing, be that as it may, is to try to capture in the theory the interaction between the processes of the personal characteristics of the offender, and the role of the social environment. To summarize: SAT seeks to explain the proximal causes and mechanism of crime by analyzing two levels: the micro or individual, and the macro or social levels (Bunge, 2006), which makes it especially interesting when analyzing sexual crime and its functioning.

## **2. Some notes on SAT**

SAT resorts, as its name suggests, to a theory of "action", a fact that is unusual in criminological theories, which are rather based on static elements, and which is somewhat surprising if one considers that crimes are basically "acts". When a criminological theory speaks in general of the importance of choice, it usually refers, ambiguously, to "self-interest", to the "search for pleasure and avoidance of pain", to calculations related to "costs and benefits", or to the "maximization of profits". These are all events of complex quantification that do not always - in fact, not even most of the time - seem to be present in the background of criminal dynamics as clearly as they are claimed to be.

On the other hand, there do not seem to be definitions of "crime", or "criminal act" that are commonly accepted by all criminology researchers, which makes it difficult to compare the different theories that, logically, start from different and often profoundly heterogeneous categorical frameworks. It is literally impossible for

a theory based on "personal interest" or "rational calculation" to be put in line with others based on "motivational" elements, "emotional" aspects or "physiological variables". A fact that has usually generated no little theoretical background noise in scientific criminology itself.

In order to overcome these complications, Wikström and his collaborators (2012) have proposed to explain criminal acts as processes (interactive, but not deterministic mechanisms) that mobilize "actions" (hence the importance of a good "action theory") that ultimately transgress rules of conduct. More precisely, they define crime "as an act that violates a rule of moral conduct defined in the laws". It would thus be a subset of conduct that is included in the more general set of "acts that violate moral rules of conduct". Although such constructs of moral conduct are not specified in any law and, therefore, not all of them are crimes per se, they could respond to the same mechanisms that mobilize crimes in a legal sense (Janosch González, 2013). In other words, crime would be defined in the SAT as an act that breaks some rule of conduct established in the law (in the penal code of each state), and that can be analyzed in terms of moral action.

Moral action, on the other hand, is understood as that conduct that is guided by rules that establish what is right or wrong to do, under certain circumstances (Wikström and Treiber, 2016). What is interesting is that defining crime as an act that violates a rule of moral conduct that is embodied - or tries to be embodied - in the form of laws has the advantage that it can be applied to any type of crime (such as shoplifting in a supermarket, setting fire to a car, or murdering someone), in any place (although criminal acts are a little different in different places), in any time (new crimes, and others that have ceased to be crimes), because what is defined, ultimately, is an act of violating a rule of moral conduct that specifies some law. Hence, we can claim that SAT is, fundamentally, a general theory of moral action (Wikström and co-workers, 2012), since it would explain all types of moral rule-breaking, in any time or place, by

emphasizing this mechanism that induces the breaking, and not the content itself of the disobeyed moral rule as variable and subject to constant modification (Pauwels, 2018a; Pauwels, 2018b). It is thus that the causal mechanism of perception and action would be present in petty theft as well as in sexual assault or homicide. One of the immediate consequences of this approach to the problem, which should not be lost sight of or lightly ignored, is that in medium- and long-term criminal policies, education in conformity - the moral reinforcement of the future citizen - would be more successful than increased police pressure or the constant tightening of laws. That is to say: it must be understood that it is the person who must feel compelled to respect the law - more moral - and not the law that must systematically "threaten" the person.

It has been established in countless investigations and for decades that crimes, in general, are mostly committed by young men. However, as mentioned above, neither sex, nor age, nor other facts such as profession, level of education or nationality, which are nothing more than attributes or qualities of the subject, should be simplistically understood as direct causes of crime. SAT proposes that the cause of a particular crime is a process of perception and choice that is set in motion when the person is placed in a given physical and social setting. It is in that situation, emerging from the interaction between the person and the setting, that the possibility of committing a crime is perceived as a possible alternative action, subsequently a choice is made and, finally, the person acts accordingly by committing, or not, the crime (Wikström, 2017). Crime thus results from the interaction between personal propensity to crime -or morality-, and exposure to different potentially criminogenic scenarios.

