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## From the Editor

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Dear Members,

As we move forward in our mission to contribute to criminal justice scholarship, we proudly introduce our second edition of the year.

In this issue we aspire to provide an interesting cross-section of criminal justice scholarship. In “The Role of the Family in Crime and Delinquency: Evidence from Prior Quantitative Reviews” the authors interpret the results of 26 relevant meta-analyses published during 1984-2005 on the relationship between family factors and criminal behavior. The authors posit that the meta-analyses fall into five general categories, and each are discussed in detail. In “An Exploration of the Sex Offender Specialization and Violence Nexus” the authors explore the widely accepted ideals pertaining to sex offender recidivism. The conventional wisdom holds that sex offenders recidivate at higher rates than other offenders and that sex offenders specialize in purely sexual crimes. This study assesses the accuracy of these perceptions through an analysis of the non-sex crimes of a sample of 229 currently incarcerated registered sex offenders in Kentucky. In “Victim Services Delivery: A Comparison of Rural and Urban Communities” the authors investigate the existing disparities in victim services between urban and rural communities by examining 379 victim service organizations in the State of Texas. It is an ambitious undertaking with interesting results. Finally, in “Race and the Sentencing of Drug Offenders: An Examination of the Focal Concerns Perspective” the author scrutinizes how sentencing decisions are influenced by the three components of the focal concerns perspective. The results are interesting and suggest that several factors predicted by the focal concerns perspective to impact judges’ decisions did have a significant impact on sentence outcomes.



As always, the future success of the Journal is inextricably tied to the willingness of our members to actively participate in the process of publishing the Journal. I am pleased to report that many members have volunteered to review manuscripts and assist in determining publication worthiness. However, we still need more help. If you can review a manuscript, please email [swjcz@utsa.edu](mailto:swjcz@utsa.edu) and express your desire to become a reviewer for the Journal.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roger Enriquez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roger Enriquez, J.D.

Editor, Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice

## **The Role of the Family in Crime and Delinquency: Evidence from Prior Quantitative Reviews**

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### *Abstract*

*There has been a large amount of research bearing, in some way, on the relationship between family factors and criminal behavior. Not surprisingly, a large number of quantitative reviews—or meta-analyses—have tried to take this literature into account. Our goal was to ascertain the relative strength and consistency of family factors as a predictor and as a target for delinquency and crime prevention treatment. This paper describes the results of a systematic search for these meta-analyses to meet those goals. Using a variety of methods, we find 26 relevant meta-analyses published in English between 1984 and 2005. These meta-analyses fell into five general categories: (1) meta-analyses of longitudinal studies; (2) meta-analyses of offender recidivism prediction studies; (3) meta-analyses of specific family factors and crime; (4) meta-analyses of family-based interventions; and (5) broader reviews that included a breakdown for family-based strategies. These meta-analyses indicate a smaller but non-trivial role for family factors in the onset of delinquency and the continuation of offending as adults. Moreover, particular family-based treatment programs appear to reduce subsequent offending behavior.*

**Key Words:** family factors, parental supervision, crime, parental attitudes toward violence

## INTRODUCTION

Policymakers, practitioners, citizens, and researchers often consider the family a critical ingredient in a child's subsequent involvement in crime (e.g., Loeber & Loeber-Stouthammer, 1986). Researchers have undertaken a number of investigations to better understand the relationship between various family factors and crime. For example, factors studied in criminological research include the role of maternal deprivation, whether a child has criminal parents, the severity of discipline administered to a child, parental neglect and abuse, inadequate parental supervision, domestic violence, age of parents at time of child's birth, parental attitudes toward violence, parental drug use, parent history of mental illness, birth order, size of the family, parent education and socioeconomic status, and parent/child separation (e.g., Loeber and Loeber-Stouthammer, 1986).

A negative family characteristic such as poor parental supervision of children is often studied as a risk factor for future delinquency or crime, and children who come from such homes are believed to be at greater risk or are more likely to commit offenses than children who do not. When the reverse occurs—such as a child growing up in a loving and supportive home—researchers often refer to these variables as “protective” factors, as they promote a child's resiliency or provide protective barriers against the onset of criminal involvement—even in the light of adverse conditions (e.g., Derzon, 2005). It is also likely that family factors interact with other factors in a complex relationship difficult for researchers to tease out (e.g., Derzon, 2005).

There are a number of studies examining the role of the family and other social, psychological, genetic, and environmental factors on crime. For example, there are longitudinal studies in which large cohorts of children are followed for years, with some becoming criminal and others remaining law-abiding. Such studies provide a fertile ground for analyzing and comparing the factors that predict the onset of criminal behavior (e.g., Farrington, 1979). Another set of studies follows a group of already identified offenders who have been released from prison, or have completed their probation or parole term. In any set of already identified offenders, some will become recidivist and others will not. Again, it provides opportunity to analyze the factors that are most persuasive in these already identified offenders becoming recidivist or not (e.g., Gottfredson and Tonry, 1997).

The enormity of the task in bringing together all of the primary studies that bear on the family-crime relationship, and to adequately identify, retrieve, code, analyze, and summarize this potentially large research base, would certainly require considerable research funding. Is there a more cost-effective way of getting a picture of what this literature tells us?

Fortunately, there have been a number of meta-analyses of longitudinal and predictor studies that are relevant to better understanding the influence of family factors in criminal behavior. In addition, a number of meta-analyses have also been reported that directly assess the effectiveness of family-based interventions in reducing subsequent delinquent or criminal behavior, either specifically examining evaluations of family-based treatment or comparing the results for such programs with other strategies. Finally, meta-analyses have been reported that assess the evidence for one family factor and subsequent criminality. These also bear in some way on the interests and concerns of policymakers, practitioners, citizens, and researchers in further understanding the role of the family in crime.

This paper brings together those reviews that bear specifically on the family-crime relationship. Essentially, we conducted a systematic review of meta-analyses (what one colleague said we should call a “systematic review squared”!). Because meta-analyses involve quantitative analyses of the impact of programs or the relationship between variables, we can use such reports to examine the impact of family factors on crime and delinquency more closely, and to compare it with the estimated effect of other factors, such as education.

Meta-analyses (and systematic reviews in general), therefore, provide a type of “criminological intelligence” that should be mined to determine what is already there, what still needs to be known, and how future research should proceed (e.g., Petrosino, Kiff, & Lavenberg, 2006). Although using reviews in this way is not common in criminal justice, there is some precedent for doing so. In 2000, when the UK National Health Service wanted to determine the evidence for its broad health agenda, it asked researchers to identify systematic reviews relevant to the paper’s recommendations (including such areas as crime and illicit drug and alcohol use, see Contributors to the Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations, 2000). In other examples, Palmer (1994), Losel (1995), and Lipsey and Cullen (2007) have summarized general offender rehabilitation meta-analyses and reviews to glean lessons.

The meta-analyses we gathered fell into five general categories: (1) meta-analyses of longitudinal studies; (2) meta-analyses of offender recidivism prediction studies; (3) meta-analyses of specific family factors and crime; (4) meta-analyses of family-based interventions; and (5) broader reviews that included a breakdown for family-based strategies. We did not attempt to quantitatively synthesize these reviews in some type of “meta-meta-analysis,” but instead describe them narratively in the text and summarize them in tables.

We have two goals in this paper. First, by examining meta-analyses of predictors, we are able to provide information about the size and consistency of the correlation between family factors and crime, as well as some sense of its relative importance compared to other measured predictors. Second, by examining meta-analyses of family-based treatment programs, we also provide information about the size and consistency of effects for programs that focus on family factors, and some sense of the relative importance compared to other intervention effects.

## METHODOLOGY

For this paper, we used systematic review methods to identify relevant syntheses. Our eligibility criteria were:

- *The review had to be a meta-analysis or include quantitative outcomes of effect size.* This permitted us to compare effects across different factors and to summarize our findings across meta-analyses. Our focus on meta-analysis was a trade-off, as we lost some of the rich descriptive information and suggestive findings reported in the narrative syntheses. There were several good systematic reviews that were also excluded because they found so few studies or such a diverse sample that they did not attempt to summarize their findings quantitatively. Reviews that used vote-counting or other summary techniques and did not attempt to create an “effect size” for the effect of family characteristics were also excluded (e.g., Chan, et al., 2004; Delsol & Margolin, 2004; Graves, Openshaw, Ascione, & Erickson, 1996).

- *The meta-analysis had to report at least one effect size for at least one family factor.* We excluded reviews of longitudinal studies that did not include some breakdown either by family factors (e.g., Pajer, 1998) or, in the case of broader meta-analyses of “what works,” did not include a breakdown for family-based programs.
- *The meta-analysis had to include outcomes of delinquent or criminal behavior.* We focused the review on meta-analyses that included crime and delinquency outcomes. To make the searches and the review more manageable, we excluded meta-analyses of illegal drug use, child abuse/neglect, or aggressive or anti-social child conduct.
- *The meta-analysis had to provide some information about study eligibility criteria and search methods.* These did not have to be overly detailed, but they had to provide some information on how the sample of studies was put together.
- *The meta-analysis must be published in an academic journal, book, or as an easily accessible [government, quasi-government, foundation, research firm] agency report.* We did not try to retrieve the unpublished literature of conference papers, technical reports, academic theses, or other documents. Only if we came across such a report in the course of our searches, or an author generously sent it to us, did we include it.
- *The meta-analysis was published in the relatively recent time frame of 1985-2005.* Given that a criminological meta-analysis was not reported in a journal until 1985 (e.g., Garrett, 1985), we believed this time frame would cover all eligible reports.
- *The meta-analysis must be available in English.* We were unable to search for and translate reviews in other languages.

We searched 44 electronic bibliographic databases for meta-analyses (Appendix 1).<sup>1</sup> One advantage to our search is that a large number of these databases include references to unpublished but important reports (e.g., *NCJRS, Criminal Justice Abstracts*).<sup>2</sup>

There were three major statistics used in meta-analyses gathered for this paper: (1) Pearson’s correlation coefficient ( $r$ ), the Phi coefficient ( $\phi$ ), and Cohen’s effect size ( $d$ ). Note that  $r$  is about half the size of  $d$  ( $r = .5d$ ) and  $\phi$  is comparable to  $r$ .<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this review of meta-analyses, we use  $r$  to enable us to compare across meta-analyses.

1. Our search terms varied depending on the type of database. For criminal justice-focused collections such as NCJRS and Criminal Justice Abstracts, we first identified reviews by using the following search terms: meta-analy\* (retrieves meta-analysis and meta-analytic), systematic review, empirical review, quantitative review, research review, and research synthesis. When searching databases outside the field of criminology or including a broader scope of documents (e.g., PsycINFO or Sociofile), we used a combination of the review search terms above with the following identifiers for criminality: Aggress\* (retrieves aggression, aggressive), antisocial, crim\* (retrieves crime, criminal, criminological, criminals, criminogenic, criminality), delinq\* (retrieves delinquent, delinquents, delinquency), offen\* (retrieves offense, offenses, offender, offenders, offending), and violen\* (retrieves violence, violent). We also augmented these searches with other terms, including family factors, developmental, onset, and desist in combination with terms above.

2. Note, however, that a very important resource—Dissertation Abstracts International—was excluded because of the cost in accessing theses.

3. A phi correlation for two binary variables will be identical to a Pearson correlation coefficient for two binary variables (see Welkowitz, et al. 1982, p. 286).

## FINDINGS

Our search methods resulted in several hundred citations to potentially eligible review articles. We screened these citations and abstracts against our eligibility criteria, resulting in a final sample of 26 eligible meta-analyses published between 1985-2005. We briskly describe these meta-analyses below, for each of the five major categories.<sup>4</sup>

### **Meta-analyses of risk factors for onset of delinquency and crime**

We identified four meta-analyses of longitudinal studies following the same *cohort* of individuals from youth (even from birth) to adulthood. By following individuals over the “life course” and repeating measurements at various time intervals, such longitudinal studies can identify and measure factors that are present prior to the onset of crime.

Lipsey and Derzon (1998) sought to determine the factors that predict violence in persons age 15-25. To be eligible for their meta-analysis, each study had to: (1) have a design in which measurements were taken about the same individuals at two or more time periods (and provide enough information to allow for reliable inference of age of the participants at the time of measurements); (2) provide quantifiable outcomes on serious or violent offending; (3) not be an evaluation of intervention effectiveness; and (4) be conducted in a Western economy nation (e.g., U.S., U.K.) and be reported in English. They located 66 reports describing 34 distinct longitudinal studies; these included a total of 793 distinct effects. Lipsey and Derzon used statistical procedures to control for the influence of factors relevant to the methodology or characteristics of the studies or samples, and converted outcomes to Pearson's *r*. Lipsey and Derzon compared risk factors for two different age groups: those present in children 6-11 and those for children 12-14. Table 1 presents the results separately, as Lipsey and Derzon do, for these two age categories.

For the 68 studies relevant to ages 6-11, Lipsey and Derzon report on the strength of 18 different predictors, including five family factors. The average correlation across all 18 predictors is .17, ranging from .04 to .38. The average across the five family factor correlations is .12, with only one (having anti-social parents) above the average correlation for all predictors (.23). For the 87 studies that had samples of juveniles ages 12-14, they report on 19 predictors, with correlations ranging from .04-.39, with an average of .16. Again, five family factors were studied, with an average correlation of .12. Two family factors had slightly higher correlations than the average across all predictors: poor parent-child relations (.19) and having anti-social parents (.16).

