

# **A Logistic Analysis of Factors that Predict Sex Offender Recidivism**

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## **Introduction**

The ability to predict with a high degree of accuracy the likelihood that a convicted sex offender will reoffend is crucial to the protection of the public and informed criminal justice policy. Public policy makers, judges, parole board members, correction officials, law enforcement personnel, and clinicians are just some of the individuals whose decision-making powers could be improved given some probabilistic ability to predict which offenders might reoffend or what type of recidivism could be expected. This ability has become a priority to researchers of late because of: (1) the increasing concern by the public in the frequency and type of sexual assaults; (2) the various forms of trauma experienced by victims of sexual assault; and (3) the resulting financial burdens placed on government agencies because of the resulting prison overcrowding, judicial costs, costs of supervision and treatment, and victim expenses.

Contrary to popular conception, the rate of sexual offenses (excluding rape and prostitution) shows an overall decline for the last decade. Data reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicates that the number of sexual assaults for 1998 was 52,527 incidents as compared to 45,871 incidents for 2007. This represents an overall reduction of 12.7 percent (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). More specifically, the per capita rate of forcible rape was 10.7 for 1971, reached a high of 16.0 for 1991 and 1992, and declined to 7.7 by 2007. It should be noted that the overall decline in sex offenses follows an overall decline in virtually all types of offenses since 1971.

In spite of this decline, state and local governments have passed laws that have mandate more severe penalties for sex offenders and increased registration requirements. For over three

decades the United States' has pursued an aggressive policy of incarceration as opposed to treating offenders using evidence-based treatment approaches. According to a recent report by the PEW Center on the States, the United States incarcerates more citizens per capita than any country in the world. With one out of every 100 adults behind bars, several states including Vermont, Michigan, Oregon, Connecticut, and Delaware now spend as much or more on corrections than they do on higher education. Ironically, severe prison overcrowding conditions inevitably lead to modified release policies that are necessary to free up space for incoming offenders, and protect institutions from lawsuits due to overcrowded conditions filed by inmates claiming protection under the eighth amendment (Ellis, 1991; Anson and Hancock, 1992).

As prison populations throughout the country are close to or at maximum capacity, the issue of whom to release becomes a much more critical issue. Due to both ethical and legal considerations it is clear that not everyone who commits a sexual offense can be banished to prison for the rest of their lives. In reality, most sex offenders are eventually released from prison. The ability to accurately predict which sex offenders will recidivate is crucial to the formulation of reasonable treatment approaches and the management of offenders.

### **Prior Research**

Longitudinal studies of sex offender recidivism have produced a wide array of results. A commonly held belief is that sex offending has a high frequency, is repetitive, and underreported since many acts are never officially reported (Doren, 1998; Firestone, P., Bradford, J. M., Marcia, M., Greenberg, D. M., Larose, M. R., & Curry, S., 1999). Other researchers maintain that the probability for sexual reoffending following the initial offence is relatively low (Wollert, 2001; Barbaree, 1997). One explanation for these disparate views is the methodological

differences between the various studies for such factors as sample size, operationalization of recidivism, regionality, length of time offenders were tracked, and the population studied (Losel & Schmucker, 2005).

A study conducted by Hanson, Steffy, & Gauthier (1993) examined the recidivistic activity of 197 child molesters released from a provincial correctional institution in southern Ontario between 1958-1974. Offenders were followed for varying lengths of time from 15 to 20 years. Recidivism was defined as a sexual offence or a violent offence that resulted in conviction. Results of the study suggested that child molesters were at risk for reoffending for many years with a reconviction rate of 5.2 percent for the first six years and then 1.8 percent for the following years.

A UK study based on 900 randomly selected sex offenders followed offenders released from prison in 1987 for a four-year period of time. Reconviction data indicated that only seven percent of offenders were reconvicted for a new sexual offence (Marshall, 1994). Another UK study conducted by Thornton & Travers (1991) examined the recidivistic activity of sex offenders that were incarcerated for at least four years and were released from prison in 1980. A review of the records 10 years after offenders were released revealed that 15 percent of rapists and approximately one-third of child molesters had been reconvicted of a new sexual offence during the follow-up time period.