By "personal propensity" we refer to the individual's tendency to perceive and choose to perform criminal acts, and it has two main components: personal moral rules (which may not coincide in whole or in part with those contained in laws), and the ability to exercise self-control (Kroneberg and Schultz, 2018). The latter is understood

as the ability to act following one's own personal moral rules (Pauwels, Svensson, & Hirtenlehner, 2018), and depends on both dispositional characteristics, and neurological executive functions, as well as momentary influences being experienced, such as alcohol or drug intoxication, and stress level (Wikström, 2017). However, it should be noted that no kind of moral relativism is involved here: there are important theoretical and empirical bases to explain why certain kinds of moral rules emerge in an undifferentiated way in all societies, being relative to human nature and the need to live in a social order. On the other hand, and following the traditional philosophical differentiation between morality and ethics, we must distinguish between the "moral values" and the "moral rules" of a person: someone can hold certain general moral values (what is good and what is bad in a metaphysical sense), but when it comes to acting, conduct himself by specific moral-ethical rules (what is right and what is wrong to "do" in this case). Such ethical "rules of conduct" may or may not be compatible with the moral reference values held by the individual. On the other hand, the strength of a given personal moral-ethical rule may be reflected in the emotions linked to it. Among such emotions we find shame and guilt, which operate as anticipated feelings when faced with the perception of an act that violates that ethical-moral rule (Wikström et al., 2012).

In short: the interaction between the person's propensity to crime and the criminogenic characteristics of the scenario is what will trigger the process that will lead (or not) to the criminal act itself. The propensity to crime will depend, according to SAT, on the person's moral standards and ability to exercise self-control (always bearing in mind that the ability to exercise self-control may be diminished by alcohol or drug use, or by intense stress with subsequent emotional imbalance). The criminogenic characteristics of the scenario, in turn, will depend on the so-called "morality of the environment" (the perceived rather than the real one) and on the existence or not of deterrents, which encourage or discourage the violation of moral norms (Wikström et al., 2012). In sum, crime is ultimately the result of a process of perception and choice, this

process being initiated and guided by relevant aspects of the interaction between the person and the setting in which the events take place (Wikström and Treiber, 2016).

It should not be forgotten, by the way, that the person, as a biopsychological entity, with experiences, and will, has "agency" (Serrano Maíllo, 2017). In this sense the term "situation" does not denote the same as in other social theories, where the so-called "situation" is understood rather as a simple synonym of the "environment" in which the behavior develops. The possible action will consist of a series of movements, guided by the person who has agency, that is to say, a process or a succession of events. In particular, the action may be reflexive or automatic, the latter being guided by habit. What is fundamental here is that there are different people and different scenarios, and only particular interactions between person and scenario (situations, or processes of perception and action) will bring out particular criminal acts. Consequently, the propensity to offend, by itself, is not sufficient to explain crime to the same extent that "propensity" is substantially different from "action". For the criminal act to be triggered, exposure to criminogenic environments that provide the opportunity to perceive alternative actions, including criminal ones, is necessary. Indeed, scenarios, defined as the parts of the environment (objects, people, events) that are directly accessible to the person through his senses, can be more or less criminogenic, and are governed by their own moral rules (compare, for example, the "morality of the environment" in a neighborhood food market with the morality of the environment in an area where illegal drugs are sold). In specific scenarios, people experience different temptations and provocations ("motivations") and, just as there are the moral rules of a given scenario, there is also a level of deterrence inherent to it that will induce to a greater or lesser extent compliance with such moral rules (Pauwels, Svensson, & Hirtenlehner, 2018).

