An international focus on sex offender recidivism: a review of the evidence from various longitudinal studies and the “effects” sex offender registration and notification (SORN) policies

Wesley G. Jennings, Ph.D.
Outline of Presentation

- Brief Review of Literature on Sex Offender Continuity

- Studies #1 & #2: Continuity Evidence from a Small Rural Town (Racine, Wisconsin, USA) and a Large Urban City (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA)

- Study #3: Continuity Evidence from London (UK)

- Study #4: Megan’s Law (SORN) 20th Anniversary Study (New Jersey, USA)

- Summarize the Findings from the Four Studies

- Brief Discussion of the Policy Implications & Directions for Future Research
Sex Offender Assumptions that are Inherent in Polices and Legislation (Particularly in the USA)

- Assumption #1: “Sex Offenders have High Rates of Recidivism”
- Assumption #2: “Sex Offenders are Uniquely Dangerous”
- Assumption #3: “Sex Offenders are Specialists”
The Early Continuity Studies

(1) Over half of adult sex offenders reported juvenile sex offending

(2) Sipe et al. (1988)—9.7% continuity

(3) Rubinstein et al. (1993)—37% continuity

(4) Vandiver (2006)—4.0% continuity
Limitations of Earlier Sex Offender Research

(1) highly select samples

(2) lacked a comparison group

(3) short follow-up periods

(4) retrospective
Continuity Evidence from a Small Rural Town (Racine, Wisconsin, USA) and a Large Urban City (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA)


### Racine, Wisconsin vs. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racine, Wisconsin, USA</th>
<th>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Small Rural Town)</td>
<td>(Large Urban City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small and rural Midwestern city</td>
<td>large metropolitan and urban city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 6,000 boys and girls</td>
<td>Approximately 27,000 boys and girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low offending rates</td>
<td>high offending rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racially homogenous (predominantly white)</td>
<td>racial heterogeneity (predominantly minorities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Juvenile Sex Offending Prevalence and Sex Offending Recidivism in Adolescence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Racine, Wisconsin, USA (Small Rural Town)</th>
<th>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (Large Urban City)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juvenile Sex Offending Prevalence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
<td>&lt;2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Juvenile Sex Offending Recidivism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>&lt;25%</td>
<td>&lt;15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Adult Sex Offending Prevalence and Sex Offending Continuity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Racine, Wisconsin, USA (Small Rural Town)</th>
<th>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (Large Urban City)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Sex Offending Prevalence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0.005%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Offending Continuity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuity Evidence from London (UK)

Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) Data

-Prospective longitudinal survey

-411 South London males

-First contacted in 1961/62 when aged 8-9

-Most subjects were white (97%) and of British origin
Proportion of Sex and Non-Sex Offense Convictions among CSDD Males
## A Comparison of General and Sex Offending Criminal Career Information among CSDD Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Offending Criminal Careers</th>
<th>Sex Offending Criminal Careers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevalence</strong></td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuity (offense &lt;17 and offense 18+)</strong></td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Should We Require Juveniles to Register as Sex Offenders?

(1) The prevalence of juvenile sex offending is VERY low

(2) The prevalence of sex recidivism among juvenile sex offenders is low (Racine, Wisconsin & Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

(3) Sex offending continuity rates are VERY low (roughly 10% or less)

(4) More effective to register robbers and motor vehicle thieves
The Effects of Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) Policies in the US: The New Jersey Experience

Sex Offender Registry in New Jersey
## Sex Offender Registry in New Jersey

### Found 6 offenders in 5 locations

**Radius:** 0.26 miles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Alert</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Zip</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>View Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#">View Details</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#">View Details</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#">View Details</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#">View Details</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="#">View Details</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sex Offender Registry in New Jersey

**Offender Search: Offender Details**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Vehicles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
<td>Registration #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level: Tier 2 - Moderate Risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status: Inactive-Incarcerated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical Description**

- **Age:** 34 (DOB: 01/23/1984)
- **Height:** 5'10"
- **Sex:** M
- **Weight:** 175lbs
- **Race:** Black
- **Hair:** Black
- **Scars/Tattoos:** Tattoo on R_Shoulder - Front (HANDGUN)

**Address**

- **View Map**

**Offenses**

- **Description:** 14-2 - AGGRAVATED SEXUAL ASSAULT
- **Date Convicted:** 04/08/2004
- **Conviction Details:**
- **County of Conviction:**

**Comments**

The individual named in this notification is a convicted sex offender. As required by New Jersey Megan's Law, you have received this notification from law enforcement because this individual resides in your area. Use this information to assist you in protecting your family, employees, and those you supervise. This information is made available for the purpose of protecting the public. Anyone who uses this information to commit a criminal act against another person is subject to criminal prosecution. Additional information is available online at: [www.njsp.org](http://www.njsp.org).
Sex Offender Registry in New Jersey
New Jersey Megan’s Law 20th Anniversary Study

- **Data**
  - Random Samples of Pre-SORN (n=275) and Post-SORN (n=275) Sex Offenders
  - Arrests Records

- **Sample**
  - 50.5% White; Average Age was 38

- **Analysis Plan**
  - Sex Recidivism Comparisons
  - General Recidivism Comparisons
  - Multivariate Analysis of Risk Factors Associated with Sex and General Recidivism
Bivariate Results: No Significant Difference in the Prevalence of Sex Recidivism

Bar chart showing the percent re-arrested for Pre-SORN and Post-SORN sex offenders.
Bivariate Results: No Significant Difference in the Prevalence of General Recidivism
Multivariate Results: Variability in the Risk Factors associated with Recidivism; No SORN Effect

Predictors of Sexual Recidivism

1. Age:
   (OR= 0.95, CI= [0.92-0.98], p< .001)

2. Number of Sexual Victims:
   (OR= 1.37, CI= [1.12-1.68], p< .01)

3. Prior Sexual Offense
   (OR= 2.29, CI= [1.28-4.09], p= .01)

SORN EFFECT:
(OR= 0.54, CI= [0.69-2.04], p= .54)

Predictors of General Recidivism

1. African American
   (OR= 2.94, CI= [1.53-5.63], p< .001)

2. Drug Abuse Problems
   (OR= 2.58, CI= [1.68-3.97], p< .001)

3. Prior Non-Sexual Offense
   (OR= 2.38, CI= [1.56-3.63], p< .001)

4. Average Length of Follow-Up
   (OR= 1.14, CI= [1.01-1.28], p= .04)

SORN EFFECT:
(OR= 1.88, CI= [0.85-4.14], p= .12)
Summary of Results

-Sex Offending Continuity Prevalence
  - Racine, Wisconsin, USA (STUDY #1)
    • MALES= 8.5%
    • FEMALES= 10.3%
  - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (STUDY #2)
    • MALES= 8.3%
    • FEMALES= 0.0%
  - London, UK (STUDY #3)
    • 0%

-SORN Effects on Sex Recidivism Prevalence (NO SORN EFFECT; New Jersey, USA; STUDY #4)

-SORN Effects on General Recidivism Prevalence (NO SORN EFFECT; New Jersey, USA; STUDY #4)

-Different Risk Factors Predict Sex and General Recidivism, USA; STUDY #4)
Policy Implications & Directions for Future Research

Policy Implications

– Exclude juvenile sex offenders from the registries
– Opportunities for Removal from Registry (Time-Out)
– Re-Entry Assistance

Directions for Future Research

– Replicate
– Compare Results with Non-Sex Offenders on Parole/Probation
Questions?

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