Simourd and Andrews (1994) collected studies of risk factors in samples that included both male and female participants. They found 60 studies (and 464 correlations) that looked at the impact of gender separately on risk factors for delinquency. Table 1 [next page] also presents the findings for males and females separately. For both males and females, Simourd and Andrews report on eight predictors and two family factors. They found the correlations for females mirrored those for males. The “poor parent-child relations” variable is the only one above the mean across all predictors, with a correlation of .20 with onset for females and .22

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4. Note that, with the exception of Table 2, we do not specifically report the sample size of studies (or effects) that the correlation between family factor and crime is based on.

TABLE 1. PREDICTORS OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY ONSET IN LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

	L & D (1998) Ages 6-11	L&D (1998) Ages 12-14	S & A (1994) Females	S & A (1994) Males	H&P (2002) Females
<i>Total N of studies in meta-analysis</i>	68 Studies	87Studies	60 Studies	60 Studies	97 Effect Sizes (not studies)
<i>Number of predictors examined</i>	18	19	8	8	13
<i>Number of family factor predictors examined</i>	5	5	2	2	2
<i>Largest correlation reported</i>	.38 (General Criminal Offending)	.39 (Social Ties)	.39 (anti-social peers or attitudes)	.40 (anti-social peers or attitudes)	.53 (anti-social peers)
<i>Lowest correlation reported</i>	.04 (Anti-Social Peers/ Attitudes)	.04 (Ethnicity)	.07 (family structure/parental problems; lower social class)	.06 ((lower social class)	.03 (lower social class)
<i>Mean correlation for all predictors</i>	.17	.16	.20	.21	.20
<i>Mean correlation for family factors predictors only (Range)</i>	.12 (.07-.23)	.12 (.08-.19)	.14 (.07-.20)	.16 (.09-.22)	.19
<i>Family factor correlations above mean correlation for all predictors</i>	1 Anti- Social Parents (.23)	2 Poor Parent-Child Relations (.19) Anti-Social Parents (.16)	1 Poor parent-child relations (.20)	1 Poor parent-child relations (.22)	1 Prior history of child or sexual abuse (.21)
<i>Family factor correlations below mean correlation for all predictors</i>	4 Poor Parent-child relationships (.15) Other family issues (.12) Broken homes (.09) Abusive parents (.07)	3 Broken homes (.10) Abusive parents (.09) Other family characteristics (.08)	1 Family structure/parental problems (.07)	1 Family structure/parental problems (.09)	1 Family relationships (.17)

L&amp;D (1998) = Lipsey and Derzon (1998)

S&amp;A (1994) = Simourd and Andrews (1994)

H&amp;P (2002) = Hubbard and Pratt (2002)

for males. Family structure (e.g., whether it was an intact family or broken home) and parental problems had a correlation of .07 for females and .09 for males.

Hubbard and Pratt (2002) also examined predictors of delinquency for girls, and whether these variables had a different relationship than those generally reported for males. They found 97 effect size estimates (representing 5,981 females). They converted the statistical information in each study to correlation coefficients. They reported on 13 predictors, ranging from .03-.52 and averaging .20. Two could be considered family factors (with a mean correlation across the two family factors of .19). Child/sexual abuse (which largely occurs within the family) had a correlation of .21 with onset. The correlation of “family relationships” with offending was .17 across these correlations. Although the unit of analysis in this meta-analysis was the correlation and not the study, most of the correlations were still based on very small samples.

Derzon (2005) drew on an updated database (that began with the Lipsey and Derzon, 1998 collection), to conduct a meta-analysis examining the predictive strength of 21 different family factors on problem behavior, aggression, criminal behavior, or violence (he includes residential mobility and urban housing as family factors). He finds 233 reports on 119 distinct longitudinal studies reporting 3,124 predictive effects. Like Lipsey and Derzon (1998), Derzon used sophisticated statistical methods to rule out or control for methods or other characteristics of the studies so that the relationship of family factors and antisocial behavior could be better understood. Because Derzon (2005) does not report, in these particular documents, the breakdown for non-family predictors, we present his findings in a separate table. Table 2 [next page] presents the results of this meta-analysis on criminal behavior only, and does not include Derzon’s other meta-analytic outcomes of aggression and problem behavior (such meta-analyses would not have been included in our paper). We also exclude violence, as that would have been subsumed by the criminal behavior outcomes.

As Table 2 indicates, the 21 family factors studied by Derzon had an average correlation of .15 with the onset of crime, ranging from .02 for parent psychopathology to .30 for low parental education and expectations. These estimates appear quite consistent with those reported in the earlier meta-analyses reported in Table 1. Both of these family factors, it should be noted, are based on very small numbers of studies (4 for parent psychopathology and just 1 study representing low parental education/expectations).

### **Meta-analyses of studies examining predictors of adult or juvenile offender recidivism**

We identified five meta-analyses of studies that examine what factors predict whether released offenders will recidivate. The five predictor meta-analyses span a wide group of offenders, including adult felons, mentally disordered offenders, sex offenders, and juvenile offenders.

Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) reviewed studies examining predictor variables on adult offender recidivism. Their eligibility criteria were: (1) studies must have collected data on the offender prior to recording criminal outcome measures, with a minimum six-month follow-up (the longest follow-up was used if multiple time intervals were reported); (2) treatment follow-up studies were not included; (3) criminal outcome measure of recidivism had to be recorded for persons 18 and older; (4) the criminal outcome measure had to have a “no-recidivism” category (i.e., studies using “more versus less recidivism” were not included); and (5) the study had to report statistical information that could be used in meta-analysis.

Gendreau and his colleagues (1996) found 131 studies with 1,141 correlations. They make a distinction between static and dynamic predictors. Static predictors are fixed and not amendable by rehabilitation or other intervention (e.g., age). Dynamic predictors are potentially alterable by intervention (e.g., social achievement).

**TABLE 2. SPECIFIC FAMILY FACTOR PREDICTORS OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY ONSET IN LONGITUDINAL STUDIES (DERZON 2005)**

	N of Studies	N of Participants	Correlation
Broken Home	25	33,677	.10
Child rearing skills	13	4,147	.26
Discipline	9	4,201	.17
Family SES (socioeconomic status)	46	133,525	.13
Family size	9	21,296	.11
Family stress	10	6,458	.21
Foster care	5	2,845	.14
Home discord and stability	11	3,605	.26
Maltreated as a child	8	2,950	.21
Other family deviance	9	2,847	.19
Parent anti-social behavior	11	15,645	.15
Parent education and expectations	3	11,415	.30
Parent psychopathology	4	5,368	.02
Parent use & tolerate ATOD	1	632	.08
Residential mobility	3	1,650	.08
Separated from parents	2	749	.08
Supervision & involvement	10	4,075	.06
Unwanted pregnancy	5	21,256	.10
Urban housing	9	14,705	.13
Warmth & relationship	22	8,021	.18
Young parents	4	12,553	.08
AVERAGE			.15

Gendreau et al. report on 18 domains of predictors, ranging from .05 for SES and personal distress to .30 for the correlation between risk scale scores and offending.<sup>5</sup> The average correlation across all domains was .13; for family factors it was .10. Only one family factor (birth family child rearing practices) was above the overall average correlation (.13); two were below—birth family structure (.09) and birth family criminality (.07).

Bonta and his colleagues (1998) examined the influence of a wide range of factors on general criminal recidivism or violent recidivism in mentally disordered offenders. They considered recidivism either a new criminal justice offense or re-hospitalization for the criminal act.

5. Correlations are only provided in the article for the 18 larger predictor domains and not for the individual variables that comprise those larger domains.

They identified studies that: (1) were published or unpublished from 1959 to 1995; (2) were written in English; (3) used a longitudinal research design; and (4) reported sufficient information for meta-analysis. Approximately 64 studies reporting 774 correlations were identified. They computed a weighted correlation coefficient, and they conducted analyses to isolate the influence of studies with extreme values (i.e., outliers). They reported their results across four major predictor domains: personal demographics, criminal history, deviant lifestyle-history, and clinical factors.

Bonta et al. report on 35 correlations ranging from 0 (for SES) to .39 (for objective risk assessment), with an average correlation of .10. Only two family factors were examined as correlations with criminal offending in this sample of mentally disordered offenders: a history of family problems (.10) and being single (.07).

Cottle, Lee, and Hielbrun (2001) focused on research literature published 1983-2000, to determine what factors predicted juvenile offender recidivism. They included studies in their meta-analysis that: 1) involved juveniles ages 12-21; 2) included juveniles with at least one prior arrest; and 3) provided data on subsequent offending. Authors analyzed 22 studies and identified 30 predictor variables, with five that were family factors. Cottle and her colleagues converted raw statistics from each study into correlation coefficients.

The correlations in Cottle, et al. (2001) range from .01 for substance abuse to -.35 for age at first contact (the younger the child was at first contact, the more likely he was to be rearrested). The average correlation was .14. Two family factors had larger correlations than the average across all predictors: family problems (.23) and number of out-of-home placements (.18).

Focusing only on sex offenders, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2004) updated their earlier meta-analysis of recidivism prediction studies. Eligible studies were those that (1) clearly identified a sample of sex offenders; (2) examined recidivism after a period of time; and (3) provided sufficient statistical information permitting meta-analysis. They located 95 studies representing 31,000 sex offenders, and 1,974 predictive effects reported. The typical study involved a median follow-up period of five years. The average recidivism rate was 13.7% for sexual crimes, 14% for non-sexual violent recidivism, 25% for any violent, and 36.9% for any recidivism at all (violent or non-violent). Here we focus on the results for sexual recidivism.

They converted the difference between recidivating and non-recidivating groups into an effect size for use in the meta-analysis (Cohen's effect size  $d$ , weighted by sample size), which we converted into correlation coefficients. They examined seven domains of predictors with sexual offending, ranging from .01 (general psychology, clinical presentation) to .15 (sexual deviancy), with an average correlation of .07 across the larger domains. Those domains for sexual offending are actually comprised of 82 variables, including five family factors. The only family factor correlation that was above the average correlation across all predictors was separation from parents (.08).

Dowden and Brown (2002) investigated the predictive strength of substance abuse history and subsequent criminal recidivism. They included all studies that: (1) assessed substance abuse factor prior to recidivism; (2) provided sufficient statistical information to permit meta-analysis; and (3) included a recidivism and no-recidivism category. They located 45 studies and 116 effect sizes (they used Pearson's  $r$  as their effect size measure). Dowden and Brown (2002) also conducted analyses comparing results with extreme values or outliers, and without them.

TABLE 3. PREDICTORS OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY CONTINUATION IN RECIDIVISM STUDIES

	G, L & G (1996) Adult offenders	B, L & H (1998) Mentally disor- dered offenders	C, L & H (2001) Juvenile offenders	H & M-B (2004)	D&B (2002)
<i>Total N of studies in meta-analysis</i>	131 Studies	64 Studies	22 Studies	95 Studies	45
<i>Number of predictors examined</i>	18	35	30	82	5
<i>Number of family factor predictors examined</i>	3	2	5	5	1
<i>Largest correlation reported</i>	.30 (risk scales)	.39 (objective risk assessment)	-.35 (age at first contact)	.53 (unvalidated objective risk assessment scheme)	.22 (alcohol drug problem)
<i>Lowest correlation reported</i>	.05 (SES; personal distress)	0 (SES)	.01 (substance abuse)	.01 (denial of sexual crime)	-.02 (substance abuse charge)
<i>Mean correlation for all predictors</i>	.13	.10	.14	.07	.12
<i>Mean correlation for family factors predictors only (Range)</i>	.10	.09	.12	.04	.13
<i>Family factor correlations above mean correlation for all predictors</i>	1 Birth family rearing practices (.13)	1 Family problems (.10)	2 Family problems (.23) Number of out-of-home placements (.18)	1 Separation from parents (.08)	1 Parental substance abuse (.13)
<i>Family factor correlations below mean correlation for all predictors</i>	2 Birth family structure (.09) Birth family criminality (.07)	1 Single marital status (.07)	3 Living with single parent (.07) SES (.07) Parent pathology (.07)	4 Childhood neglect (0) Childhood sexual abuse (.01) Negative relation with father (.03) Negative relation with mother (.05)	0

G, L & G (1996) = Gendreau, Little & Goggin (1996)

B, L & H (1998) = Bonta, Law and Hanson (1998)

C, L & H (2001) = Cottle, Lee and Heilbrun (2001)

H & M-B (2004) = Hanson & Morton-Bourgon (2004)

D&B (2002) = Dowden & Brown (2002)

They report on five predictors, ranging from a correlation of  $-.02$  (any substance abuse criminal charge) to  $.22$  (any alcohol or drug abuse), with an average of  $.12$ . The correlation for the only family factor, “parental substance abuse,” was  $.13$ .

**Other meta-analyses of family factors and crime**

We also included a number of meta-analyses that investigated the role of a particular family factor and subsequent criminal outcome. Table 4 provides the outcomes of these meta-analyses. For example, one of the most commonly accepted theories about violence is “intergenerational transmission.” The intergenerational transmission of violence refers to children growing up in abusive or violent homes, then becoming adult offenders who perpetrate abuse or violence. Stith and her colleagues (2000) examined the relationship between being abused—or witnessing domestic violence—in childhood, and later domestic violence perpetration or victimization. The authors found 39 studies published from 1978 to 1997, representing 12,981 individuals and 103 effect sizes (converted to Pearson’s  $r$ ). Overall, the relationship between childhood experience with violence and later spousal abuse perpetration is  $.18$ .