### **3. The confluence model of sexual assault revised**



Whereas SAT is a general theory of crime, the so-called confluence model of sexual assault (CM) is a crime-specific theory of sexual assault that has now become the most widely used approach for examining the risk of perpetrating sexual assault (Yucel, Angelone, & Jones, 2023). The proposal suggests that there are two interacting core risk factors that, when conflated, predict the risk of perpetrating sexual assault: impersonal sex and hostile masculinity (Malamuth et al., 1995). Impersonal sex has been defined as sex based on the principle of "conquest" (understood, for example, as a game to win) that does not involve commitment and lacks emotional closeness ("sex without love") with the sexual partner (Malamuth et al., 1991). Hostile masculinity, on the other hand, is a form of masculine ideology centered on the belief that men are "superior" to women, maintaining a distrustful and dominant attitude toward them and deriving gratification from dominating them. Moreover, the underlying idea to this model is the belief that most women, perhaps, find special pleasure in being "dominated" (Malamuth, 1986). In a recent study, Yucel, Angelone & Jones (2023) found that a model considering variables such as "hostile sexism" and "impersonal sex" would be a better predictor of sexual aggression behaviors than the classical confluence model. This new theory, therefore, was termed the revised confluence model of sexual assault (rMC) and will also form part of the sexual offending analysis format proposed in this article.

#### **4. The present study**

In the study proposed here in the context of sexual assaults, for the purpose of also considering, together with the SAT, the previously mentioned rCM, we have chosen to focus on the propensity to offend, and its components: personal morality and self-control. Thus, the hypotheses proposed to be explored, in line with the theories put forward, are as follows:

- H1. Low personal morality and low self-control will correlate with sexual assault behaviors.

- H2. Impersonal sex and hostile sexism will correlate with sexual aggression behaviors.
- H3. Low personal morality and low self-control will be predictors of sexual aggression behaviors.
- H4. Impersonal sex and hostile sexism will be predictors of sexual aggression behaviors.

## **5. Measuring instruments**

All the following scales were translated into Spanish, to carry out the study.

### *Self-Control: Impulsivity and Risk Seeking (LowSelfControl)*

According to the protocol of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (Marshall et al., 2022) self-control has been incorporated into the concept of criminal act propensity, which are postulated as conditioning the link between frictions or provocations and subsequent delinquency. In the SAT framework, propensity arises from the interaction between self-control and personal morality. The scale most commonly used to measure self-control in the criminology framework has usually been the one proposed by Grasmick (1983). Grasmick's scale comprises 24 items measuring six dimensions of self-control: impulsivity, simple tasks, risk seeking, physical activities, egocentric orientation, and volatile temperament. Although the strength and explanatory power of these dimensions vary in different studies, they and the overall scale have been found to be valid and reliable measures of self-control. Low self-control has been firmly established as a relevant causal variable in criminology, regardless of whether it is modeled separately or as part of crime propensity. According to the aforementioned ISRD4 protocol (Marshall et al., 2022), self-control can be successfully measured through impulsivity and risk seeking, the dimensions most frequently included in measures of self-control. In the elaboration of the present work, it was decided to measure self-control with the scale suggested by the ISRD4 protocol. Thus: the self-control

questionnaire asks to answer the question "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" with the response options (1) "fully agree", (2) "somewhat agree", (3) "neither agree nor disagree", (4) "somewhat disagree", (5) "fully disagree". As an example of the 6 items used, we can cite the following: " I act on the spur of the moment without stopping to think" and " Sometimes I will take a risk just for the fun of it". For the analysis the scale scores have been inverted so that higher scores point to low self-control.

*Personal Morality: Moral Beliefs and Anticipated Shame  
(LowPersonalMorality)*

According to the ISRD4 protocol (Marshall et al., 2022), some form of morality, or immorality, has long be viewed as the cause of offending behavior. Social control theory, without going further, identifies moral beliefs as one of its four factors, while social learning theory sees deviant moral beliefs as a stimulus for law violation. More recently, SAT has postulated morality as a component of crime propensity, a construct that mediates between provocations or temptations to commit crimes and subsequent criminal behavior. In this theory morality is seen as the most important variable: self-control only comes into play when morality is weak.

Morality has been broadly conceptualized as a set of beliefs or emotions. Beliefs are cognitive judgments about right and wrong behavior that are expressed as principles, attitudes, values, or rationalizations. The moral emotions most frequently studied in relation to crime are shame and guilt. Since multivariate analyses have shown that the importance given to the opinions of parents and teachers is significantly associated with the level of personal morality, this has been taken into account in the construction of the morality scale in the protocol of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (Marshall et al., 2022).