Hanson and Bussiere (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 61 studies of sex offender recidivism consisting of a total of 28,972 offenders. Using a follow up period of 4 to 5 years, they found a recidivism rate of 13.4 percent for a sexual offence, 12.2 percent for a nonsexual violent offence and 36.3 percent for any other type of offence. Characteristics that predicted

sexual recidivism were oriented towards measures of sexual deviance and, to a lesser degree, conventional criminological variables.

More recently, in an update to the Hanson and Bussiere study of 1998, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) analyzed 115 studies on sex offender recidivistic patterns as well as re-offenses committed by sex offenders for nonsexual types of offenses. Using a variety of recidivistic measures, results indicated that the sexual recidivism rate was 13.7 percent and the violent nonsexual recidivism rate was 14.3 percent. The strongest predictors of sexual recidivism were variables associated with sexual deviancy and antisocial orientation.

Langan, Schmitt, and Durose (2003) conducted a study of the recidivistic patterns of 262,420 offenders released from 15 state prisons in 1994. The sample included 9,691 offenders that had been incarcerated for various sex offenses. Offenders were tracked for three years following their release. Results indicated that 5.3 percent (517 of 9,691) of sex offenders were rearrested within a three-year period of time. The conviction rate for sex offenders convicted of a new sex offence during the three-year time period was 3.5 percent. In comparison to non-sex offenders, 48 percent of sex offenders returned to prison due to arrests for new offenses as compared to 68 percent of the non-sex offenders.

Sample and Bray (2003) conducted a study of the recidivistic patterns of 146,918 sex offenders and non-sex offenders that were arrested in Illinois between 1990 and 1997. Recidivistic activity was measured at intervals of one, three, and five years. At the five year interval 6.5 percent of offenders previously convicted of a sex crime were rearrested for a new sex offence. This is considerably lower than 38.8 percent of the offenders that were initially convicted of robbery charges and rearrested for a new robbery offence. Offenders convicted of

homicide (5.7 percent), kidnapping (2.8 percent), and stalking (5 percent) were the only offence-specific categories that showed lower rates of recidivism than sex offenders.

Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of sex offender recidivism based on 577 findings from 79 distinct samples. Their results showed that the sexual recidivism rate was 12.4 percent (72 studies), the violent recidivism rate, which included sexual and non-sexual violence, was 17.5 percent (36 studies), and the general recidivism rate (all offenses) was 30.1 percent.

Other studies show a much higher rate of recidivism. For example, Prentky, R. A., Lee, A. F. S., Knight, R. A., and Cerce, D. (1997) investigated 115 extra-familial child molesters following them over a 25 year period of time. Using “new sex offence charge” and “reconviction for a new sex offence” as outcome measures, they documented a failure rate of 52 percent for reoffending.

Part of the difficulty of interpreting results of studies on sex offender recidivism is the variety of outcome measures that are used to measure recidivism. An additional consideration is that many of the studies on sex offender recidivism have relied upon a single outcome measure of recidivism. Realistically, the measurement of recidivism is more complex than just one specific measure (Polizzi & MacKenzie 1999). For example, several studies operationalize recidivism as rearrest for a sexual offence (Sample & Bray, 2003; Hout, 1997; Nagayama-Hall, 1995; Song & Lieb, 1995; Marques, Day, Nelson, & West 1994; Marshall & Barbaree, 1988). Other studies limit the definition of recidivism to reconvictions (Friendship, Mann, & Beech 2003, Nickolaichuk, Gordon, Andre, & Gu 1995; Gordon & Nickolaichuk, 1996; Marshall, Eccles, & Barbaree, 1991; Rice, Quinsey, & Harris; 1991). A limited number of studies took a

more “bottom-line” approach in defining sex offender recidivism as reincarceration (Nickolaichuk, et al., 1995). Some studies such as those conducted by Maletzky (1991), Marshall, et al., (1991), McConaghy, Blaszczycki, and Kidson (1988) and Meyer, Cole, and Emory (1992) relied on both official and unofficial records of recidivism such as self-reports, and informal reports (i.e. significant-other interviews, Children’s Aid Society, reports from patient’s legal representatives, reports from social agencies). Other studies, such as one conducted by Prentky, Lee, and Cere (1997), used multiple measures including imprisonment, conviction, and new charges as a measure of recidivism. A study conducted by Marshall and Barbaree (1988) measured recidivism using both official and unofficial reports. They noted that unofficial reports indicated over 2.7 times the number of offenses as compared to official records.