**TABLE 4. META-ANALYSES EXAMINING A SINGLE FAMILY FACTOR IN THE PREDICTION OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY**

	<b>S, R, M, B, L &amp; C (2000)</b>	<b>G (2002)</b>	<b>W (1992)</b>	<b>W &amp; R (1991)</b>	<b>P &amp; K (2003)</b>
<i>Total N of studies in meta-analysis</i>	39 Studies	88 Studies	38 Studies	50 Studies	72 Studies
<i>Predictor examined</i>	Being abused or witnessing violence in childhood	Use of corporal punishment by parents on children	Family heredity and crime	Broken homes and delinquency	Divorce and delinquency
<i>Correlation with crime or delinquency</i>	.18	.21	.09	.11	.08

S, R, M, B, L & C (2000) = Stith, Rosen, Middleton, Busch, Lundeberg & Carlton (2000)

G (2002) = Gershoff (2002)

W (1992) = Walters (1992)

W&R (1991) = Wells & Rankin (1991)

Gershoff (2002) addressed the question of whether the use of physical punishment by parents has a negative impact on their children. The author located 88 studies, representing 36,309 individuals and 117 effect sizes. Studies had to measure physical punishment as a child (e.g., spank, slap) and later behavior in childhood or adulthood (e.g., aggression, delinquency). The correlation between physical punishment and later delinquency as a juvenile or criminality as an adult was identical ( $.21$ ).

Walters (1992, p. 598) conducted an “exhaustive review of the genetic literature on crime” and identified 38 studies that addressed the gene-crime relationship. Three types of studies were located: family heredity studies that compare the criminal behavior of parents and other relatives for criminals under study and compare them to a non-criminal population; comparisons of monozygotic (single-egg) twins that share 100% of the same genetic material with

dizygotic (dual-egg) twins who share 50% of the genetic material; and adoption studies in which the criminality of biological parents and adoptive parents are compared for children placed in adoption at an early age. These 38 studies produced 54 effect sizes, and Walters converted these to phi correlations. The correlations represent the strength of association between heredity and criminal behavior. After weighting the correlations by sample size across studies, he reports an average correlation of .09. He concludes (1992, p. 604) that there is “guarded optimism for a genetic interpretation of certain facets of criminal behavior.” Walters (1992, p. 607) further cautions that more recent studies, and more rigorous ones, provided less support for the gene-crime relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Wells and Rankin (1991) were interested in estimating the total effect of broken homes on delinquency, and to assess and understand the variation across these studies. They located 50 studies published from 1925-1985. They used phi correlations as the effect size, weighted by sample size. They found an association between broken homes and delinquency of .11. There is a study methodological impact, as smaller samples using non-probabilistic (convenience or purposive) samples report larger correlations than larger, probability samples.

Price and Kunz (2003) focused their study on the influence of divorce in juvenile delinquency. They identified studies published from 1930-1999 that: (1) contained a sample of children living in a single-parent family and a sample of children from intact families; (2) at least one quantifiable outcome of delinquency was reported that could be converted to a correlation; and (3) subjects had to be younger than 19 years of age. They located 72 studies. Across all studies, the mean correlation was .08.

### **Specific meta-analyses of family-based treatment**

We also collected meta-analyses that focused specifically on determining whether family-based interventions reduced subsequent delinquent or criminal offending. We found four meta-analyses that reviewed family-based treatments of all types. As Table 5 [next page] shows, the overall effect size (reported or converted to correlations) is between .15 and .28 for family-based treatment. We provide more detail on each below.

Latimer (2001) reviewed family-based treatment for juvenile delinquents. He included all studies that: (1) focused on young offenders; (2) offered one group a type of family-based treatment; (3) used a control or comparison group that did not receive the same treatment; (4) reported recidivism in a manner that allowed the researcher to compute proportion of each group that failed or succeeded; and (5) provided sufficient statistical information to permit calculation of effect size. For each study, he also assigned one point if the evaluation included random assignment, a sample size larger than 100, a follow-up measure longer than 12 months, and an external researcher (not the program staff). He located 35 studies by relying on his file of studies (from a prior review) and conducting additional electronic bibliographic searches. These 35 studies reported 50 effect sizes, and the average correlation across all studies was .15. Latimer was critical of the evidence because treatments tested in weaker studies (according to

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6. We did not include Rhee and Waldman (2002), who also conducted a meta-analysis of 51 studies examining the influence of family hereditary on anti-social behavior, but only included five crime studies, with no specific breakdown for crime or delinquency.

his methodological rigor scale) were much more effective (.33) than treatments tested in more rigorous studies (0). Latimer (2001, p. 248) concludes that the effect may be more about “how we evaluate” rather than “what works.”

**TABLE 5. SPECIFIC META-ANALYSES OF FAMILY-BASED TREATMENT STUDIES**

Study	Aim/purpose	# studies (# effects)	Types of Studies	Correlation
Latimer (2001)	Examine family-based treatment for juvenile delinquency	35 (50)	QED/RCT	.15
Dowden & Andrews (2003)	Examined family-based treatment for juvenile delinquency	38 (53)	QED/RCT	.21
Woolfenden, Williams, & Peat (2002)	Examine family and parenting interventions for conduct disorder and delinquency among juveniles between 10 and 17 years	8	RCT	.28 (on rearrests)
Farrington & Welsh (2003)	Examined family-based crime prevention programs	40	QED/RCT	.16

QED=Quasi-experimental design

RCT=Randomized controlled trial

In their Cochrane Collaboration review, Woolfenden, Williams, and Peat (2002) included only those studies that reported the results of a randomized controlled trial of a family-based intervention on juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17. The juveniles had to be referred by the juvenile justice system or be diagnosed as having a conduct disorder. They found eight experiments with a total of 749 children included. Family and parenting interventions reduced risk of rearrest and reincarceration, decreased mean length of time in institutions, and reduced sibling rearrest. The most promising mechanism for why intervention reduced delinquency included measures of “family cohesion.” The correlation for the five studies that measured the impact of family-based intervention on arrest rates was .28. They conclude that the evidence suggests that family and parenting interventions have beneficial effects on reducing criminal activity.

Farrington and Welsh (2003) also conducted a systematic review of family-based crime prevention programs, but included experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations. They included studies that: (1) focused on family as the target for the intervention; (2) had an outcome measure of delinquency, antisocial behavior, or disruptive child behavior in the study; and (3) included at least 50 persons. The authors located 40 studies and looked to provide effect sizes for four different effects: (1) short-term effects on delinquency; (2) short-term effects on child antisocial behavior; (3) long-term effects on offending; and (4) long-term effects on antisocial behavior. Short-term was one year (unless only two-year data available) and long-term was three years. Offending was measured by either official records or self-report, which were averaged in cases in which both were reported. The exception was in cases in which the official data were poor and self-report were better. The overall correlation was .18. One difficulty pointed out by the authors is that many family-based interventions are delivered when children are very young, and that long-term follow-ups of offending behavior have not been conducted or have yet to be reported.

Dowden and Andrews (2003) responded to the pessimistic conclusions of Latimer (2001) by conducting their own meta-analysis of 38 studies and 53 tests (89% of their sample overlapped with Latimer). They use Latimer's methodological rigor score. They report a slightly higher overall correlation (.21) than Latimer (.15). Their findings—not surprisingly, given the overlap between the two samples—replicate Latimer's findings on rigor. Stronger methodological studies report smaller effects. Treatments, however, that “appropriately target criminogenic needs of offenders” achieved an average correlation of .23 even in methodologically rigorous studies, compared to .04 if they inappropriately targeted needs.

### **Broader reviews of intervention effectiveness**

We also sought to identify meta-analyses that tackled broader topics, such as “what works to reduce juvenile delinquency.” We only included these broader interventions if they reported correlations for specific treatment types, including family-based treatment. Eight such meta-analyses were located for this paper.

In her review, Garrett (1985) gathered evaluations of institutional-based treatment for juveniles. She looked at all studies that: (1) were reported between 1950-1983; (2) evaluated a residential or institutional program; (3) included only adjudicated (officially defined) delinquents; and (4) included a control procedure (including pre-post only designs). Garrett located 111 studies, 225 comparisons, and 433 effect sizes, with 13,055 juveniles total participating. The correlation for recidivism specifically was .07 (only 34 studies provided recidivism data). She reports that family-based treatments, including only three studies and seven effect sizes, had an overall correlation of .14 on recidivism. Garrett (1985, p. 297) describes the result as “promising but tentative.”

Roberts and Camasso (1991) collected 46 juvenile offender treatment program evaluations published in major criminal justice and psychology journals from 1980 to 1990. Studies including random assignment, quasi-experimental design, or a pre-post only test, were included. “Family therapy” has an average correlation of .28 (based on eight studies) on criminal recidivism. These positive findings for family therapy were sustained even when looking at studies with large samples (more than 200 juveniles), longer follow-up periods (more than 12 months), and strong statistical controls. They concluded that (1991, p. 438): “...it is also important to recommend to juvenile justice administrators that they replicate family counseling in their respective jurisdictions.”

Lipsey (1992) reviewed treatment programs for juvenile delinquency recidivism. He included those evaluations that: (1) tested a treatment or intervention that aimed to reduce recidivism; (2) included a majority of participants who were 21 or younger; (3) had at least one delinquency outcome measure used to compare a treatment with a control or comparison condition; (4) had a control or comparison group that was randomly assigned, or had a quasi-experimental comparison with evidence that groups were equivalent before the study began; (5) came from English-speaking countries; and (6) were published or available since World War II. Summarizing 397 evaluation reports, the overall correlation was .05 and shows little difference between random and non-random assignment studies, likely a testament to the strong quasi-experimental studies included in his sample. Lipsey (1992), however, finds that the average effect size for the six experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of family therapy for

delinquents within the juvenile justice system was an almost negligible .01. There is a slightly higher correlation for family treatment programs for juveniles outside the system (.05).

Petrosino's (1997) study conducted a meta-analysis of randomized experiments testing any crime reduction program delivered to individuals. Petrosino included studies that: (1) used random or quasi-random (odd/even or alternation) allocation to assign participants; (2) were written in English; (3) were published between 1950-1993; and (4) included some quantifiable outcome of official crime (e.g., arrests, convictions). Petrosino located 300 experimental reports and randomly selected 150 for the meta-analysis. The overall correlation of .05 mirrored Lipsey (1992), but, in contrast, the average correlation across four family counseling experiments in his sample is .17.

Lipsey and Wilson (1998) synthesized treatment evaluations for serious and violent juvenile offenders. Few studies specifically focused on serious offenders, so the authors focused on evaluations in which (1) the great majority of offenders were adjudicated delinquents, with most having prior record of person or property offenses and not primarily status, drug, or traffic crimes; (2) the referral to the program was made by juvenile justice agents and not schools or parents; and (3) studies were added if most or all of the juveniles had an "aggressive history" or the intervention was an attempt to change aggressive behavior. Authors report on 200 experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations. The majority of studies were conducted since 1990 in the U.S., with largely male, Anglo or mixed ethnic samples, and evaluating an intervention mandated by the juvenile justice system. Authors used police contact/arrest as the outcome measure.

The overall correlation is .06, but there was a lot of variability across the studies. Lipsey and Wilson report that five methodological features explained the variation in effect size: nature of assignment to groups; attrition; type of outcome measure selected; sample size; and statistical power. They report a "method-adjusted" effect size that controls for the influence of methodological variables. They report observed-effect sizes, method-adjusted effect sizes, and equated effect sizes for types of treatment. They report these for studies with institutionalized (83) or noninstitutionalized (117) offenders. Family-based programs had generally positive but inconsistent effects on noninstitutionalized offenders (.10, based on eight studies).

Dowden and Andrews (1999a) investigated evaluative studies testing the effects of some intervention on subsequent offending by youths. They relied on samples used in prior meta-analyses, resulting in 229 tests from 134 studies. The overall effect size was .09, but there was great heterogeneity in the sample. Dowden and Andrews stress the importance of treatment targeting appropriate criminal needs. Two "family factors" were among the most effective needs targeted for youths: "parental supervision" (.35) and "within family affection" (.33). Treatments that appropriately targeted these family factors—increasing expressed affection within a family and increasing proper supervision by parents of their children—reduced offending (interventions that targeted vague family factors were categorized as "non-criminogenic needs," and the effect sizes were much smaller).