For the case of moral beliefs, with response options (1) "very wrong", (2) "wrong", (3) "a little wrong", and (4) "not wrong at all", serve the following 2 items as examples of the 8 in the scale: "Share online an intimate photo or video of someone that he or she did not want others to see" and "Hit someone with the idea of hurting that person".

To measure anticipated shame, four items will be used, arising from two questions, of which we indicate one as an example: "Imagine you were caught shoplifting, would you feel ashamed [if a close friend found out/if your parents found out]", with response options (1) "very ashamed", (2) "ashamed", (3) "somewhat ashamed", (4) "hardly ashamed", and (5) "not ashamed at all".

For the analysis the moral beliefs and moral emotions scores were summed giving rise to the personal morality scale. And in the resulting scale the scores have been inverted so that higher scores point to low personal morality.

### *Impersonal Sex (ImpSex)*

To measure impersonal sex, hostile sexism, and sexual aggression, it was decided to take the same instruments used in the study by Yucel, Angelone, and Jones (2023), so impersonal sex was measured using the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). This inventory is a nine-item self-report measure identifying willingness to engage in sex without commitment, where questions 1 to 3 are measured numerically (i.e., 0, 1, 2, 3 . . . 20 or more), questions 4 to 6 are measured on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (9), and questions 7 to 9 are measured on a 9-point scale ranging from never (1) to at least once a day (9) (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). Sample items include "I can imagine myself being comfortable and enjoying 'casual' sex with different partners" and "In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met?". The Sociosexual Orientation

Inventory demonstrates good reliability and has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86 (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008).

*Hostil Sexism (HostileSexism)*

Hostile sexism was measured using an 11-item self-report subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), designed to identify a deep-seated dislike or aversion toward women. The hostile sexism subscale questions were measured using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Sample items include "Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them" and "Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for 'equality'". The sexism subscale has yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranging from 0.80 to 0.92 (Glick and Fiske, 1996).

*Sexual Aggression (SexualAggression)*

The Coercive Sexuality Scale (Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984) is a 19-item self-report measure used to identify sexually coercive and non-coercive behaviors using a variety of behaviors. Items identify the frequency of specific behaviors initiated against a woman's will, such as "touched a woman's genital area against her will" or "used physical restraint with a woman against her will". Response options range from never (0) to often (4). Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale has been reported to be 0.96 (Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984). According to Yucel, Angelone, and Jones (2023), the prevalence of sexual aggression identified using this instrument is similar to the prevalence of sexual aggression identified using the Sexual Experiences Survey by Koss & Oros (1982), so only the coercive sexuality scale has been used. However, the decision was made to exclude the item "attempted to verbally convince a woman against her will" because, on some occasions, this may be interpreted as behavior not necessarily linked to sexual aggression. Therefore, the original 19 items have been reduced to 18. The variable has been

dichotomized into presence (1) and absence (0) of sexual aggression behaviors.

## **6. Other questionnaire items**

The questionnaire also included some items referring to demographic characteristics of the respondent:

Age (on a scale of 18 to 27).

Studies. Level of studies, dichotomized into (1) basic studies (primary, secondary or vocational training), and (2) higher studies (university studies, master's degree or doctorate).

Relationship. The subject has a partner (No = 1, Yes = 2).

Autonomous community (or region) where the subject live in Spain.

## **7. Method**

### *Sample*

A form containing all the detailed instruments items and the demographic items was implemented online on the Internet, with the intention of obtaining responses from all regions of Spain, from heterosexual men between 18 and 27 years of age.

### *Statistical analysis*

After performing some descriptive correlations (Pearson and Spearman's rho), and, in order to test hypotheses 1 and 2, Spearman's rho values were calculated. Binary logistic regression was used to construct the predictive models for hypotheses 3 and 4, and once the Coercive Sexuality Scale responses were dichotomized into 0 (absence of sexual aggression behavior) and 1 (presence). Finally, binary logistic regression was used to construct a predictive model

that included independent variables from the two theories used in this study. Logistic regression was chosen because, according to Hair et al. (2014), logistic regression models differ from discriminant analysis primarily in that they accommodate all types of independent variables (metric and non-metric) and do not require the assumption of multivariate normality.

