Comparing criminal careers:
sex offenders versus non-sex offenders

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• Starting point: assumptions and stereotypes

• Objective: assess criminal career differences between SO and non-SO

• Data & methods

• Results

• Conclusions
Starting point: assumptions and misunderstandings
Widespread misconceptions and assumptions about sex offenders include:

- sex offenders are a **different, particular (even peculiar) group of offenders** as opposed to non-sex offenders

- sex offenders have a **high propensity towards recidivism**

- they repeat the same sex offence over and again (‘specialists’)

- they are **irredeemable** offenders, incorrigibles, who will continue with their offence behaviour until it becomes impossible to them
Criminal careers: a comparison of dimensions

A **criminal career** = ‘the characterization of the longitudinal sequence of crimes committed by an individual offender’ (cfr. Blumstein et al., 1986: 12)

Dimensions / parameters of a criminal career:

- Participation
- Onset
- Termination
- Duration
- Frequency
RQ

• Are the criminal careers of sex offenders different in terms of criminal career parameters/dimensions (e.g. onset,...) in comparison with non-sex offenders?

• Are the criminal careers of sex offenders different from the criminal careers of non-sex offenders? (frequency-based GBTM)

• Comparison of national data Belgium and the Netherlands: similar findings of comparison?
3. Data

-National datasets for Belgium and the Netherlands

**Belgium**: All persons convicted in **1995** (*n* = **136,530**)

**The Netherlands**: All persons convicted in **1997** (*n* = **153,252**)

Datasets include **all prior convictions** and have **long-follow up periods** (B: up to end of 2013; N: up to 2016)

-Sex offender = a person whose **index offence** (i.e. the offence that led to the conviction in 1995 (B) or 1997 (N)) is or includes a sex offence
3. Data

**Conviction data**: advantages and disadvantages, differences between penal codes,...

Challenges in **comparing the data sets**
(adapting the datasets to the ‘lowest common denominator’ wherever necessary)

Creation of common variables (e.g. based on Dutch CBS-based categories, offence categories)

Importance of **patterns** (not per se of concrete numbers)
3. Data

-selection of all sex offenders and a 10% sample of non-sex offenders

BS: n = 885; BNS: n = 13,380

NS*: n = 963; NNS: n = 7,716

(*due to adaptation to Belgian data set, Dutch sample < 10%)

-Methods: descriptive analyses and GBTM (frequency-based)
Results

Focus here primarily on Belgian results

Showcasing career parameters

Descriptive synthesis for the Netherlands

GBTM SO-NSO Belgium and the Netherlands
Onset

Sex offenders (n = 882; 3 miss.)
Median age onset: 24 years
SD : 12,561
Min: 12
Max: 88

non-sex offenders (n = 13254; 126 miss.)
median age onset: 26 years
SD : 12,813
Min: 12
Max: 88

T-test: significant difference
Year first conviction

SO: range between 1937 and 1995  
NSO: range between 1945 and 1995
Year last conviction

SO: range between 1995 and 2013
NSO: range between 1995 and 2013
Duration of the criminal career

SO: $n = 885$
Median duration: 12 years
SD: 11.59
Min: 0
Max: 63 years

T-test: significant difference

NSO: $n = 13380$
Median duration: 9 years
SD: 10.65
Min: 0
Max: 63
SO: n = 885
Median n convictions: 4
SD: 9,1
Min: 1
Max: 70 (max sex off: 23, median: 1)

NSO: n = 13380
median n conv: 3
SD: 8,58
min: 1
max: 119 (132 sex off after 95)

T-test: significant difference
Specialization (among sex offenders)

Ratio sex-related convictions / total convictions

N = 823 (62 miss.)
Median of specialization: 44,44%

When > 1 conviction (n = 611; 62 miss.)
Median of specialization: 28,57%

When > 5 convictions (n = 280; 48 miss.)
Median of specialization: 12,5%

When > 10 convictions (n = 140; 35 miss.)
Median of specialization: 8,33%
### Preliminary results: the Netherlands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX OFFENDERS</th>
<th>N = 963 (99.2% men); 138 (14.33%) deceased prior to the end of the follow-up period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career dimension</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onset</td>
<td>11-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year first conviction</td>
<td>1954-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age last conviction (termination)</td>
<td>33-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>19-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency*</td>
<td>3-182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency**</td>
<td>1-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq of sex offences*</td>
<td>1-56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON-SEX OFFENDERS</th>
<th>N = 7716 (89.9% men); 988 (12.8%) deceased prior to the end of the follow-up period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career dimension</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onset</td>
<td>8-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year first conviction</td>
<td>1930-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age last conviction (termination)</td>
<td>19-101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>2-61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency *</td>
<td>3-291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency**</td>
<td>1-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq of sex offences* (after 1997)</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 SO: n = 103; 2 SO: n = 13; 3 SO: n = 3; 4 SO: n = 4; 5 SO: n = 5
Frequency-based GBTM comparison SO-NSO

B: SO

B: NSO
GBTM SO-NSO – Belgium and the Netherlands

SO

NSO

B

N

B

N

age

age

0 2 4 6 8

0 2 4 6 8

1 14.2% 2 64.2%

1 9.8% 2 66.1%

1 12.4% 2 67.6%

1 9.2% 2 68.5%

3 16.1% 4 5.5%

3 17.1% 4 5.7%

3 15.3% 4 4.8%

3 15.3% 4 4.8%
Intermediate conclusions

• Criminal career **dimensions** of sex offenders and non-sex offenders show **similar patterns** (substantive vs. statistical).

• Based on the **GBTM**, a **remarkable similarity** across the 4 trajectories in the 4 graphs (but mind the differences too).

• **Differences between B – N are to some extend related to the data** (comparisons are difficult): **SO and NSO are very similar per country**, but differences between countries.

• Perhaps we should focus on **sex offending** rather than sex offenders.
Further analyses are underway

Any thoughts or ideas are very welcome