In a different meta-analysis, Dowden and Andrews (1999b) reviewed the treatment studies pertaining to exclusively or predominantly female offenders. Again using their own files, they identified 26 studies (with 46 effect sizes) that: (1) were composed predominantly or entirely of female offenders; (2) included a follow-up period (the longest one was taken); (3) compared a treatment group to a control or comparison group that did not receive treatment; and (4) in-

TABLE 6. EFFECTS FOR FAMILY-BASED TREATMENT IN LARGER META-ANALYSES OF TREATMENT

	G (1985) Institutionalized Youth	C&R (1991) Youths	L (1992) Youths	P (1997)	L&W (1998) Serious & Chronic Ju- veniles	D&A (1999a) Youths	D&A (1999b) Females	L, D & M-B (2003) Youths
<i>Total N of studies in meta-analysis</i>	111	46	397	150	200	134	26	154
<i>Type of Evaluations included</i>	QED/RCT	QED/RCT	QED/RCT	RCT	QED/RCT	QED/RCT	QED/RCT	QED/RCT
<i>Number of programs examined</i>	13	10	29	40	27	13	8	10
<i>Largest correlation reported</i>	.46 (milieu)	.03 (restitution)	.19 (employment)	.34 (individual psychological counseling for adults)	.23 (individualized counseling)	.39 (other criminogenic needs)	.38 (anti-social cognition; family process needs)	.16 (multi-focused; family-focused)
<i>Lowest correlation reported</i>	-.07 (academic)	.41 (group therapy)	-.12 (deterrence)	0 (drug testing; adult citizen volunteer program; vocation for adults)	-.09 (vocational)	.04 (substance abuse treatment)	.10 (school/work needs)	-.09 (wilderness)
<i>Mean correlation across all programs</i>	.07	.09	.05	.05	.06	.09	.17	.09
<i>Mean correlation for family-based treatment</i>	.28	.28	.01 justice/ .05 non-justice	.17	.10	.35 family supervision needs .33 family affection needs	.38 family processes .30 family and peers	.16
G (1985) = Garrett (1985)								
C&R (1991) = Camasso & Roberts (1991)								
L (1992) = Lipsey (1992)								
P (1997) = Petrosino (1997)								
L&W (1998) = Lipsey & Wilson (1998)								
D&A (1999a) = Dowden & Andrews (1999a)								
D&A (1999b) = Dowden & Andrews (1999b)								
L, D & M-B (2003) = Latimer, Dowden & Morton-Bourgon (2003)								
QED=Quasi-Experimental Design								
RCT=Randomized Controlled Trial								

cluded some measure of recidivism that permitted meta-analysis. As with their meta-analysis on youth programs, family variables were among those with the highest effect sizes if “appropriately targeted by treatment” (i.e., “family processes” .38, “family and peers” .30).

In 2003, Latimer, Dowden, and Morton-Bourgon looked at juvenile treatment programs. They included studies if they: (1) examined a non-traditional response to youth delinquency (i.e., not traditional probation or custody); (2) consisted of youth under 18 who committed an offense by current adult standards; (3) used a control or comparison group without the same treatment; (4) provided sufficient statistical information; and (5) measured at least one outcome of interest (i.e., recidivism, academic performance/attendance, psychological well-being, family functioning, employment, social skills, anti-social attitudes, substance abuse, anger management, anti-social peer pressure, and cognitive skills). They located 154 studies that reported 332 unique effect sizes, published from 1964 to 2002. The average correlation was .09, and family-focused interventions had the largest average correlation of .16 (multi-focused intervention also averaged .16). Latimer, et al., (2003, p. 19) assert the positive impact for family-based treatment, concluding that the “...results demonstrate the potential of treatment to improve communication within families as well as parental performance on such concepts as monitoring and supervision.”

## DISCUSSION

Derzon (2005) once asked if the family was the “wellspring of crime.” A commonly held notion by policymakers, practitioners, and the general public is that the major cause of criminal behavior is problems in the family. We have pulled together a number of meta-analyses to examine the relationship of family factors to the onset, continuation, and treatment of criminal behavior.

From these prior meta-analyses, we gleaned the correlations of family factors with the onset and continuation of delinquency and crime (Tables 1-4). For onset, the correlations range from .12 to .19, and for continuation, they range from .04-.13. For those meta-analyses focused on a sole family factor, the range of correlations is somewhat similar (.08-.21). One immediate question is whether these correlations are large enough that intervention programs should be designed to address them. The answer is somewhat subjective. Recall that Cohen (1988), in a famous treatise, considered correlations of .10 or less a weak effect, with moderate correlations at .25 and large correlations at .50. None of the correlations with onset or continuation would reach the subjective standard of “moderate strength.” Furthermore, if one were to focus on variance explained ( $r^2$ ), a correlation of .10 means that only 5% of the variation in the crime outcome is explained by the presence or absence of that family factor. Clearly, from these data, families are not the wellspring of crime and delinquency.

But these data show that family factors are, for the most part, a consistently small and non-trivial factor in onset and continuation. Even if the correlations are considered, by subjective standards, to be small, they still may represent important differences in crime outcomes between criminal and non-criminal groups. For example, an  $r$  of .10 would correspond to a 10% increase in the onset of crime for the group having a certain negative family factor (e.g., “family problems”) compared to the group not having the same factor, assuming that the baseline was 50% recidivism in each group prior to the program (Lipsey, 1992).

Meta-analyses that specifically reviewed family-based treatment program evaluations reported positive findings for such interventions on criminal behavior, with correlations ranging from .15-.28. Again, Cohen (1988) would consider such correlations (with the exception of the Woolfenden et al. 2002 review of the impact of family-based treatment on rearrests) to be small. Still yet, such correlations would be equivalent to 8-14% reductions in crime for treatment groups compared to control groups (assuming a baseline recidivism rate of 50% in each group). Some would argue such a reduction is not trivial but sizable and important.

For the meta-analyses examining the crime reduction effectiveness of family-based treatment as well as other interventions, the findings are more variable. They range from .01 in Lipsey's (1992) meta-analysis for family-based treatments delivered within the juvenile justice system to .38 for interventions that specifically target "family processes" in the homes of female offenders (Dowden & Andrews, 1999b).

Ultimately, large and small are terms best understood in the context of their application. If an intervention is inexpensive and can be widely disseminated, than a small effect may translate into many large reductions in antisocial behavior. For example, a meta-analysis of mass media interventions for substance use by Derzon and Lipsey (2002) found that although their effects were quite modest ( $r=.02$ ), the cumulative effect over 10 years could be expected to result in 5.5 million fewer cigarette users. If, on the other hand, an intervention is expensive, or tightly focused on a small group of individuals, even a very large effect, a very successful intervention, may not be justified as it ultimately affects very few of those who are ultimately criminal.

Contrary to common notions, family factors may have a role to play in criminal offending but are not the major reason why most persons become criminal (Derzon, 2005). For those meta-analyses that examined a range of variables and their association with the onset and continuation of crime, family factors were never the largest correlation; in fact, the average correlation across family factors never surpassed the average correlation across all predictors.

Derzon (2005) raises the possibility that if family constructs are important in the development of antisocial behavior, it may require a more complicated model to account for their influence. In other words, for family factors to produce antisocial behavior, they require the presence of other conditions. Rather than a risk factor, certain family characteristics may serve as protective factors, by generating or providing resilience to adversity, or otherwise minimizing the effects of adversity. Thus, certain family factors become protective only in the presence of adversity. Most children with negative family characteristics will not commit crime, and many others without such negative family factors will be antisocial at an early age and continue. It is possible that family factors play a complex, interactive role with other predictor variables. For example, good family functioning may act as a protective factor in a child's life, helping to counter adverse conditions that would normally become criminogenic. On the other hand, negative family factors may interact with other criminogenic predictors so that their combined predictive influence is more powerful in a child's life. In other words, perhaps it is the combined effect of multiple adverse factors that leads to the onset and continuation of criminal behavior. Although multivariate meta-analysis is still underdeveloped, (e.g., Becker, 1992; Lipsey, 1992), a systematic assessment of the multivariate evidence of family predictors with later antisocial behavior would have great utility for understanding how family factors influence later criminality. If family factors are, in fact, protective, it is in their interaction with other family, setting, and individual conditions that their true merit will be uncovered.

The continued implementation and evaluation of family-based treatment for juveniles is encouraged by this research. From the correlations in Tables 1-4, we see that family factors are generally more strongly correlated with onset and recidivism for juveniles than with adult offender recidivism. Moreover, a wave of meta-analyses of specific and broad-based treatment effectiveness meta-analyses generally supports the theory of targeting *malleable* or changeable conditions within the juvenile's family for intervention. In fact, in those meta-analyses that compare family-based treatment with other interventions, the correlation for family-based treatment is always larger than the average across all other interventions (with the exception of the Lipsey .01 finding for family treatment within the juvenile justice system). In fact, given the "weak" correlations presented in Tables 1-4 for family factors with onset and continuation of crime, family-based treatments may be addressing additional non-family risk factors for offending to achieve the generally larger correlations viewed in Tables 5 and 6.

Though some programs have been encouraged as evidence-based interventions, it is important that these continuously be evaluated using rigorous designs. There is room for innovative, new treatments as well, but these too must be subject to careful evaluation so that governments can learn what works and contributions can be made to the criminological knowledge base. Note that successful intervention at the earliest life stages (e.g., ages 6-11 or earlier) could result in greater reduction in human misery and costs due to crime than intervention later in the child's life.

Many of the meta-analyses that we collected involved very small cells when they examined a particular family factor and its relationship to the onset or continuation of crime. This is because the number of primary studies that provided data on that relationship is often sparse. We issue a call to investigators who are studying the onset or continuation of crime to include a variety of family factors and to provide the effects of that relationship in accessible reports. This is the only way that knowledge can be accumulated and lessons learned.

Finally, we plan to update this review to search for and incorporate more recent meta-analyses (e.g., Piquero, et al., 2008). Moreover, updates of this work should incorporate dissertations and unpublished literature, and also consider expansion of the review beyond crime and delinquency to include meta-analyses focused on illicit drug use, child abuse and neglect, and aggressive or anti-social conduct by children. In this way, a more comprehensive picture of the role of family factors in all types of problematic societal outcomes can be gleaned.

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## **APPENDIX: LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATABASES SEARCHED**

- Academic Search Premiere (EBSCO)
- Bibliography of Nordic Criminology
- Chalk's e-Library Collection
- Campbell Collaboration Reviews of Intervention and Policy Effects (C2-RIPE)
- Campbell Collaboration Social, Psychological, Educational and Criminological Trials Register (C2-SPECTR – also includes over 300 systematic reviews)
- Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews
- Criminal Justice Abstracts
- Criminal Justice in Denmark
- Database of Reviews of Effectiveness (DARE)
- EBSCO Megafile
- Econlit
- ERIC
- Expanded Academic ASAP
- Full-Text of OVID Journals
- Google and Google Scholar
- Health Technology Assessment Register
- Housing and Urban Development (U.S.) "HUD USER"
- Index to Current Urban Documents
- Inside Info Plus (British Public Library)
- International Bibliography of Social Science
- ISI Web of Science
- Medline
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) abstracts and full-text documents
- National Clearinghouse of Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN)
- PAIS Archive
- PAIS International
- Periodical Contents Index
- PolicyFile
- Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection
- PsycInfo (includes PsychLit)
- Sage Family Studies Abstracts
- Sage Journals Criminology Full-Text Collection

- Sage Journals Management and Organizational Studies Full-Text Collection
- Sage Journals Political Science Full-Text Collection
- Sage Journals Sociology Full-Text Collection
- Sage Urban Studies
- Social Service Abstracts
- Social Service Research Network
- Social Work Abstracts
- Sociological Abstracts
- UNESCO (UNESDO and UNESBIB)
- Wider Public Health Agenda Project Report (annotations of relevant reviews)
- Worldwide Political Science Abstracts
- World Bank Documents

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## An Exploration of the Sex Offender Specialization and Violence Nexus

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### *Abstract*

*Two commonly researched topics surrounding sexual offending are recidivism and specialization. The widely-accepted belief that sex offenders recidivate at a higher rate than other offenders, in conjunction with the misconception that sex offenders specialize in purely sexual crimes and general criminality, has compelled policymakers to enact conservative legislation. This study assesses the accuracy of these perceptions through an analysis of the non-sex crimes of a sample of 229 currently incarcerated registered sex offenders in Kentucky. The focus of the current study is to explore the heterogeneity among sex offenders as a whole by assessing differences in criminal behavior and offender characteristics of sex offenders who are currently incarcerated for non-sex violent and non-sex nonviolent offenses. Bivariate results suggest that offender age, race, victim age, registration violation, multiple victims, and sex offense severity all significantly differ between sex offenders as conditioned by offense violence. Multivariate results suggest that sex offenders with a child victim and registration violation were less likely to be violent offenders and that offenders with multiple victims were also more likely to be violent.*

**Key Words:** sexual criminal behavior, specialization, high-frequency offenders, sex offender recidivism

## INTRODUCTION

The image of sex offenders in the media as incurable human predators influences public perceptions and legislative decision-making. Often, sex offenders are considered especially dangerous and in need of specialized treatment and rehabilitation. Common assumptions hold that sex offenders specialize and are only involved in sexual criminal behavior; however, research has questioned this belief (Simon, 1997; Lussier, 2005; Miethe, Olson, & Mitchell, 2006; Zimring, Piquero, & Jennings, 2007; & Zimring, Jennings, Piquero, Hays, 2009). For example, Miethe et al. (2006) found that sex offenders exhibited the least amount of specialization when compared to all other groups of offenders. Furthermore, studies have also suggested that various types of sex offenders have different degrees of specialization (Simon, 1997; Soothill, Francis, Sanderson, & Ackerley, 2000; Guay, Proulx, Cusson, & Ouimet, 2001; Lussier, 2005). In addition to the belief that sex offenders are specialists, there are also common concerns regarding a presumably high rate of recidivism among sex offenders, although this has also been questioned by researchers (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Sample & Bray, 2003 & 2006). For instance, one review of 42 studies measuring sex offender recidivism concluded that sex offenders have a relatively low rate of recidivism, below 12% (Furby, Weinrott, & Blackshaw, 1989). In light of these issues, the focus of the current study is to explore the degree of specialization among violent and nonviolent currently incarcerated sex offenders in Kentucky with special attention to the similarities and differences in offense characteristics.