## **8. Results**

### *Number of valid responses*

A total of 328 valid questionnaires were answered, representing 18 of the 19 Spanish autonomous communities (only the Autonomous City of Ceuta was not represented in the sample). Of those who responded, 51.8% did not have a partner at the time of responding, and 48.2% did. According to level of education, the distribution was as follows: basic studies 69.8% and higher studies 30.2%. Thirty-nine of the respondents (11.9%) admitted to some sexual aggression behavior, a percentage that coincides with the study by Martín et al. (2005) on a Spanish sample, which indicates approximately 15%. The age of the respondents varied through 18 to 27 years old (mean = 23.6, standard deviation = 2.7).

### *Significant correlations between independent variables and covariables*

#### **Table 1**

Significant correlations (Pearson or Spearman's rho) between personal morality, self-control, impersonal sex, hostile sexism, age, studies and relationship (N=328).

*Relationship between low personal morality and impersonal sex with sexual aggression behaviors towards women in a sample of Spanish heterosexual men*

| (bilateral)                                | Test           | Correlation coefficient | Significance |
|--|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| LowSelfControl / LowPersonalMorality<br>** | Pearson        | 0.161                   | 0.003        |
| LowSelfControl / HostileSexism<br>**       | Pearson        | 0.209                   | 0.000        |
| LowSelfControl / ImpSex<br>**              | Pearson        | 0.418                   | 0.000        |
| LowPersonalMorality / Age<br>*             | Pearson        | 0.127                   | 0.021        |
| LowPersonalMorality / HositleSexism <br>** | Pearson        | 0.234                   | 0.000        |
| ImpSex / Age<br>**                         | Pearson        | 0.160                   | 0.004        |
| ImpSex / HostileSexism<br>**               | Pearson        | 0.122                   | 0.027        |
| HostileSexism / Studies<br>**              | Spearman's rho | -0.171                  | 0.002        |
| Age / Relationship<br>**                   | Spearman's rho | 0.161                   | 0.003        |
| Age / Studies<br>**                        | Spearman's rho | 0.332                   | 0.000        |
| ** p<0.01    * p<0.05                      |                |                         |              |

The moderate correlation between low self-control and impersonal sex, and the expected correlation between age and studies, stand out. Hostile sexism correlates with both low personal morality and low self-control. Hostile sexism decreases with higher education.

*Correlations of independent variables with sexual assault behaviors.*



**Table 2**

Correlations (Spearman's rho) between personal morality, self-control, impersonal sex and hostile sexism with sexual aggression behaviors (N=328).

| (bilateral)                               | Correlation coefficient | Significance |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|
| PersonalMorality / SexualAggression<br>** | 0.157                   | 0.004        |
| SelfControl / SexualAggression<br>**      | 0.150                   | 0.006        |
| ImpSex / SexualAggression<br>*            | 0.129                   | 0.019        |
| HostileSexism / SexualAggression          | 0.019                   | 0.728        |

\*\* p<0.01    \* p<0.05

In the first three cases in Table 2, the correlation coefficients were low but significant. It is worth remembering here that a low (but statistically significant) correlation in social sciences may be the tip of the iceberg. In fact, one of the central characteristics of sexual crime is precisely this, that it tends to remain below the surface, and not only in relation to reporting, but also in relation to the intentions of the potential offender. This implies that what we calculate in the studies is what we are able to collect and quantify with the data we obtain with our instruments, but an imponderable component always remains in the shadows, which means that, in reality, the relationship may be much greater.

Hypothesis H1, in any case, holds true: low personal morality and low self-control are significantly correlated with sexual aggression behaviors. Hypothesis H2, on the other hand, is partially satisfied: impersonal sex correlates significantly with sexual aggression behaviors, but not with hostile sexism.

## **Models of sexual aggression**

### *Model 1*

When the variables low personal morality (LowPersonalMorality) and low self-control (LowSelfControl) were entered in a binary logistic regression as independent variables, being sexual aggression (SexualAggression) the variable to predict, the resulting model was significant,  $\chi^2(2) = 14.138$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $\chi^2(8) = 3.330$ ,  $p = 0.912$ ). Wald's criterion indicated that only one of them, low personal morality ( $p = 0.004$ ) had a significant contribution in the prediction of sexual aggression. The model correctly classified 65.2% of the cases. H3, therefore, has been partially fulfilled as only low personal morality was predictive of sexual aggression behaviors, when both independent variables are present.