Studies that rely on the use of a single recidivistic measurement run the risk of either underestimating or overestimating the actual rate of recidivism (Bench, Kramer, & Erickson, 1997). For example, the use of arrest data as an outcome measure for recidivistic activity is inherently deceptive in that it has a tendency to overestimate recidivism. It is widely acknowledged that an arrest is not tantamount to a conviction. Numerous studies have shown that a high percentage of offenders arrested by the police are declined for prosecution or dismissed by the court. For example, a study conducted by Reaves and Smith (1995) for the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that approximately 46 percent of felony arrests were either declined for prosecution or dismissed by the court.

Part of what is known about sex offender recidivism comes from studies that have compared the recidivism rates of treated vs. untreated offenders (Hanson, Broom, & Stephenson

2004; Looman, Abrade & Nicholaichuk, 2000; McGrath, R. J., Cumming, G., Livingston, J. A., & Hoke, S. E., 2003; Worling & Curwen, 2000; Friendship et al., 2003). For example, Losel and Schmucker (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies containing 80 independent comparisons between treated and untreated offenders. Their findings indicated an overall recidivism rate of 11.1 percent for offenders who were treated and 17.5 percent for offenders who were untreated. A meta-analytic review conducted by Hanson (2002) of 43 studies (n=9,454) revealed a sexual recidivism rate of 12 percent for sex offenders who received treatment as compared to a rate of 16.8 percent for comparison groups. Hall (1995) conducted a meta-analytic review of 12 studies. Results revealed an average sexual offender recidivism rate of 19 percent for offenders that received treatment as compared to a rate of 27 percent for untreated offenders.

The current study attempts to address some of the methodological problems found in the previous research. Strengths of the study are as follows: (1) examines the recidivistic activity of a large number of convicted sex offenders (N=387); (2) uses over 51 variables in estimating the likelihood of both sexual and non-sexual recidivism based on demographic, historical, behavioral, and legal information; (3) measures recidivism from episodic perspective using several different definitions of recidivism (N=11) and (4) tracks offenders up to 15 years following their release.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 387 male sex offenders who were under the supervision of the Utah Department of Corrections at some time between 1979 through 2005. The sample was

restricted to offenders for which complete information on all of the variables studied was available. Offenders in the study received sex offender specific treatment in a community correctional center as a condition of their release from prison. The treatment program was based on cognitive-behavioral and relapse prevention models. Treatment modalities included cognitive restructuring and relapse prevention group therapy, deviant sexual preference-modification, conditioning group therapy with penile plethysmography, and psycho educational classes. These classes included training in assertiveness, anger management, sex education, stress management, parenting, victim empathy, thinking errors, and relapse prevention. All sex offenders who are released from prison in lieu of serving their full sentence are required to participate in treatment at a community correction center. Only a very small percentage of sex offenders opt to serve the full length of their sentence.

The offenders were predominantly Caucasian (92.4 percent). The mean offender age was 33 and the median age was 32. The range was 17 to 73 years of age. The offender I.Q. distribution was roughly normal with a mean of 102.8 and a standard deviation of 20.48. The mean number of years of education was 11.76. The distribution of marital status was as follows: married 33 percent, divorced 31 percent, separated 9 percent, and never married 27 percent. The mean number of arrests, as measured at time of release for the initial offence, was 3.6 with a range of one to sixty-three. A controlled substance was used at the time of the offence in 13.1 percent of the cases, and alcohol was used at the time of the offence in 20.4 percent of the cases.

### *Procedure*

Offenders were tracked for up to the first arrest/conviction episode following their initial conviction for a sex offence using the 11 definitions of recidivistic behavior as contained in



Table 1. An episode is defined as an event in which the offender is the subject of a technical violation, an arrest warrant, single or multiple charges, and single or multiple convictions. Offenders were tracked for a median of 1.2 years following release for their initial conviction for a sex offence with minimum and maximum values of 1 day and 15.1 years respectively. The mean for the amount of time tracked was 2.3 years with a standard deviation of 2.7 years.

Recidivistic activity was confirmed using information obtained from the Utah Department of Corrections, the Utah Bureau of Criminal Identification, and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Use of multiple data sources allowed recidivistic activity to be detected at both state and national levels. In cases where multiple recidivistic charges occurred within a single episode, the most severe charge or disposition was coded as defined by the Utah State Code. For example, following his release from prison, one of the offenders in the study was arrested for the felony charge of “Aggravated Sexual Abuse Of A Child” but was ultimately convicted of “Lewdness With A Child,” which is a misdemeanor as defined by Utah State Code.