### Sex Offender Recidivism

With large numbers of persons being sexual offense victims, yet sex offenders being relatively rare among arrestees, it is believed that sex offenders are high-frequency offenders, even once identified, arrested, convicted, and sanctioned. This belief has influenced many of the recent restrictions and enhanced sentences legislated for sex offenders. However, research has not supported the assumption regarding the high rates of sex offense recidivism. For example, in two of the most comprehensive studies to date examining sex offender recidivism, Sample and Bray (2003, 2006) examined arrest data from Illinois from 1990 to 1997 to assess the recidivism rates of sex offenders relative to that of other types of offenders. In their first study, Sample and Bray (2003) reported that for 953,000 arrestees with a total of 2,908,000 charges, the property offenders had the highest rate of offense-specific recidivism after five years (38.8%), specifically a rate six times higher than the recidivism rate for sex offenders (6.5%). Additionally, sex offenders also exhibited lower rates of general recidivism (45.1%) compared to most other offender groups. In their second study of this same sample of Illinois offenders, Sample and Bray (2006) focused solely on those arrested for a sex offense. This sample was comprised of 17,000 sex offenders who committed a total of 34,668 sex offenses from 1990-1997. After accounting for incarceration time, their results demonstrated that child molesters had the highest felony offense recidivism rate within 5 years post-arrest (51.9%), followed by rapists (49.1%), whereas those who victimized children and teens showed the lowest general recidivism rates. Regarding offense-specific recidivism within 5 years post-arrest, all of the sex offenders had low rates of recidivism, with rapists having the highest rate (5.8%).

## **Sex Offender Specialization**

Specialization refers to specific patterns of criminal behavior that are persistent throughout the criminal career. Many criminologists believe that certain criminals will continue to engage in similar patterns of criminal behavior across time (Soothill et al., 2000; Hood, Shute, Feilzer, & Wilcox, 2002; Lussier, 2005). In accordance with this perspective, it is assumed that sexual offenders will persist in criminal sexual deviance once such behaviors are initiated. Of practical importance to this assumption is the concept of specialization which drives public policy, legislation, and treatment programs. Most methods of intervention initiated by the criminal justice system are focused on this expected pattern of offending, ignoring the existence of general criminality found among many types of offenders. The issue of whether sex offenders exhibit high levels of specialization has been the focus of several research efforts, with most studies concluding that sex offenders do not have high degrees of specialization.

For example, in one of the more comprehensive studies to date examining sex offender specialization, Miethe et al. (2006) analyzed a sample of 38,000 offenders released from prison in 15 states in 1994. They measured the timing of arrest cycles and the most serious offense within each transition. Their findings suggested that sex offenders had roughly 7 separate arrests, compared with general offenders, who exhibited an average of 10 or more arrests. Furthermore, their results revealed less specialization among sex offenders than other offender types. One important finding they presented concerned the length of the offender's criminal record. Specifically, the longer the criminal record of the sex offender, the more likely they were to be generalists, whereas for property and public order offenders, the likelihood of specialization increased with the length of the criminal career. Overall, Miethe et al. (2006) concluded that sex offenders are neither specialists nor persistent offenders.

Related to the issue of specialization are questions about whether early involvement in sexual offending is likely to be maintained throughout one's criminal career, and more specifically, whether juvenile sex offenders are likely to continue with sex offending as adults. In pursuit of answers to these questions, two recent studies have focused on whether sexual offending as a juvenile is related to adult sexual offending (Zimring et al., 2007; Zimring et al., 2009). The first of these studies examined the offending patterns of 6,000 youth from three birth cohorts (1942, 1949, and 1955) in Racine, Wisconsin. The 1942 youth cohort was followed until the age of 32, age 25 for the 1949 cohort, and age 22 for the 1955 youth cohort. Without detailed offense information, the Racine data was aggregated according to whether the sex offense committed was a felony or misdemeanor. Zimring et al. (2007) sought to identify any indicators of continued involvement in sex offending among those juveniles who had contact with the police for a sexual offense in comparison to those who did not. As hypothesized, very little evidence of specialization or persistence was found among these juvenile-adult offenders. In fact, involvement in juvenile sexual offending did not predict future adult sexual offending. Instead, they found that "the best predictor during a juvenile career of adult sex offending is the frequency of police contacts as a juvenile rather than the presence of a sexual offense during adolescence" (p. 529).

In a more recent study, Zimring et al. (2009) extended their analysis of juvenile sex offenders to include data from the 1958 Second Philadelphia Birth Cohort. This sample contained 13,160 males and 14,000 females, with a special emphasis on the 204 boys and 17 girls with police contacts for sex offenses as a juvenile. Their results suggested that juveniles, as a whole,

are not particularly specialized in their patterns of offending. Likewise, those with a sex offense as a juvenile were no more likely than non-sex juvenile offenders to commit a sex offense as an adult. Similar to their previous findings (Zimring et al., 2007), they found a strong connection between the frequency of juvenile offending and propensity for sexual offending in adulthood.

### **Current Study**

As suggested by the existing literature, sex offenders often engage in a variety of criminal behaviors. However, it is not clear whether sex offenders who also engage in other forms of violent and nonviolent offenses are more similar or different. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the similarities and differences in offense characteristics among violent and nonviolent sex offenders currently incarcerated in Kentucky. By comparing and contrasting sex offenders across this dimension, any existing heterogeneity among sex offenders can be highlighted. Furthermore, this type of analysis can explore the versatility demonstrated by this sample in their general offending, in addition to examining the actual sexual crimes committed by this group of offenders.

## **METHODS**

### **Data**

The data utilized for this study is secondary data retrieved from two sources. The initial source of data collection was the Kentucky Sex Offender Registry, an online database maintained by the Kentucky State Police containing information related to registered sex offenders (<http://kpsor.state.ky.us/>). Relying on this data source, currently incarcerated sex offenders were identified, and several variables were obtained for analysis. The variables of interest that were retrieved through this source include the specific sex offenses for which the offenders were required to register, the age of the victim(s), registration type, and demographic information on each offender. The demographics that were obtained from this source for each offender include their date of birth, race, and sex.

Once the currently incarcerated sex offenders were identified through KSOR, additional information on each offender was obtained through the Kentucky Online Offender Lookup (KOOL) website (<http://corrections.ky.gov/kool.htm>). This website is maintained by the Kentucky Department of Corrections and includes information for currently incarcerated offenders in the state of Kentucky. The information that was obtained from this website includes the correctional institution where the inmate is located, the specific offense(s) for which the individual is currently incarcerated, and the county of the offense(s).

### **Sample**

The total number of currently incarcerated sex offenders found on the Kentucky Sex Offender Registry (KSOR) who are currently incarcerated in Kentucky for a non-sex offense was 229. Excluded from this sample are out-of-state transfer inmates and those whose conviction information is unavailable. The out-of-state transfers were excluded from the sample due to the difficulty in classifying their various offenses in the designed Kentucky classification system. Consistent with prior research and considering that there was only one female on the registry that met the sample selection criteria, our analysis is based on the male sex offenders only.

## Variables

Aside from the demographic information, other variables used in the analysis include: victim age, whether an offense included multiple victims, most severe sex offense, most severe sex offense felony level, type (e.g., length) of registration, and whether the offender has a recorded violation of sex offender registration requirements. The dependent variable was whether the non-sex offense(s) for which these sex offenders are currently incarcerated is categorized as either a violent or nonviolent offense.

### *Independent Variables*

The age of victims was dichotomized as under age 18 or age 18 and older. The offenders who victimized children (under 18) represented 57.2% (n=131) of the sample. The remaining 42.8% (n= 98) of offenders victimized adults. In order to examine the extent of the victimization perpetrated by these sex offenders, the variable "multiple victims" was used. This variable included two categories: one victim= 0 and multiple victims=1. Approximately 95% (n=219) of offenders victimized only one individual, the remaining 4.4% (n=10) had multiple victims.

While many of the offenders included in this sample committed multiple sex offenses; the most severe sex offense(s) was utilized for the analysis that follows. This variable was broken down into four categories: rape only (yes/no), sexual abuse/sexual assault only (yes/no), rape and sexual abuse/sexual assault (yes/no), and "other" (yes/no). More than one-third, 39.7% (n=91), of the sample is registered for rape only. Nearly one-half, 45.9% (n=105), of the sample is registered for sexual abuse/sexual assault only. The category of offenders who committed both rape and sexual abuse/sexual assault accounts for 8.4% (n=19) of the sample. The "other" category contains offenders who are registered for none of the aforementioned sex offenses, and committed one or more of the following: sodomy, incest, unlawful transaction with a minor, lewd/lascivious act with child under 16, use of minor in sexual performance, and possession of matter portraying minor in sexual performance. Only 6.1% (n=14) of the sample comprise the "other" category.

Another important variable for consideration when analyzing the currently incarcerated sex offenders is the felony sex offense level. For this variable, the most severe sex offense felony level was utilized to formulate a severity scale. This variable was broken down according to felony level (Felony A, B, C, D, and Misdemeanors). Only 4.8% (n=11) of the sample committed an A felony sex offense. More common were those offenders who committed a B felony sex offense (21.8%, n= 50). The C felony sex offense level category accounts for 17.5% (n= 40) offenders. The majority (53.7%, n=123) of the sample has been convicted of D felony sex offenses, and 2.2% (n=5) of the offenders in the sample have misdemeanor sex offense convictions.

Regarding the type/length of sex offender registration for the sample, 48% (n=110) are required to register for 10 years, 7.4% (n=17) are subject to 20-year registration, and 44.5% (n=102) are lifetime registrants. Finally, a dichotomous variable indicating whether the individual has a recorded sex offender registration violation was included, with 10.9% (n=25) of the offenders having a registration violation.

### *Dependent Variable*

When classifying the non-sex offense(s) committed by these offenders, the most severe non-sex offense for which these offenders are currently incarcerated was categorized into one

of the following: violent, property, drug, violations, and other. The crimes that constitute the “violent” category include: murder, manslaughter, robbery, assault, kidnap, and unlawful imprisonment. For the “property” category, the following offenses are included: arson, burglary, theft over \$100, criminal mischief, forgery, fraud, unlawful use of credit card, receiving stolen property, desecration of a venerated object, and grave violation. Those offenses that fall into the “drug” category include: trafficking of a controlled substance, manufacturing methamphetamine, cultivating marijuana, possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, driving under the influence, and possession of a forged prescription. The offenses that constitute a “violation” include: failure to register, persistent felony offender, flagrant nonsupport, possession of a handgun by a felon, operating a vehicle without a license, bail jumping, and in-prison offenses such as possession of contraband or possession of a forged instrument. The “other” category includes: escape, wanton endangerment, fleeing and evading, impersonating a peace officer, intimidating a witness, tampering with physical evidence, custodial interference, criminal syndicate, and abandonment of a minor.

The frequency distribution of this variable shows that violent offenses account for 24% (n=55) of the sample, property offenses are the most serious non-sex offense for 29.7% (n=68) of the sample, drug offenses account for 17% (n=39), 22.3% (n=51) are incarcerated for a “violation,” and the “other” category represented the remaining 7% (n=16) of the sample. This categorical variable was subsequently dichotomized as 1=violent offender and 0=nonviolent offender (e.g., the categories of property, drug, violations, and other were combined) in order to differentiate between those offenders who are currently incarcerated for a violent non-sex offense and those who are currently incarcerated for a nonviolent non-sex offense.

### **Plan of Analysis**

The analysis takes place in several steps. First, descriptive statistics were examined for the sex offenders who are currently incarcerated for a non-sex offense. The analysis identifies demographics for the sample, including the age of the offender and the victim, and the types of sex offense for which they are registered. Second, a series of bivariate *t*-test analyses were performed to identify the similarities and differences between the sex offenders who are incarcerated for violent non-sex offenses and those who are incarcerated for a non-sex, nonviolent offense. Third, a logistic regression model was estimated to explore which variables may predict involvement in non-sex violence among sex offenders.

## **RESULTS**

### **Sample Descriptives**

Table 1 [next page] represents the sample descriptives for each variable included in the analysis. The mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum of each variable is shown in this table. The sex offenders were 40.61 years of age on average (SD=10.21), with a range of 21 to 72 years of age. The majority of the offenders were White and chose child/adolescent victims. Slightly more than one out of every ten offenders had committed a registration violation, and less than 5% had more than one victim. Most of the offenders were required to register for 10 years for their sex offense, followed by lifetime registrants and 20 year registrants. Ranging from 1 (misdemeanor) to 5 (felony), the offenders scored an average of 2.73 (SD=0.98) on the

sex offense severity scale. Finally, the most prevalent type of sex offense for which these offenders were currently registered was sexual abuse/sexual assault only, followed by rape only, both rape and sexual abuse/sexual assault, and “other” type of sex offense.

