

## **BETTER TOGETHER**

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

### **F-02**

#### **Examining and Validating Predictors Among Incarcerated and Community-Based Offenders**

Symposium Chair: Skye Stephens, PhD, RPsych  
Saint Mary's University

Sexual crimes are especially likely to evoke public concern, particularly when committed by known offenders, suggesting that the crime could have been anticipated and prevented (Mann, Hanson & Thornton, 2010). However, not all sexual offenders are equally likely to reoffend. Many people who have crossed sexual boundaries are able to remain offence-free for extended periods of time. However, on average, 10-15% will reoffend sexually within five years back in the community (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998; Mann et al., 2010). Within that estimate, base rates vary depending on factors such as the type of offence the person is inclined to commit (e.g., non-contact versus contact offending; Hanson & Bussiere, 1998), the length and type of the sentence received (Budd & Desmond, 2013), sexual deviancy, victim type, and general criminological factors (e.g. age, lifestyle; Hanson & Bussiere, 1998).

The current symposium examines these factors across three studies designed to explore the impact of novel predictors on sexual reoffending among incarcerated and community-based samples. Specifically, this symposium looks at patterns of recidivism for polymorphic offending, the impact of sentencing on recidivism, and recidivism rates and the generalizability of established predictors to a community-based sample. Results of this symposium will extend academic literature on sexual reoffending, speak to the generalizability for different groups, and offer new insights for clinical assessment and practice.

#### **References**

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- Hanson, R. K., & Bussiere, M. T. (1998). Predicting relapse: A meta-analysis of sexual offender recidivism studies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66(2), 348-362.
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### **Criminal Versatility and Offending Severity in Age-Polymorphic Sex Offenders**

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Sex offenders are commonly misrepresented in the general public and media as being exclusive in their choice of victim age (e.g. selecting only child, pubescent, or adult victims). However, research has demonstrated that a considerable portion (36-48%) of sexual offenders will cross-over between victim-age categories, which is referred to as victim choice polymorphism (Guay et al., 2001; Sim & Proeve, 2010; Stephens, Reale, Goodwill, & Beauregard, 2017). What remains unclear is whether age polymorphic offenders are higher risk (i.e., offend more frequently and severely) and offend with greater versatility (i.e., have both sex and non-sex crime) throughout their criminal career in comparison to age-specific offenders.

The aim of the current study is to explore this issue by comparing polymorphic and age-specific sexual offenders using their criminal history risk factors (e.g., prior offense history, number of past sentencing dates) and the severity of their offenses (pre-and post-index). The study uses a sample of 465 male sexual offenders referred to an assessment clinic in Ontario with an index sexual offense from 1996-2007 and are followed for an average of 10 years post-index. As polymorphism inherently indicates an offender who has more than one sexual offense, only age-specific offenders with at least two prior sexual offenses are included in the current study. Using logistic regression analysis, differences in demographic characteristics, criminal history, and severity of pre-index offenses were explored between polymorphic and age-specific offenders. Preliminary results suggested that polymorphic offenders are more violent and have more contact and non-contact sex offenses pre-index. To examine whether polymorphic offenders had different patterns of recidivism (more frequent reoffending, greater degree of severity and versatility in their reoffending), we utilized cox-proportional hazards-regressions to control for time at risk. We hypothesized that age-polymorphic offenders will be more versatile and will increase in severity compared to age-specific offenders. Implications for offender management, public policy, and police investigations are discussed.

#### **References**

- Guay, J., Proulx, J., Cusson, M., & Ouimet, M. (2001). Victim-choice polymorphia among serious sex offenders. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 30*, 521-533.
- Sim, D. J., & Proeve, M. (2010). Crossover and stability of victim type in child

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molesters. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 15, 401-413.

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Stephens, S. Reale, K., Goodwill, A.M., Beauregard, E. (2017). Examining the role of opportunity in victim cross-over sex offenders. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 52, 41-48.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Better understand the offense behaviour of polymorphic sexual offenders over time
- Determine whether polymorphic offenders have different criminal histories, demographic characteristics, and greater offense severity compared to age-specific offenders
- Discuss how differences between age-polymorphic and age-specific sexual offenders impacts management, policy and police investigations

### **The Effects of Sentencing on the Sexual Recidivism of Sexual Offenders**

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Limited research exists that examines the effects of sentencing on recidivism in sexual offenders. There have been few studies that investigate the impact of sentencing on sexual offenders and fewer have considered risk to reoffend (e.g., Budd & Desmond, 2013; Hsieh, Hamiton, & Zgoba, 2016; Nunes, Firestone, Wesler, Jensen, & Bradford, 2007). The present study aims to examine the impact of sentencing on recidivism in a large sample of sexual offenders. The study extends the previous literature by considering how type (e.g., incarceration, probation) as well as length of sentence might impact the incidence and severity of general, violent, and sexual recidivism. We expected to see a relationship between sentencing and recidivism that is moderated by risk level.

To examine the relationship between recidivism and sentencing a large outpatient sample ( $n = 751$ ) was used. Sentencing information (type of sentence and the duration of the sentence) and recidivism information were collected from a national database of criminal records. The Static-99R was used to assess actuarial risk level and the Cormier-Lang score was used to control for criminal history and index offense severity. All recidivism data have been coded and analyses will be completed well ahead of the ATSA conference. Briefly, 70% of the sample were sentenced to a period of incarceration and 30% received community sentences (e.g., house arrest), with an average sentence length of 19 months ( $SD = 29$  mos). The overall recidivism rate was 37%, and 14% reoffended sexually. The average Static-99R score was 2 ( $SD = 2.4$ , with scores from -3 to 11) and the

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average Cormier-Lang score was 4.9 ( $SD = 11.9$ ). The study provides an opportunity to examine the application of the risk-needs-responsivity model, as it applies to sentencing in sexual offenders and the results will be considered in the context of this model (Bonta & Andrews, 2006).