#### *Model 1.1*

When only the variable low personal morality (LowPersonalMorality) was entered into a binary logistic regression as an independent variable, with sexual aggression (SexualAggression) as the variable to be predicted, the resulting model was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 10.505$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $\chi^2(7) = 8.249$ ,  $p = 0.311$ ). The Wald criterion indicated that low personal morality ( $p = 0.001$ ) had a significant contribution to the prediction of sexual aggression. The model correctly classified 71.6% of the cases.

#### *Model 1.2*

When only the variable low self-control (LowSelfControl) was entered into a binary logistic regression as an independent variable, with sexual aggression (SexualAggression) being the variable to predict, the resulting model was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.857$ ,  $p < 0.05$  (Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $\chi^2(8) = 9.812$ ,  $p = 0.278$ ). The Wald

criterion indicated that low self-control ( $p = 0.016$ ) had a significant contribution to the prediction of sexual aggression. The model correctly classified 59.8% of the cases.

### *Model 2*

In this model the variable hostile sexism was not entered because it did not correlate significantly with the variable sexual aggression, see Table 2. When only the variable impersonal sex (ImpSex) was entered in a binary logistic regression as an independent variable, with SexualAggression being the dependent variable, the resulting model was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.629$ ,  $p < 0.05$  (Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $\chi^2(8) = 4.063$ ,  $p=0.851$ ). The Wald criterion indicated that impersonal sex ( $p=0.019$ ) made a significant contribution to the prediction of sexual aggression. The model correctly classified 57.0% of the cases. Thus, H4 was partially fulfilled as only impersonal sex was a predictor of sexual aggression behaviors.

### *Model 3*

When the variables personal morality (PersonalMorality) and impersonal sex (ImpSex) were entered into a binary logistic regression as independent variables, with sexual aggression (SexualAggression) as the variable to be predicted, the resulting model was significant,  $\chi^2(2)=16.192$ ,  $p<0.001$  (Hosmer and Lemeshow test:  $\chi^2(8)=2.445$ ,  $p=0.964$ ). The Wald criterion indicated that both variables, low personal morality ( $p=0.001$ ) and impersonal sex ( $p=0.018$ ), made a significant contribution to the prediction of sexual aggression. The model correctly classified 66.2% of the cases. This is the most complete model obtained, with low personal morality and impersonal sex being the most efficient predictor characteristics of sexual aggression behaviors, when confluent.

*Controls: Age, Relationship, and Studies*

All of the above models were subjected to a control to verify which additional covariables could affect them. As expected, neither age (which ranged from 18 to 27 years), nor the condition of being in a relationship or not, nor the level of education, affected any of the five models.

## **9. Discussion**

In order to test two criminological theories, one general, the situational action theory (Wikström et al., 2012), and the other specific, the revised sexual aggression confluence model (Yucel, Angelone, & Jones, 2023), 328 heterosexual men between 18 and 27 years of age, representative of the whole Spanish territory, answered an online form. The results obtained can be summarized as follows: low personal morality, low self-control, and impersonal sex were significantly correlated with sexual aggression behaviors. However, the results of model 1 partially verified the individual aspects of the SAT, finding that low personal morality, but not self-control, is the variable that most effectively predicts sexual aggression behaviors. This makes sense when put in line with other studies showing that self-control may have a more decisive weight in triggering violence and aggression when it comes in line with other predisposing variables in the subject's personality, such as high narcissistic (Larson, Vaughn, Salas-Wright & DeLisi, 2015) and/or psychopathic components (Brazil, Roy, Bubeleva, & Neumann, 2023; DeLisi, Bouffard & Miller, 2020). It would be a good idea, for future studies, to design integrative models of analysis that allow exploring, as far as possible, the connections between personality and morality in order to clarify the relationships and/or possible correlations between these elements if any. Especially when it is borne in mind that poly-consumption, for example, common in aggressors with a narcissistic and/or psychopathic component in young people, strongly mediated by environmental variables, has its importance in this context. This would retroactively connect the understanding of individual psychological variables with the proposals of the SAT. In fact, the study of these

connections could, in more than one sense, bring the SAT model closer to the consolidated rCM proposals (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura & LeBreton, 2011).