**TABLE 1. SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVES (N=229)**

<i>Variables</i>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Offender age	40.61	10.20	21	72
Non-white	.36	.48	0	1
Victim age	.57	.50	0	1
Registration violation	.11	.31	0	1
Multiple victims	.04	.20	0	1
Registration type: 10 yrs	.48	.50	0	1
Registration type: 20 yrs	.07	.26	0	1
Registration type: Life	.45	.50	0	1
Sex offense felony level	2.73	.98	0	5
Rape only	.40	.49	0	1
Sexual abuse/assault only	.46	.50	0	1
Both rape and sexual abuse/assault	.08	.28	0	1
Other than rape and sexual abuse/assault	.06	.42	0	1

### Mean Difference Tests

A bivariate *t*-test analysis between those sex offenders who were currently incarcerated for a nonviolent non-sex offense and those sex offenders who are currently incarcerated for a violent non-sex offense was conducted. The findings from the mean difference tests are displayed in Table 2 [next page]. As shown, the bivariate *t*-test analysis revealed several significant mean differences. First, in regards to age, offenders who are incarcerated for a violent non-sex offense are approximately 3.5 years older than those incarcerated for a nonviolent non-sex offense. Second, marginally significant race differences ( $p=.06$ ) were revealed, demonstrating that there was a higher prevalence of Non-Whites among the violent offenders. Third, victim ages were significantly different ( $p<.001$ ) suggesting that there was a higher prevalence of child/adolescent victims among the nonviolent offenders. Fourth, there was a higher prevalence of registration violations among nonviolent offenders ( $p<.001$ ). Fifth, there was a marginally significant difference ( $p<.10$ ) for multiple victims, indicating that there was a higher prevalence of having more than one victim among the violent offenders. Finally, the sex offense severity scores were significantly different ( $p<.001$ ) by group, suggesting that the violent offenders on average committed more severe sex offenses than the nonviolent offenders.

**TABLE 2. MEAN DIFFERENCE TESTS**

Variables	Nonviolent Offenders (n=174)		Violent Offenders (n=55)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Offender age*	39.73	10.36	43.40	9.27
Non-white+	.33	.47	.47	.50
Victim age***	.64	.48	.36	.49
Registration violation***	.14	.35	.02	.13
Multiple victims+	.02	.15	.11	.31
Registration type: 10 yrs	.49	.50	.45	.50
Registration type: 20 yrs	.09	.28	.04	.19
Registration type: Life	.43	.50	.51	.50
Sex offense felony level**	2.61	.97	3.11	.96
Rape only	.37	.48	.49	.50
Sexual abuse/assault only	.48	.50	.38	.49
Both rape and sexual abuse/assault	.09	.28	.07	.26
Other than rape and sexual abuse/assault	.06	.24	.05	.23

+p<.10 \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

### Logistic Regression

After the bivariate *t*-test analysis, these same variables were entered into a multivariate logistic regression model so as to examine whether these variables could distinguish violent offenders from nonviolent offenders in a multivariate context. Collinearity is not an issue in this analysis, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**TABLE 3. DISTINGUISHING VIOLENT OFFENDERS FROM NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS**

Variables	b	se	exp (b)
Offender age	.012	.019	1.012
Sex offense felony level	.325	.211	1.384
Nonwhite	.477	.358	1.611
Victim age	-.792*	.376	.453
Registration violation	-2.103*	1.063	.122
Multiple victims	1.581*	.777	4.859
Registration type: 20 yrs	-.893	.827	.409
Registration type: Life	-.250	.374	.778
Rape only	.497	.747	1.643
Sex abuse/assault only	.182	.799	1.200
Both rape and sex abuse/assault	-.557	.989	.573

Model Diagnostics:  $\chi^2= 35.48***$ ; -2 log likelihood=217.009; Nagelkerke  $R^2= .215$

+p<.10 \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

Several variables emerged as significant discriminators for violent offending. For instance, victim age was negatively associated with violent offending ( $b = -.792, p < .05$ ) suggesting that having a child/adolescent victim significantly decreased the likelihood for a sex offender to be currently incarcerated for a violent offense. Having committed a registration violation also significantly decreased the likelihood for an offender to be currently incarcerated for a violent offense ( $b = -2.103, p < .05$ ). Finally, having multiple victims significantly increased the likelihood that an offender would be incarcerated for a violent offense ( $b = 1.581, p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The primary focus of this study was to explore the degree of specialization among violent and nonviolent currently incarcerated sex offenders in Kentucky with special attention to the similarities and differences in offense characteristics. Most comparisons of subgroups of sex offenders involve victim type or offense type, this study sought to reveal the heterogeneity that exists among sex offenders as a whole, by examining the non-sex offenses for which these sex offenders are currently incarcerated. The results of the bivariate analysis suggested that the following variables differed significantly between those sex offenders with a nonviolent non-sex offense and those with a violent non-sex offense: offender age, race, victim age, registration violation, multiple victims, and sex offense severity. These findings imply that there are differences in the offense and offender characteristics of these two groups of sex offenders. Furthermore, the multivariate analysis revealed that sex offenders with a victim under the age of 18 and with a registration violation are less likely to be violent offenders, and that those sex offenders with multiple victims are more likely to be violent offenders.

Sex offenders have long been a targeted population of offenders. With restrictive legislation and harmful societal stigmas attached, these offenders are seen as predatory and incurable. These offenders violate the vulnerable and are therefore subject to punishment; however, the question remains as to whether they should be punished once their sentence is served. For instance, does community notification and registration curb sex offending? Or does it counteract the treatment they have received and lead to further recidivism? These are questions that demand further research and policy analysis.

Taken together, the present study investigated the criminal behavior of registered sex offenders who are currently incarcerated in the state of Kentucky for a non-sex offense. While the general public and policymakers typically view sex offenders as persistent specialists and recidivists, the literature reviewed in this study and the findings from the present study suggest that sex offenders engage in a variety of criminal behaviors and are a heterogeneous group of offenders. Furthermore, several variables such as victim age, having committed a registration violation, and having more than one victim can differentiate sex offenders currently incarcerated for a violent non-sex offense from those who are currently incarcerated for a nonviolent non-sex offense. Future research should continue to explore the distinguishing features of violent and nonviolent offenders, as well as those that may distinguish sex offenders from non-sex offenders. Having said this, the evidence is mounting against the notion of sex offender specialization and perhaps policies such as registration and community notification need to be re-considered.

The current study is, however, not without its limitations. First, this study is only a snapshot of the sex offenders with certain offense characteristics at one particular period of time

(e.g., cross-sectional data). Additionally, the two sources of data, the KSOR and KOOL websites are official sources of data. Future research should explore whether or not similar findings may be obtained through self-report data sources. Future research could also include a larger sample, specifically across multiple states to see if these findings generalize beyond the State of Kentucky.

Overall, the current study adds to the body of literature showing that sex offenders are not highly specialized in their offending patterns, and that within the population of sex offenders who do commit other types of offenses there is heterogeneity and important patterns that may be important for informing policy, legislation, and predictors of risk and recidivism.

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## Victim Services Delivery: A Comparison of Rural and Urban Communities

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### *Abstract*

*Despite a considerable body of literature on victim services delivery, there exists a paucity of studies that juxtapose victim services in rural vis-à-vis urban settings. Most studies focus on urban victims and urban victim service providers. A few studies that did explore rural settings largely confined their focus to service provision to victims of domestic violence and sexual assaults. This study is based on a state-wide survey of 379 directors of diverse victim service organizations in Texas, with the aim of exploring victim services delivery to a broader group of the victim population. This study explored existing disparities in victim services between urban and rural communities. In addition, 18 service providers were interviewed in-depth in support of the validity of the quantitative findings for the state-wide survey.*

**Key Words:** rural; victim services delivery; mixed methods

### INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of studies on crime control and operations of criminal justice institutions are primarily geared to urban settings (Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1995). Rural and small-town environments have frequently been given less attention. Accordingly, criminal justice policies are instituted primarily in accordance with the characteristics of urban settings. To rural communities, therefore, such urban-oriented programs and policies might exhibit efficacy only when underlying mechanisms for urban and rural settings are homogeneous—which is usually not the case.

In a similar vein, policies impacting victim services delivery have largely focused on urban, large city models. “Innovative” victim programs widely promoted by governmental technical reports are usually the ones that are created and practiced in urban settings. There has been a paucity of research and much less program development geared toward victim services delivery in rural and small towns (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Logan, Evans, Stevenson, & Jordan, 2005; Websdale, 1998). Concerns and criticisms to this effect have been raised but have gone largely unanswered. For instance, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts noted years ago:

Advocacy groups claimed that victims who reside in rural counties are not receiving the services for which they are eligible... (but) there has been no comprehensive needs assessment or evaluation of victim services... (Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 1999, ¶ 26).

A few studies that delved into rural victim services delivery largely focused on services for limited segments of the victim population—namely victims of domestic violence and sexual assaults (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Logan et al., 2005). Although these types of victims constitute a larger—and critical—portion of clients who utilize available services, current victim programs and services target much broader-based victim segments. This is especially so because the victim services field has notably grown and expanded recently, after 30 or so years of teething (Yun & Kercher, 2006). For instance, recent decades saw a dramatic increase of victim services personnel operating within the criminal justice system, either at law enforcement agencies or prosecutor’s offices (Jerin, Moriarty, & Gibson, 1995). These justice-based providers—commonly known as victim witness coordinators in many localities—offer a variety of services to a diverse group of victims, including even victims of property crimes.

This study is based on a state-wide survey of 379 directors of victim service organizations in Texas. In order to cover a full range of the cross-section of victim service providers, these directors are drawn not only from community-based organizations but also from law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices. Survey responses were analyzed to uncover differences in, *inter alia*, types of services, training hours, and funding sources between urban and rural victim services. In addition, 18 service providers were interviewed in-depth to support the validity of the quantitative findings for the state-wide survey.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

One might be inclined to discount the concerns about victim services delivery in rural areas, resorting to the fact that crime rates in rural areas are lower than those of cities. Be that as it may, rural crime is also a problem in its own right and may be increasing (Weisheit et al., 1995). For instance, the recent decade witnessed an alarming surge of clandestine methamphetamine labs in rural America. Accordingly, the number of child victims involved in methamphetamine lab incidents increased exponentially (Office for Victims of Crime, 2003). Gangs, traditionally a big city phenomenon, are also now creeping into rural and small towns (Office of Justice Programs, 2002). Apart from the peaceful and idyllic image, rural communities experience no less, probably more, domestic violence than urban areas (Bachman, 1994; Websdale & Johnson, 1997).

Further, some suggest that the lower crime rate in rural areas might simply be an artifact of lower reporting rates, while the actual rate is as high as that of urban cities (Ruback & Menard, 2001; Weisheit et al., 1995).

In addition, rural victims are likely to face added barriers in service utilization. Unique barriers faced by rural victims of domestic violence are relatively well documented. Compared to urbanites, for instance, rural communities are characterized by stronger informal social control, as well as traditional gender-role norms ( Leukefeld, Clayton, & Meyers, 1993; Logan et al., 2005; Websdale, 1998). This conservative tradition may manifest itself as community members' disapproval of the domestically abused who "stir up trouble" by contacting formal agencies. Due to the close-knit social network in rural and small towns, sexual assault victims may keep quiet out of fear of stigma and shame. Some victims might be extremely mindful of being noticed by other community members when entering, say, a local family violence shelter, thus rendering them particularly reluctant to access what few resources and services are available (Logan et al., 2005; Websdale, 1998). In the absence of affordable transportation, abused victims may be forced to stay in the relationship and continue to be at risk of being abused. Most notably, geographic isolation in rural areas renders victims unaware of services available or their access to services painstaking (Grama, 2000; Rural Justice Center, 1991).

Not only do victims in rural areas face unique barriers, victim services providers also face additional difficulties. First and foremost, rural communities appear to have fewer available resources, whether it be health, mental health, substance abuse treatment, or shelters (DeLeon, Wakefield, & Hagglund, 2003; Logan, et al., 2005). The few that do exist must cover wider geographical areas, where a lack of public transportation poses obstacles for both providers and clients (Grama, 2000; Rural Justice Center, 1991). With fewer resources, but larger areas to cover, rural shelters may have a long waiting list of victims.

Many programs are required to cover several counties many miles away. In such cases, victims residing near service organizations may adequately be served, but victims in outlying areas are likely to be left without help (Grama, 2000; Regional Research Institute for Human Service, 2003; Rural Justice Center, 1991). Also, individual victims in rural areas tend to have fewer economic resources than their urban counterparts (Doyle, 1998; Websdale, 1998), which might necessitate them to stay longer at service programs or to be more dependent upon service providers in the arduous process of transitioning from a victim to a survivor. In such cases, resources at rural programs are likely to be more rapidly depleted than urban programs.

The comparative lack of resources at rural programs may translate into burnout and higher turnover rates in personnel. Extensive social networks in rural communities may place victim advocates in the awkward position of having to assist friends, family members, or neighbors (Diamond, 2004). If not, they may know the family or friends of the victim, which creates a certain degree of emotional involvement or otherwise discomfort for both the advocate and the victim. This requires rural service providers to exert extra effort to keep personal feelings separate from professional duties. Additional care seems necessary to avoid breaching confidentiality in such circumstances (; Diamond, 2004; Logan et al., 2005).

Onerous challenges facing rural providers notwithstanding, delivery of adequate services to rural victims is crucial in many victims' journey to becoming whole again. To the extent that rural victims themselves relatively lack necessary coping resources in the aftermath of victimization, services offered by community-based as well as justice-based victim service programs appear to be more salient in rural settings than in urban communities.