### **References**

- Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2007). *Risk-need-responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation* (User Report 2007-06). Ottawa, Ontario: Public Safety Canada.
- Budd, K., & Desmond, S. A. (2013). Sex offenders and sex crime recidivism: Investigating role of sentence length and time served. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *58*, 1481-1499. doi: 10.1177/0306624X13507421
- Hsieh, M.-L., Hamilton, Z., Zgoba, K. M. (2016). Prison experience and reoffending: Exploring the relationship between prison terms, institutional treatment, infractions, and recidivism for sex offenders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. Advance online publication. doi: [10.1177/1079063216681562](https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063216681562)
- Nunes, K. L., Firestone, P. Wexler, A. F. Jensen, T. L., & Bradford, J. M. (2007). Incarceration and recidivism among sexual offenders. *Law and Human Behavior*, *31*, 305–18. doi: DOI 10.1007/s10979-006-9065-5

### **Learning Goals:**

- Provide background information on the limited literature examining the effects of sentencing on recidivism in sexual offenders.
- Examine the impact of sentencing type and length on different measures of reoffending (presence and severity).
- Examine how risk level might moderate the relationship between sentencing and recidivism.

### **Recidivism Among Community-Based Sexual Offenders**

Angela Connors, PhD  
Michelle St Amand-Johnson, PhD  
Kate Calnan  
Nova Scotia Health Authority

At present, most of the research on prediction and treatment of sexual offending has been conducted using samples of incarcerated offenders (e.g. Hanson & Bussiere, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004), who on average have a different criminal profile than offenders sentenced to supervision in the community. The current study offers a preliminary examination of recidivism rates and key factors that predict and influence the likelihood of reoffending for a community-based population. Data for the study is being

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drawn from a clinical data set containing information on every client assessed at Nova Scotia's provincial Forensic Sexual Behaviour Program since 1999 ( $n = 1800$ ), in combination with newly coded recidivism data from clients' criminal records. To date, the sample comprises detailed information on 250 adult males who were convicted of sexual offences and sentenced to community supervision (i.e., probation or conditional sentence).

The specific goals of the study are to investigate recidivism rates for sexual, violent (non-sexual), and general offences at several follow-up time periods (e.g. 1, 3, 5, and 10 years), for various sub-groups defined by offence type (e.g., online versus in-person offences; contact versus non-contact crimes, etc.), and by level of risk that was determined during assessment. Preliminary results suggest that recidivism is highest in the first 5 years following the index sentence and more common for contact offenders with prior criminal histories. Cox regression was used to examine the relationship between recidivism and key predictor variables, including those identified by previous research using incarcerated samples (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010), such as age at onset of offending and at commission of the index offence, number and type of prior sexual and non-sexual offences, and certain personality constellations (e.g., psychopathy). Implications for risk assessment, community-based treatment, and literature on community-based offenders are discussed.

### **References**

- Hanson, R. K., & Bussiere, M. T. (1998). Predicting relapse: A meta-analysis of sexual offender recidivism studies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66*(2), 348-362.
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### **Learning Goals:**

- Establish an empirical description of community-based sexual offenders by clarifying recidivism rates for designated follow-up time periods, offence type sub-groups, and assessed risk
- Examine the relationship between recidivism and key predictor variables, including those identified by previous research using incarcerated samples
- Increase overall understanding of sexual recidivism among community-based offenders as compared to incarcerated samples

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**Dr. Skye Stephens** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Saint Mary's University. She has published research mainly on the assessment of sexual interest in children and its relationship with victim selection and sexual reoffending. She was a recipient of the APLS Dissertation Award for her research on hebephilia and sexual offending. Dr. Stephens is a Clinical and Forensic Psychologist (Candidate Register) in Nova Scotia where she works with adolescent and adults. She has a particular interest in working with those who have committed sexual offenses and has provided assessment and treatment services to this population across different forensic settings (e.g., hospital, forensic inpatient settings).

**Kylie Reale** is currently a Ph.D. student in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Burnaby, British Columbia. She obtained her M.A. in Criminology at SFU and her B.A. in Psychology at Ryerson University. Her research interests include sexual offending and sexual violence, offense behaviour, and criminal careers. Her work on sexual offending has been published in several journals in the field, including, *Journal of Criminal Justice* and *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

**Sarah Moss** is a MSc student in Applied Psychology – Forensic Stream at Saint Mary's University. Sarah's main research interest is in the role of atypical sexual interests in populations who have not committed sexual offences. Sarah was awarded the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation Scotia Scholars Award and a Faculty of Graduate Studies & Research Graduate Award for her MSc work. Sarah has published one article in a peer-reviewed journal as well as a forthcoming book chapter. She has collaborated on several research reports and conference presentations during her time as a Research Analyst at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. She holds a MSc in Foundations of Clinical Psychology from the University of Sussex.

**Dr. Angela Connors** is a native of Nova Scotia who earned a PhD in Clinical Psychology (clinical-forensic stream) from Simon Fraser University in 1996. She has conducted research with adolescent offenders and has worked with adult male offenders at both the provincial and federal levels. For the past 20 years she has been the Clinical Lead for the NS Forensic Sexual Behaviour Program. Her current research interests include prevention of sexual violence through education, and predicting sexual and violent recidivism. In her private practice she provides services for general mental health, including working with those whose lives have been impacted by sexual abuse and violence.