Model 2, precisely and in line with the above, partially verified the revised confluence theory, finding that impersonal sex, but not hostile sexism, would predict sexual aggression behaviors, a fact that does not seem to coincide with studies that take into consideration sexual aggression and subclinical psychopathy, in which the aggressor's anger towards women would seem to have a much greater weight than other variables such as the capacity for manipulation, narcissism or the tendency towards promiscuity (LeBreton, Baysinger, Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2013). In view of this contradiction, and in order to deepen these relationships, a new hybrid model was attempted, model 3, which could be considered more satisfactory, in general, than the first two in view of the results obtained in relation to this issue. In this third model, low personal morality and impersonal sex predict sexual aggression behaviors much more efficiently than was initially expected. Moreover, this last model, which is an advantage that allows us to "clear" the ground to some extent, does not seem to be affected in the proposed study by the variables of age, having or not a partner, or general level of education. In short, it leaves out of the analysis what is to be considered summarily as a "quality" of the subject, but not as a direct "cause" of behaviors, which is an inexcusable requirement of the SAT.

The fact that, according to the present study, low self-control predicts sexual aggression behaviors ratifies the findings of Ha & Beauregard (2016): low self-control is a significant predictor of criminal behaviors, and sex offenders with lower self-control exhibit behaviors during various stages of sexual offending that resulted in impulsive, risky, callous, physical, and aggressive behaviors, all of which correspond to the personality trait theoretically defined as low self-control.

Impersonal sex alone appears to predict sexual assault behaviors. In a recent study conducted in Spain (Siria Mendaza, Echeburúa Odriozola, & Amor Andrés, 2020), 73 young people aged between 14 and 18 years who were serving a judicial measure for crimes against sexual freedom in various parts of Spain, showed a development of "inappropriate sexualization" (96% of cases) related, fundamentally, to an early onset in the consumption of pornography (70%), a sexualized family environment (26%) and the presence of sexual victimization during childhood (22%). All these experiences could be related to the development of sexuality without commitment, sex without love, or casual sex, typical of promiscuous or impersonal sex. In addition, they would link much of the sexual crime committed by the youngest aggressors (as in the case of the "manadas") with the consumption of pornography without control and at increasingly younger ages. A fact that is beginning to emerge clearly in the literature (Mestre-Bach, Villena-Moya & Chiclana-Actis, 2023).

On the other hand, according to Cleveland, Testa, & Hone (2019) college men who are interested in consuming alcoholic beverages and having impersonal sex were more likely to frequent places and/or groups in which to drink, and more frequent bar attendance predicted subsequent sexual assault perpetration. However, in a recent study we did on 176 rapes, we found that the percentage of offenders who were under the influence of alcohol was 12.5%, and under the influence of drugs 9.7% (Janosch González, Pérez-Fernández, Nut & Maset, 2023), possibly because the Cleveland, Testa, & Hone study refers only to college men, and not to men in general. But it is also true that heavy drinking is related to low self-control, which, according to our study, seems to predict sexual aggression behaviors on its own. Indeed, we found a significant correlation between low self-control and impersonal sex (see Table 1). For example, and following this line, Vazsonyi et al. (2023) used promiscuous sexual norms (impersonal sex) as a mediating variable in their study on low self-control. On the other hand, impersonal sex may not be one of the causes of sexual

aggression, but rather the lack of intimacy and loneliness that are linked to impersonal sex (Bumby & Hansen, 1997). Men are much more likely than women to seek intimacy through sex so some of these low social skilled individuals may be expected to seek intimacy through frequent brief sexual encounters with adults (impersonal sex), so-called "sexual addicts" (Garlick, Marshall & Thornton, 1996). According to Marshall (1989) failure to achieve intimacy in relationships with adults produces emotional loneliness, leading to an aggressive disposition, and a tendency to seek sex with diverse partners in the hope of finding intimacy through sexuality (impersonal sex) or through partners who are perceived as "less threatening".