Not only do rural service programs offer support, safety, and a variety of helping hands, they also play a critical role in encouraging otherwise reluctant rural victims to access and

cooperate with justice agencies. One rural victim of domestic violence reported, “I wouldn’t have gone to court by myself; the shelter made it easy” (Rural Justice Center, 1991, p. 32). Victims’ crime reporting and their cooperation at the investigatory and prosecution stages are critical elements in fulfilling the goals of the justice system (Dawson & Dinovitzer, 2001; Skogan, 1984). In this regard, not only victims but also justice agencies accrue benefits from the actions of rural service providers.

Therefore, it would be worthwhile to examine how adequately the needs of rural victims are met in comparison to their urban counterparts. Likewise, investigating the nature and the degree of unique challenges facing rural providers, as opposed to urban providers, will shed a valuable insight for both researchers and policymakers. Yet empirical endeavors on victim services that draw attention to rural and urban dichotomies are rare. The few studies that have delved into this issue typically targeted a certain group of victim populations—frequently victims of sexual crime and domestic violence (Bosch & Schumm, 2004; Logan et al, 2005). For example, in an effort to investigate the rural-urban differences from the perspectives of service providers, Eastman and Bunch (2007) recently surveyed 93 service providers, but the target population was limited to domestic violence victim service providers.

Given that service providers are in a position to observe victim services and victims’ needs on a continuous basis (Campbell, 1998), a survey of a broader group of service providers could provide an authoritative diagnosis of urban-rural differentials in services provision. Thus, this study examines the urban-rural differences in services delivery by enlisting the voices of 379 directors of both criminal justice-based and community-based programs in Texas. In other words, the current study’s population encompasses not only the traditional victim service programs such as shelters, domestic violence shelters, and sexual assault programs operating outside the justice system, but also those who are situated inside the justice system (e.g., law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices). The inclusion of service providers operating inside the justice system carries an additional weight in a study of this sort because justice-based providers often become the only service entities in rural communities when no other non-governmental community-based programs exist (Rural Justice Center, 1991). It also conforms to Campbell’s (1998) proposition that studies on victim services should take a holistic view of how multiple institutions in a community respond to meet the needs of victims.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The state of Texas comprises the setting for the current study. The rural versus urban dichotomy is particularly prominent in Texas. Encompassing a geographic area of 269,000 square miles, it is the second largest state in the United States in terms of land area, and has a population of over 22 million. Seven urban counties, among a total of 254, contain over 50% of the state population. While the urban counties are among the fastest growing in the United States, the majority of the other counties are sparsely populated; 85 counties contain less than 10,000 inhabitants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

The delivery of victim services in Texas mainly falls on three distinct groups of service providers: Victim Assistance Coordinators, Victim Liaison Officers, and Community Victim Advocates. Victim Assistance Coordinators (VAC) are non-prosecutorial personnel who provide services to victims at prosecutors’ offices, while Victim Liaison Officers (VLO) are sworn or non-sworn service personnel that are located in law enforcement agencies. Unlike VLOs and

VACs who operate in the criminal justice system, a multitude of programs—termed as community victim advocates (CVA) in this study—operate outside the justice system. These include domestic violence shelters, women’s centers, and sexual assault programs.

## Procedure

A mixed methods design was employed for this study, producing triangulated data in which quantitative findings are strengthened and complemented by qualitative findings and vice versa (Patton, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The study started out with a qualitative segment comprised of interviews with key informants who were known to be knowledgeable in the area of victim services in Texas. This purposive sample of key informants alerted the researcher to the issues that should be explored in a statewide survey of victim service providers. The interviews were followed by a self-administered survey—in both mail and electronic formats—of 1,421 directors of victim service programs in Texas, which was, in turn, followed by in-depth interviews of a purposive/convenience sample of service providers.

These final stage in-depth interviews clarified and expanded some of the findings that were revealed in the state-wide survey. The research sequence of the qualitative interviews, followed by the quantitative survey, and followed by the qualitative interviews, was consistent with that promulgated by the National Science Foundation as the most frequent procedure for a mixed methods study (National Science Foundation, 2006).

## Questionnaire Survey

A draft survey questionnaire was created via an extensive review of related literature, in conjunction with several site visits and interviews with three key informants. The key informants were known to have vast experience and knowledge in the area of victim services in Texas. Interviews at this stage were instrumental in creating and modifying the questionnaire.

For a questionnaire survey, the entire population of the directors (1,421) of the three types of programs in Texas was contacted via mail. In order to increase the response rate and ease the administration of the questionnaire, a comparable web-based survey was also created. The survey questionnaires were mailed out, and the Internet survey was accessible beginning July 1, 2006. The survey was to be filled out by the director of each service program, because it was assumed that directors would have the most information on the workings of each program. Yet, many of VACs and VLOs in Texas deliver victim services alone without additional staff, so in these many cases the entire “programs” were in fact surveyed. Two follow-up postcards were subsequently sent out, prompting service providers to respond to either the mail or web survey. Since the current study was conducted at the behest of the Crime Victims’ Institute (CVI)—a research institute funded by Texas Legislature—CVI’s recognized letter head, along with the signature of the director of the Institute, was used in the survey. To ward off the social desirability effect, complete confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

## Variables, Measurements, and Hypotheses

While the concept of *rural* appears clear in everyday conversation, determining whether a service program is located in a rural area or not entails complex definitional issues. For example, Weisheit et al., (1995) maintain that rural is not a single, but a four dimensional term involving demographic, occupational, social structural, and cultural dimensions. For the sake

of brevity and clarity, the operationalization of the term “rural” in this study drew upon the guidelines of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Developments’ Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The guidelines, which have been adopted in other studies ( Gilford, Nelson, and Ingram, 1981; Weisheit et al., 1995), designate locales with populations of 50,000 or less as rural or non-urban (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Developments, 2006). Thus, victim services programs that operate in a community with a population less than 50,000 are considered rural. To do this, respondents were simply asked, “What is the service area population of your jurisdiction?” The upper limit population of 50,000 in determining rural may be deemed upwardly biased to some observers. This demarcation, however, provides conservative estimates of differences between rural and urban communities. That is to say that if any difference were found using this cut-off point, it would be argued that the difference would be greater if a smaller population was used as an alternative demarcation.

One promising way to ascertain any disparities in service delivery between rural and urban areas is to compare the quantity and quality of services provided to individual victims, both of which are quite a daunting task requiring painstaking tallies, in tandem with suitable measurement tools. In order to minimize the toil and potential counting errors on the part of survey respondents, Finn & Lee’s (1987) work was utilized in this study. They identified 33 types of services which national experts agreed that victim service programs should provide. The 33 types of services, a few of which are modified to fit the Texas context, are presented in Table 1 [next page]. Presented with the 33 service items, survey respondents were asked to check the type of services they routinely provide to the victims in their community. The summed value of the checked items constitutes the variable “Number of types of services provided,” ranging from 0 to 33, with 33 denoting that all of the Finn & Lee’s service items were routinely provided.

In addition to the *number of types of services provided* by each program, five other variables are also measured, all of which the literature deems to be closely related with victim services delivery. First, respondents were asked whether their program adopted a *mission statement* that professed victim services as the goal of the program. A clearly defined mission statement gives victims an idea of what to expect from the program and encourages them to seek help (Tomz & McGillis, 1997). A value of 1 was given when such a statement existed, 0 when it did not.

Victim service programs receive funding from multiple sources, and the amount and *type of funding* clearly correlates with the quantity and quality of victim services (Blomberg, Waldo, & Bullock, 1989; Newmark, 2004; Peterson & Underwood, 2000). Most victim assistance funding in the nation is disbursed in the form of federal/state and city/county grants. The larger portion of federal/state funding is directed toward community-based programs while city/county funding tends to favor justice-based programs. Still, some service programs fail to get any funding and have to rely mainly on donations. Although a program typically receives multiple types of funding, for the sake of brevity only six primary funding sources for each program were analyzed. The six primary funding sources are: federal/state funding, county/city funding, and donation/fundraising.

Although all of the 33 service items in Table 2 [page 152] are deemed to be important for all victim service programs (Finn & Lee, 1987), in practice the types of services provided differ somewhat based on the *service provider type*. For instance, counseling and system-wide services are more likely to be provided by community-based programs, while court-related services and claims assistance are provided by VACs and VLOs (Yun & Kercher, 2006).

**TABLE 1. TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY SERVICE PROVIDERS**

<b>EMERGENCY SERVICES</b>	<b>COURT-RELATED SERVICES</b>
Medical Care	Witness Reception Area
Shelter	Court Orientation-Adult
Security Repair	Court Orientation-Child
Direct Financial Assistance	Notification
On-scene Comfort	Witness Alert
<b>COUNSELING</b>	Transportation
24 hour hot-line	Child Care
Crisis Intervention	Escort to Court
Follow-up Counseling	Victim Impact Statement
Mediation	<b>CLAIMS ASSISTANCE</b>
<b>ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	Insurance Claims Aid
Personal Advocacy	Restitution Assistance
Employer Intervention	Compensation Assistance
Property Return	<b>SYSTEM-WIDE SERVICES</b>
Intimidation Protection	Public Education
Paralegal/Legal Counsel	Legislative Advocacy
Referral	Training
Information on VINE	
Explanation of Criminal Justice Process	
Assistance with Medical Appointments	

For a helping behavior to be effective, a service provider must possess an ability to help (Heider, 1958). Scholars agree that an effective way of improving the service providers' ability to help is training (Jerin et al., 1995; Logan et al., 2005). To indirectly measure the ability of providers to help, two questions about needed training hours for service providers—one for pre-service and one for in-service training—were asked, and the responses were summed to create the *Training* variable.

Pursuant to Tomz & McGillis's (1997) observation, it was hypothesized that victim service programs with a longer history would provide more services than newer ones, due to more resources, networks, and relationships in place. *Length of operation in years* is a metric variable, obtained by asking respondents directly how many years their programs have been operating.

Finally, respondents were asked whether there existed an interagency committee composed of representatives of multiple institutions in the community. Previous studies indicate that having a collaborative team comprised of multiple agencies increases the likelihood that victims of certain types of crimes receive better services (Campbell & Bybee, 1997; Tolman & Edleson, 1995).

**TABLE 2. SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS (N=379)**

Demographics	X2 (df)/F (df)	VLO			Total N
		VAC (75) %/Mean	(233) %/Mean	CA (71) %/Mean	
Gender	53.6(2)***				
Male		16.0%	55.8%	19.7%	156
Female		84.0%	44.2%	80.3%	223
Education	36.2(6)***				
High school		20.0%	13.3%	11.3%	54
Some college		36.0%	44.2%	22.5%	146
Graduated College		26.7%	30.5%	23.9%	108
Higher than College		17.3%	12.0%	42.3%	71
	18.2	4.9	4.3	8.2	
Length of Victim Service in Current Position	(2, 374)***	(3.9) †	(4.5)	(6.2)	
	7.8	9.5	12.3		
Length of Victim Service in Any Capacity	6.0 (2,374)**	(6.7)	(8.2)	(8.8)	

\*\*p≤.01; \*\*\*p≤.001.

† Numbers in parentheses are standard deviation.

The primary objective of the quantitative analyses of this study was to assess the disparities in victim services delivery between urban and rural locales. To achieve the purpose of the study, the key hypothesis—*Rural providers provide fewer types of services than their urban counterparts*—was tested. In addition, rural-urban differences were also tested on other relevant variables such as mission statement, training hours, length of operation in years, service provider type, top funding source, and interagency committee.

**Interviews**

In order to both bolster and supplement quantitative findings, a convenient/purposive sample of service providers was interviewed in-depth in an unstructured manner, both prior to and after the questionnaire survey. A total of 18 service providers participated in the interviews, including a minimum of 3 from each service provider group. Specifically, 5 VACs, 4 VLOs, and 9 CVAs were interviewed through site visits and various victim service conferences in Texas. All interviewees were female. The CVAs were chosen from shelters (4), women’s centers (3), a children’s center (1), and a domestic violence center for immigrants (1). Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to two hours, depending on subjects. Interviews were tape-recorded upon permission. When not permissible, field notes were taken.

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## RESULTS

### Questionnaire Survey Participants Characteristics

For the survey, the entire population of the directors (1,421) of the three types of programs in Texas was contacted through both a mail and Internet survey. It should be noted, however, that VLOs (1,070) constitute a disproportionately large portion due to the large number of law enforcement agencies in Texas. Moreover, the majority of VLOs are sworn police officers whose priorities lie with traditional law enforcement duties, quite distant from victim services delivery. In fact, many Texas law enforcement agencies imposed the nominal title of Victim Liaison Officer on existing personnel in a gesture to conform to the legislative order that had mandated such positions across the state (Office of the Attorney General, 1998). Due in part to the nature of these nominal VLOs who are already saddled with law enforcement duties, the current study did not seem to pique their interest. Consequently, the response rate of VLOs was comparatively lower than that of VACs and CVAs: Among the directors contacted, 75 (41.7%) of 180 VACs and 71 (41.5%) of 171 CVAs responded, whereas only 233 (21.8%) of 1,070 VLOs returned the survey.

Table 2 depicts the characteristics of the 379 victim service providers by their type. While more than four-fifths of the sample was female for both VACs and CVAs, the female portion of VLOs was less than half. This further indicates the overwhelming existence of the “dual duty” male police officers who have taken on the nominal title of Victim Liaison Officer.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to the level of education of the directors, the vast majority of respondents had a college degree. Yet, the overall education level was higher for the CVAs than for the justice-based providers. For instance, 42.3% of CVAs have degrees higher than a bachelor’s while the figures for justice-based providers were less than 20% for each.