**Table 1. Definitions of Recidivistic Activity**

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Technical Violations            | 7. Convicted Misd. Sex Offence     |
| 2. Warrant issued Non-Sex Offence  | 8. Convicted Misd. Sex Offence     |
| 3. Warrant Issued Sex Offence      | 9. Arrested Felony Non-Sex Offence |
| 4. Arrested Misd. Non-Sex Offence  | 10. Convicted Felony Non-Sex       |
| 5. Arrested Misd. Sex Offence      | 11. Convicted Felony Sex Offence   |
| 6. Convicted Misd. Non-Sex Offence |                                    |

In this instance, the conviction for lewdness with a child was coded as the most severe disposition for the episode. In another instance, an offender was initially arrested for larceny. However, a subsequent investigation revealed that he was a suspect for an incident in which a victim was raped. The offender was ultimately convicted of this felony charge, which in turn, was coded as the most severe disposition for the episode.

Four different models were constructed and evaluated for different forms of recidivistic activity. Model 1 measured forms of recidivistic activity that did not involve sex offenses (warrant issued – nonsex offense, arrest misdemeanor nonsex, convicted misdemeanor nonsex, arrested felony nonsex, convicted felony nonsex). Model 2 examined activity for sex offenses only (warrant issued- sex, arrest misdemeanor sex, conviction misdemeanor sex, arrest felony sex, conviction misdemeanor sex). Model 3 compared offenders who recidivated by committed any one of the 11 forms of recidivism as defined in table 1 as compared to offenders who did not recidivate as defined by the 11 definitions of recidivism in table 1. Model 4 focused on offenders who recidivated by committing technical violations as opposed to other forms of recidivism (new criminal offenses). This model was constructed because of the high percentage of offenders who come back to prison for technical violations as opposed to violating a specific criminal offense.

Logistic regression was used to determine the: (1) relative strength of the variables to predict post release recidivistic activity and, (2) accuracy of the prediction model.

Table 2 is a list of the variables used in the study.

**Table 2. Independent Variables**

Adult touching of child's clothed body	Recidivism type
Age at first arrest	Severity of current offence
Age of offender	Sexually abused as an adult
Age of victim	Sexually abused as child
Anal intercourse with victim	Simulated intercourse with victim
Child instructed to expose genitals	Substance abuse type
Child masturbated adult	Total arrests
Completed treatment	Total arrests for sex offenses
Digital penetration of victim	Total charges per episode
Drug use at time of current offence	Total convictions for non-sex offenses
Education Level	Total convictions for sex offenses
Escapes from a secure facility	Total felony arrests prior to key offence
Exposure of adult genitalia to child	Total felony non-sex arrests prior to key offence
Fondling of child's unclothed genitals	Total female victims for current offence
IQ of offender	Total juvenile arrests
Length of custody	Total juvenile convictions
Marital status of offender	Total male victims
Most serious non-sex offence	Total non-sex misd. arrests prior to key offence
Most serious offence per episode	Total number of arrests for non-sex offenses
Most serious sex offence	Total parole violations prior to primary sex offence
Offender exhibitionism	Total probation violations prior to key sex offence
Offender failed treatment	Total sex misd. arrests prior to key sex offence
Offender intoxicated at time of offence	Total victims for offence
Offender views pornography	Type of force used on victim
Open mouth kissing	Vaginal intercourse
Reason for program failure	

## **Results**

The results of the analyses for models 1 and 2 indicate that there are no statistically significant variables that predict non-sex offenses as a group (model 1) or sex offenses as a group (model 2). The results for models 3 and 4 are described below.

### **Variables and Method for Model 3**

The dependent variable for Model 3 is dichotomous, separating inmates who returned to prison for any reason (technical violations and more serious crimes) from those who did not return. The 51 independent variables used in this analysis are listed in Table 2. Stepwise logistic regression was used analysis to create a subset of variables that best predict re-incarceration.

### **Results for Model 3**

The dependent variable in Model 3 is defined as ‘1’ for returning to prison and ‘0’ for not returning. The stepwise logistic regression analysis determined that only three of the 51 independent variables considered were statistically significant predictors of re-incarceration. Table 3 presents the results of the analysis, listing the three significant variables, their coefficients, and the standardized coefficients which show the relative importance of each variable. The overall percentage predicted correctly by the model is 69.6. As shown in Table 4, the model predicts somewhat better for those who return to prison (77.8%) than for those who do not return (62.3%).

