

SHAPING THE FUTURE

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Age & Sexual Violence Risk

Men Who Sexually Offend Over the Age of 60

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Research has consistently found that men commit fewer crimes as they age (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). This finding applies to all types of offending, including sexual recidivism. Helmus, Thornton, Hanson, and Babchishin (2012), for example, found that adjusting the age-related item on the Static-99 to better account for the effects of aging significantly increased the absolute predictive accuracy of the instrument. Specifically, Helmus et al. (2012) found that (a) reducing Static-99 scores by one point for offenders aged 40 to 59.9 years and (b) reducing Static-99 scores by three points for offenders aged 60 years and older resulted in significantly better calibration of risk estimates for offenders who are released to the community at age 50 years and older. This finding, which contributed to the Static-99 being revised into the Static-99R, highlights the reduction in sexual recidivism risk associated with age, particularly for men aged 60 years and over at the time of their release. Statistically speaking, an offender who commits a sexual offense at age 45 years and is released at age 62 years poses a lower risk to sexually recidivate than if that same offender instead were released at age 48 years.

Questions remain, however, about those men who do sexually offend over the age of 60 years. This group includes men who sexually recidivate over the age of 60 years, as well as men who commit their first sexual offense over that age. Very little is currently known about these men because there is very little research on them (e.g., Marshall, 2010). This fact poses a problem for evaluators: Men who commit sexual offenses over the age of 60 years are already statistical outliers for their post-60 sexual offending, are they also outliers with regard to their sexual recidivism risk?

The current study investigated this question and several others, using a sample of 480 men in New York State who had committed sexual offenses while over the age of 60 years. The backgrounds of these men were investigated and were compared to the characteristics of their post-60 sexual offending, to determine whether these men are specialized in terms of their offending behavior (either in terms of only offending sexually or in terms of the type of their sexual offending). Analyses were then conducted to compare those men whose first sexual offense occurred post-60 and those whose post-60 sexual offense was a sexual recidivism. Finally, the current study investigated whether the noted reduction in sexual recidivism risk associated with age applies to offenders who continue sexual offending after the age of 60 years.

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References

- Gottfredson, M. R., & Hirschi, T. (1990). *A general theory of crime*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Helmus, L., Thornton, D., Hanson, R. K., & Babchishin, K. M. (2012). Improving the predictive accuracy of the Static-99 and the Static-2002 with older sex offenders: Revised age weights. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 24*, 64-101.
- Marshall, L. E. (2010). *Aging and sexual offending: An examination of older sexual offenders* (Doctoral thesis, Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Canada).

Learning Goals:

- To discuss the backgrounds and characteristics of men who commit sexual offenses over the age of 60 years.
- To compare those offenders whose first sexual offense was committed over the age of 60 years to those offenders whose first sexual offense was committed under the age of 60 years, but who then sexually recidivated over the age of 60 years.
- To discuss the sexual recidivism risk posed by offenders who commit sexual offenses over the age of 60 years.

Jeffrey C. Sandler, Ph.D. is a researcher whose main fields of research are public policies designed to manage those who commit sexual offenses, risk assessment of those who commit sexual offenses, and females who commit sexual offenses.

Predictive Properties of the VRS:SO as a Function of Age

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The present study examined the predictive properties of Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offense version (VRS-SO) risk and change scores for sexual and violent recidivism as a function of age at release, on a combined sample of 1,287 men who had attended sexual offense specific treatment services. VRS-SO scores, particularly the dynamic items, showed good properties of discrimination for sexual recidivism among older offenders, low base rates notwithstanding, and predicted multiple outcomes among younger and middle age cohorts. Cox regression survival analyses demonstrated changes in risk to have inverse associations with decreased sexual and violent recidivism controlling for baseline risk; although change score hazard ratios were not uniformly significant across all age groups, particularly for older cohorts, effects were consistent in magnitude. Calibration analyses, employing

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logistic regression over fixed 10-year follow-ups on the VRS-SO normative sample, demonstrated that age at release was not incrementally predictive of sexual recidivism after controlling for individual differences on static and dynamic risk factors, particularly the combination of Static-99R, pretreatment dynamic, and change. Implications for use of the VRS-SO in sexual violence risk assessment with older offenders, including the applicability of normative recidivism estimates, are discussed.

Learning Goals:

- To describe profiles of sexual violence risk and need among age stratified cohorts of sexual offenders.
- To summarize current data on the psychometric properties of the VRS-SO with older offenders.
- To explain the role and relevance of aging in the mitigation of sexual violence risk after taking into consideration individual differences on static and dynamic risk factors.

Mark E. Olver Ph.D. is Professor and Registered Doctoral Psychologist (Saskatchewan) at the University of Saskatchewan, where he is involved in program administration, graduate and undergraduate teaching, research, and clinical training. Prior to his academic appointment, Mark worked as a clinical psychologist in various capacities, including providing assessment, treatment, and consultation services to young offenders in the Saskatoon Health Region and with adult federal offenders in the Correctional Service of Canada. Mark's research interests include offender risk assessment and treatment, young offenders, psychopathy, and the evaluation of therapeutic change. He is the co-developer of the Violence Risk Scale-Sexual Offense version (VRS-SO) and he provides training and consultation services internationally in the assessment and treatment of sexual, violent, and psychopathic persons.