Finally, the proposed model 3 of prediction of sexual aggression behaviors, where low personal morality and impersonal sex predict sexual aggression behaviors, and model 1.2, where low self-control predicts the same behaviors, could be integrated into a new model, which could allow, within certain limits, to anticipate and thus prevent such criminal acts. Such a preventive model would involve psychoeducation of adolescents in a broad sense: education about general moral rules, highlighting the negative consequences of moral feelings of guilt and shame in the face of rule-breaking; education to develop the social skills of self-control; and sex education, not judging the inappropriateness of impersonal sex, but systematically stressing the importance of consent on the part of the sexual partner. Our proposals broadly coincide with those of Martín et al. (2005), following their study of a Spanish sample:

*“The results of the present study show the need to carry out educational and preventive actions from childhood and throughout adolescence that promote positive regard for women, respect and the need for cooperation between the sexes, along with the development of a positive relationship and integrated sexual experience that promotes personal well-being in the context of a relational ethic. From a research point of view, in light of the results obtained here, they feel that it is especially important to obtain more*

*information on what factors may originate and facilitate the development of control and dominance needs and the tendency to engage in impersonal sex without commitment.”*

In short, the present study has found two possible pathways for sexual assault behaviors by Spanish heterosexual men, aged 18-27 years old:

- a. The classic one, already referenced in the literature, originated in low self-control, possibly enhanced by the consumption of alcohol and other drugs, or by stress (model 1.2). It could be called the psychological path.
- b. The one originated by low morality and the tendency towards impersonal sex (model 3). It could be called the ethical-moral path.

The question to be elucidated in the future, which is certainly ambitious, is how both models interact with each other and, of course, whether it would be possible to integrate them into a general explanatory model, which could be called "criminological". It is understood that this would give a complete account of sexual aggression and would ultimately make it possible to generate preventive psychoeducational policies appropriate to each case, as well as to implement appropriate treatment for aggressors already in prison.

### *Limitations*

Among the main limitations of this study is that we did not establish different scenarios in our survey, which would have allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the problem. While the SAT is a situational theory, the rCM focuses exclusively on the individual level and, therefore, as is logical, we have restricted the application of the former to its individual aspects. However, we are aware, and the results obtained point in this direction, that the clear interaction between individual and social variables is fundamental to



understanding criminal dynamics. As an example, the study by Herman and Pogarsky (2023) points to the importance of situational morality in criminal actions, as opposed to personal morality, which would be a generic and obviously decontextualized morality.

Another apparent limitation is that the sexual aggression behaviors specified in the responses to the questionnaire are prior to the assessment of the individual characteristics of morality, self-control, and impersonal sex, and therefore one of the predictive conditions of the models is not met, namely that the individual characteristics must precede the behaviors. In any case, the characteristics studied here can be considered stable over a very long period of time and have to do, to some extent, with the personality of the respondents.

#### *Future research*

Our next research will investigate low morality, impersonal sex, and low self-control as possible causes of sexual aggression behaviors, in their two paths, but placing them in context. We do not intend to investigate only the individual (or subjective) aspect of these characteristics, which would keep us within a "psychological model" of sexual aggression, but also their interaction with the environment, or in other words, their situational aspects (Wikström, P-O & Kroneberg, 2022).

## **10. Conclusion**

Two criminological theories were tested, a general one, the SAT, and a specific one, the rCM. For this purpose, 328 heterosexual men between 18 and 27 years of age, representative of the whole Spanish territory, answered an online form, responding to a set of scales of low morality, low self-control, impersonal sex, hostile sexism, and sexual aggression behaviors they may have had in the past. The independent variables of low personal morality, low self-control, and impersonal sex correlated significantly with sexual assault

behaviors. A new preventive model has been suggested through adolescent education focusing on the individual characteristics described in such independent variables. This model postulates two pathways to sexual aggression: the one originating in low self-control, and the one originating in low morality and tendency toward impersonal sex.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

The authors declare no possible conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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***Relationship between low personal morality and impersonal sex with sexual aggression behaviors towards women in a sample of Spanish heterosexual men***