Table 5 shows the odds ratios for inmates returning to prison along with 95% confidence intervals. Inmates who failed to complete the sex-offender treatment program were 3.70 times more likely to return to prison than those who completed the program. Inmates with a history of parole violations were 6.99 times more likely to return to prison than those who had no such

history.

The third significant variable, age-at-first-arrest, has the only negative coefficient, indicating that the older the age at first arrest, the less likely the offender is to recidivate. This pattern also can be observed using logistic curves for each significant variable in the model. Figure 1 was created using the calculated probabilities for each inmate in the sample  $[\exp(\text{logit})/(1+\exp(\text{logit}))]$ . The results show that for parole violations and for failed treatment, the older the age at first arrest, the lower the probability that a former inmate will return to prison.

#### **Variables and Method for Model 4**

As in Model 3, the dependent variable in this model is dichotomous. However, Model 4 focuses solely on inmates who recidivate and are returned to prison, comparing those who are re-incarcerated for technical violations (i.e. missing scheduled appointments with probation/parole officers, substance abuse, falling behind in restitution payments, etc.) with inmates re-incarcerated for non-technical violations (i.e. committing another crime). Stepwise Logistic Regression was used to compare individuals returned to prison for technical violations with those returning for more serious violations. The same 51 independent variables (Table 2) were used to determine the subset of independent variables that best predicted re-incarceration due to technical violations.

#### **Results for Model 4**

In Model 4, the outcome or dependent variable is defined as '1' for re-incarceration due to a technical violation and '0' for re-incarceration due to a subsequent non-technical conviction. The analysis determined that three of the 51 independent variables included in the model were significant predictors of parole violations, i.e. failure to complete sex offender treatment

programs, the use of digital penetration at the time of the sexual offense, and previous parole violations. Table 6 lists the significant variables, coefficients, and standardized coefficients.

The overall percentage predicted correctly by the model is 72.3. The prediction is somewhat better for paroled inmates who returned for technical violations than for those who returned for more serious crimes. Table 7 shows the difference in the two groups. Former inmates who returned for technical violations were predicted correctly in 74.8 percent of cases while non-technical returnees were predicted correctly in 63.6% of cases.

Table 8 shows the odds ratios of recidivism for technical violations for each of the three significant variables along with 95% confidence intervals. First, former inmates who failed to complete the sex-offender treatment program were 3.55 times more likely to return to prison than those who did complete the sex-offender treatment program. Second, inmates who digitally penetrated their victim at the time of the sexual offense were 2.66 times more likely to recidivate. Third, parolees with a history of parole violations were 4.03 times more likely to be re-incarcerated than parolees without a history of parole violations.

## **Discussion**

The relationship between age and crime has been well documented by prior research (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Steffensmeier & Streifel, 1991; Kercher, 1987; Glick, 2005, Cohen & Land, 1987; Conklin, 2007). In general, the results of studies such as this show that recidivism decreases with age. The results of this study along with the findings of other researchers, suggest that the recidivistic activity of sex offenders is no exception. A meta-analytic study conducted by Hanson and Bussiere (1998) that incorporated 22 studies

concluded that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between age of the offender and the likelihood of occurrence of recidivism.

Another meta-analysis study conducted by Hanson (2002) on the relationship between recidivism and age of sex offenders found that “recidivism declined steadily with age” and assumed a “linear” relationship. Hanson suggested that this desistence could be attributed to (1) a decrease in sexual interest and (2) a decline in opportunity for sexual encounters.

One of the largest studies conducted on this matter was done by Langan et al. (2003) in which the recidivistic patterns of approximately 9,700 releases from U.S. prisons were tracked for a three year period of time following release. Results indicated that the downward trend identified by other studies did not start to occur until sometime after the age of 44.

While there seems to be wide consensus for the contention that sexual recidivism declines with age, the exact nature between these two variables continues to be explored. For example, some studies have focused on the importance of age at release versus age at time of first sexual offence (Barbaree et. al, 2005), and the age/recidivism connection as a function of offender typology (Prentky & Lee, 2007). Further research is needed to build on the knowledge already known about the age/recidivism relationship.

While prior criminal activity plays an important role in predicting the likelihood for sexual recidivism, results indicate that it is the history of technical violations that is related to recidivism by sex offenders. This is a somewhat surprising finding in view of the fact that 11 measures of recidivism were examined. The underlying assumption of this analysis is that sex offenders have extensive criminal histories prior to reoffending and that sex offenses are but one manifestation of this history. A number of studies on sex offender recidivism suggest the need to

reexamine this assumption. As pointed out by Fisher and Thornton, (1993) many sex offenses are “one-time incidents.” Viewed from this perspective, it is not untenable that the many variants of criminal history are not strong predictors of sex offender recidivism.

Our finding that offenders who “failed treatment” are at higher risk for reoffending than offenders who did not fail treatment reinforces the findings of studies conducted by Hanson and Bussiere (1998), Hout (1997), and Polizzi and MacKenzie (1999), that reached similar conclusions. This finding might go hand-in-hand with our finding that technical violations are an indicator of recidivism in that failure to comply with rules and conditions of release are an indicator of continued activity of sexual reoffending.

The finding that digital penetration is a significant predictor for offenders who return to prison because of technical violations is both curious and intriguing. While digital penetration might be assumed to be an expected part of behavioral foreplay leading up to intercourse, it’s unclear why the variable “intercourse” was not also a significant predictor.

In addition to being a significant predictor of re-incarceration for technical violations, the percent of digital penetration is different for criminal and technical returnees. Figure 3 contrasts these two groups and shows that some of the difference is related to the age of the victim of the initial offense.

One possible explanation for this finding is that digital penetration is used in lieu of intercourse when intercourse is not possible due to maturational limitations. This may be a plausible explanation of this finding in view of the fact that a large percentage of offenders in the sample committed offenses against children.

Previous studies on sex offender recidivism have failed to include this variable as part of



the various factors examined in relation to predicting sex offender behavior. At the very least, these findings warrant the need for additional research that would help shed light on the exact role that this variable plays as a valid predictor of recidivistic behavior.

Several recent high profile cases have resulted in an inordinate amount of attention on sex offender recidivism by both professionals and concerned citizens. Understandably, the public does not want to be put at risk from incorrigible sex offenders and expects the criminal justice system to hold such offenders accountable for their behavior. Each state requires sex offenders to register their whereabouts with law enforcement agencies in order to be placed on the internet so the public can easily identify them. Civil commitment of sex offenders following incarceration is used by several states and some politicians have called for extreme measures such as mandatory life sentences and castration for sex offenders regardless of their criminal histories.

### **Conclusion**

The frenzy surrounding sex offenders has spawned many assumptions about their behavior that are contrary to the findings of numerous empirical studies that demonstrate, among other factors, that sex offender recidivism is surprisingly low. The tendency to overlook these findings may be due in part to the methodological deficiencies and challenges faced by many of these studies. For example, Furby, Weinrott and Blackshaw (1989) note that “the methodological weaknesses and lack of uniformity are an almost inevitable result of the conditions under which most recidivism studies have been conducted.” They note that many studies on sex offender recidivism have been undertaken with the mandate of answering policy maker’s questions in an unrealistic amount of time and that many such studies have been hampered by data limitations, inadequate funding, and a lack of research expertise. Other researchers, such as Fisher and

Thornton (1993), argue that there is no consensus on how sex offender recidivism has been operationalized, and study findings encompass several definitions of recidivism such as rearrest, return to prison, reconviction for a felony offence, and reconviction for a felony sex offence. Methodological limitations such as these might be what prompted Quinsey (1984) to observe after reviewing recidivism studies on rapists that “the differences in recidivism across these studies is truly remarkable: clearly by selectively contemplating the various studies, one can conclude anything one wants” (p.101).

A noteworthy and unexpected finding of the present study is the variables that did not prove to be predictive of sex offender recidivism. The initial analysis included variables that have been alleged to have a long-standing association with criminal recidivism such as age of offender, prior involvement with pornography, sexually abused as a child, and number of prior arrests.

The demand that society should have certainty in predicting who will commit new sex offenses is unrealistic. Over 35 years of research indicates that the incidence of sex offender recidivism is not only low, but much lower as compared to many other criminal offenses. Acknowledging this, researchers must continue in their attempts to identify that small group of offenders who go on to become chronic recidivists and place the public at continued risk. It is hoped that this study points to some encouraging directions to be followed with this objective in mind.

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