The length of time served in the current position was much longer for CVAs (8.2 years) than for VACs (4.9 years) and VLOs (4.3 years). Respondents were also asked how long they have served victims in any capacity. Again, CVAs had a longer service experience than others: the mean tenure for CVAs was 12.3 while those for VACs and VLOs were 7.8 and 9.5 years, respectively.

## FINDINGS

### Quantitative Findings

To examine the differences in the dynamics of victim services delivery between urban and rural settings, a series of bivariate T-tests were conducted. Mean comparisons were made on 6 test variables. All categorical variables were dichotomized into having the value of 0 and 1. Table 3 [next page] summarizes the results of the analyses.

Most *t*-values are negative indicating that the mean of rural programs for the test variables are smaller than the urban means. Of particular importance is the mean difference in the number of types of services provided: Rural programs (10.2) provided on average four fewer types

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1. A separate analysis revealed that 74% of the responding VLOs are sworn police officers.

of services than urban programs (13.9). This result quantitatively supports previous studies' contention that rural areas have fewer available services of all types (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Logan et al., 2005) Further, it offers an additional testimony to the hypothesis of this study in that rural marginalization applies not only to domestic violence and sexual assault programs, but also to a much broader range of service programs including even justice-based ones.

**TABLE 3. T TESTS OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN VICTIM SERVICE PROGRAMS**

Variables	t-value	Rural	Urban
		(n=277) (Mean)	(n=101) (Mean)
Number of types of services provided	-6.27***	10.20	13.90
Mission statement (yes=1)	-5.03***	.38	.66
Training hours	-6.27***	29.76	50.53
Length of operation in years	-7.47***	8.32	15.24
Service provider type			
<i>VAC (yes=1)</i>	.05	.20	.196
<i>CVA (yes=1)</i>	-5.87***	.11	.41
<i>VLO (yes=1)</i>	5.44***	.70	.40
Top funding source			
<i>Federal/state funding (yes=1)</i>	-4.19***	.25	.48
<i>County/city funding (yes=1)</i>	3.49**	.56	.37
<i>Donation/no funding (yes=1)</i>	.87	.20	.16
Interagency committee (yes=1)	-7.08***	.56	.87

p $\leq$ .10; \*p $\leq$ .05; \*\*p $\leq$ .01; \*\*\*p $\leq$ .001.

Directors from rural areas also reported that their programs on average fared worse than urban counterparts with regard to annual training hours (29.76 hours versus 50.53 hours) and length of operation (8.32 years versus 15.24 years). Fewer rural programs reported that their top funding source was federal/state funding (25% versus 48%). The mainstay of victim assistance funding across the nation is the federal and state source (Office for Victims of Crime, 2001), thus, the fact that fewer programs in rural areas than in urban areas reported federal/state funding as their main funding source suggests that rural programs receive less grants. Also to the extent that county/city grants tend to fluctuate more frequently depending on year-by-year local sociopolitical contingencies (Office of the Attorney General, 1998), rural funding schemes are bound to be less stable than urban ones. All of the above differences were statistically significant at the .001 level.

More VACs and VLOs were located in rural than in urban communities, which is expected given that many more counties and municipalities in Texas are located in rural areas. In contrast, CVAs showed a greater presence in urban areas—41% of urban programs were CVAs, while only 10% of rural programs were CVAs,  $t(130) = -5.87, p < .001$ . Given that CVAs primarily provide tailored services for victims of intimate partner violence or crimes of sexual

violence, victims of these types of crimes in rural communities are less likely to receive comparable services. In addition, more rural programs (20%) reported that they primarily resorted to donation or fundraising for funding than did urban programs (16%).

Previous research suggests that victims who live in a community that has more coordinated services receive significantly more information on physical and mental health benefits (Campbell & Bybee, 1997) and hold better perceptions of the legal, medical, and mental health systems than do victims in communities with less coordinated services (Campbell, 1998). Further, an interagency committee, an indicator of better coordination, also increases the chance that certain victims receive better services (Campbell & Bybee, 1997; Tolman & Edelson, 1995). As presented in Table 3, however, such an interagency committee had far less presence in rural communities (56%) than in urban communities (87%) in the current study.

In sum, the results of a series of bivariate analyses in Table 3 indicate that victim service programs in rural Texas do not fare as well as their urban counterparts. Specifically, rural programs on average provided four fewer types of services than urban programs. Also, rural programs were placed under a wide array of disadvantages including funding, training, and possibly even the degree of coordination among providers. It is not difficult to assume that the burden of these multiple disadvantages is born primarily by the victims of rural communities.

Because the data of this study was directly drawn from the study population rather than a sample, readers are advised to put more emphasis on the magnitude of mean differences rather than on the significance levels. Tests of significance are applicable only when assessing the error in making inferences to the universe from which the sample is drawn (Raftery, 1995; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2001).

### **Qualitative Findings**

The following presents the analyses of the interviews of 18 providers. In general, the findings presented in Table 3 were supported by the qualitative data. The main goal of the unstructured interview was to explore the nature and extent of existing service disparities between urban and rural settings, as reported by service providers.

The most frequently reported was the lack of victim services in rural Texas, especially in West Texas. A director of a rural family violence shelter elaborated on this:

If you take the map of the State of Texas and divide it into east and west along the Austin line, you will see more shelters and victim services to the right of the Austin line. But if you go to West Texas, some of the shelters serve five and six counties that are two or three hours apart. If you are in this community and you are a victim, in many cases you have to leave your own community and go somewhere else to find a shelter. If you are a service provider, it is logistically very hard to get out and provide services.

Such grievances in rural areas were not limited to West Texas. A CVA from a children's center in a rural community in northern Texas echoed a similar sentiment:

Because of limited funding, we had to lay off three personnel last year and it was devastating for all of us.... Victims of sexual crimes in our community have to drive 35 miles to get a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) examination. One SANE nurse covers nine counties in our case.

Lack of available victim services in rural Texas primarily stems from limited funding. As noted, rural programs receive less federal and state funding as compared to urban programs.

The relative lack of federal and state funding for rural service programs would matter little if their funding base is complemented by relatively generous donations from corporations or foundations. The interviews with rural service providers proved to the contrary, however. A victim advocate at a rural shelter said:

Urban agencies do get more money. In urban areas, there are corporations you can tap into. For instance, in Houston, they can get Exxon or HP. I once called a major corporate office in Houston and asked them for money. They said no, saying that they give out money only locally. That is, they give money to programs within the boundary of the city where the corporate offices are. They don't give out in the rural areas. We don't get any corporate money here in our little-bitty town. There is not any corporation in our county.

Another CVA in a rural county near Dallas added to this:

People from our county go to Dallas to [do their] shopping and spend money there. But the firms and companies in Dallas do not give out donations to our county. It's unfair.

Interviewed providers commented in unison that donations from corporations can be very useful to service programs. Not only does it increase the revenue for the programs, but also it can be used for certain purposes where federal and state grants are typically not allowed to be used. With fewer grants and donations, rural agencies are likely to fall short compared to their urban counterparts.

In general, the amount of funding a victim service program receives fluctuates at the mercy of varying political and economic contingencies. Fluctuations in funding, be it federal funding or private donations, seems to affect small and rural agencies more heavily. A victim advocate from a rural family violence shelter said it this way:

There have been some shelters that had to lay staff off. Some even shut down. It was especially so after 9/11. A lot of money from the VOCA grants as well as private donations went in that direction. Fundraising that year was very low for us. Anytime something like that happens, we are affected. When the Tsunami hit Thailand, the Houston Food Bank stopped sending discounted food to us. All the grocers were sending foods over there. It made our grocery bills higher.

One might argue that less funding for rural programs can be legitimized because there are fewer victims who need services in rural communities. To this argument, one service provider at a rural shelter responds:

It is kind of like asking the question of which came first between the chicken and the egg: Are we getting less money because we serve fewer people or are we serving fewer people because we get less money? The women center (in a big city) can serve 800 women, but our shelter can hold only 32 people (in a year). Funders make allocations based on the number of people we serve. They [urban programs] can always do more, better, and faster because they have more resources.

Victim service programs are obligated to meet various requirements in order to receive victim assistance grants, which usually necessitate a considerable volume of head counting and bookkeeping. The volume and intricacies of grant requirements, mostly modeled after the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) guidelines, appears to best suit urban programs with many more personnel on the payroll, which can assign a staff solely devoted to meeting the paperwork needs. Yet smaller rural programs were subjected to the exact same guidelines. The bur-

den of paperwork therefore inordinately taxed small rural programs whose resource limitations did not allow them to commit staff solely for grant reporting purposes. In such small programs, the time spent on paperwork directly meant time that could have been spent on helping victims. A comment from a CVA in a rural shelter reflects this concern:

Grant requirements need a lot of head counting. In bigger programs, they have clerical people who can do the key punch job. In smaller agencies, that's part of everyone's job. It is added onto other things they have to do. The guidelines they [the funders] put down are easier for the bigger agencies to handle.

Finally, Table 3 reflects that service providers in rural areas received fewer hours of annual training (29.75 hrs) than do urban providers (50.53 hrs). The surprisingly low training hours for rural providers relative to urban providers stems partly from the lack of resources in rural programs and partly from the distance to travel to attend needed trainings. One VAC from a rural DA's office put it this way:

I do want to attend training and conferences which are frequently held in Austin and other big cities. But I am the only one who serves victims here in my office. I don't feel comfortable leaving my office for training.

Because of such constraints, service providers in rural communities voiced the need for more frequent regional conferences rather than those infrequently held in big cities.

## DISCUSSION

The rural-urban differences are a critical aspect of American communities. Thus, current theories and research on victim services would be far more useful if they took into account the rural-urban dichotomies. The current study examined differentials in victim services delivery between rural and urban programs, adopting a mixed methods design through which qualitative flesh was added to the quantitative bones (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Also meaningful is that, unlike previous studies, the study population included a comprehensive group of victim service providers who were situated, not only outside the criminal justice system, but also within the justice system.

The quality and quantity of services that crime victims receive should not depend on where the victims physically reside, yet both quantitative and qualitative findings in this study support the hypothesis that the provision of victim services in rural areas is significantly marginalized compared to urban communities. Rural programs offer their clients, on average, four fewer types of services than their urban counterparts. Rural programs also fare worse in other critical areas such as funding, mission statement, and training hours. These results are consistent with previous studies that have dealt with similar topics (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Logan et al., 2005). The thinner presence of interagency committees among victim service programs in rural communities possibly indicates that the level of coordination among them might not be optimal. Qualitative data suggested that fluctuations in funding strike rural programs harder than urban programs. Due to lesser staff, grant reporting requirements were particularly onerous for rural service providers.

As seen, rural service programs face many more challenges relative to their urban counterparts. In order to rectify the discrepancies observed in this study and not to leave rural victims behind, particular attention should be given to victims of rural communities. The research

findings indicate, among other things, if more federal and state funding is directed to rural programs, the discrepancy in the quantity and quality of services between urban and rural communities might be reduced. Funding schemes specifically geared toward rural programs, e.g., sub-grants for rural programs, might prove beneficial. To facilitate coordination among rural programs, a portion of grants could be set up for interagency joint applications. As for training needs, small but frequent regional conferences or training programs would benefit rural service providers. Finally, funding providers might well take into account the isomorphic nature of grant requirements that unnecessarily overburden rural programs.

Several limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The current study attempted to portray the overall picture of Texas victim services delivery, not a particular type of service provider. Therefore, three different types of service providers—VACs, VLOs, and community victim advocates—were put in a single analytic scheme. In doing so, some of the findings in the quantitative analyses might have been overshadowed by the group with the largest sample size—in this case, VLOs. But most quantitative results were supported by qualitative findings which were not influenced by the disproportionate sample size of VLOs. Further, in order to quantify the services provided to victims, the measure used was created by summing up the number of types of services provided to victims. Since this measure calculated the number of *types of services* provided, it did not capture the precise *quantity of services* delivered. It is possible that some programs specialized in fewer types of services but in a large quantity. Nor did the measure reflect the quality of services delivered. Despite the limitation, the measure used in this study is useful among those available and has been previously used in other similar studies.

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## Race and the Sentencing of Drug Offenders: An Examination of the Focal Concerns Perspective

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### Abstract

*This study examined how sentencing decisions are influenced by the three components of the focal concerns perspective. The results showed that several factors predicted by the focal concerns perspective to impact judges' decisions did have a significant impact on sentence outcomes. Specifically, those who committed more serious offenses, who had more prior felony convictions, and who had less than a high school education were more likely to be incarcerated. In addition, those who were female and White were less likely to be incarcerated. When models split by race were examined separately, the results showed that employment status had a significantly greater negative impact on Black defendants' sentences.*

**Key Words:** sentencing, racial disparity, focal concerns

### INTRODUCTION

Several recent studies inquiring into the factors that influence judges' sentencing decisions have relied on the focal concerns perspective to explain their findings. Developed by Steffensmeier and colleagues (Steffensmeier, Kramer, & Streifel, 1993; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998), this perspective offers insight into the reasons why several legal and non-legal offense and offender characteristics influence the sentences that defendants receive in the criminal court. While this perspective has become a very popular explanation for gender and racial disparities in sentencing, research examining each of its components has been limited (Hartley, Maddan, & Spohn, 2007). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the effects of several variables that are suggested to influence the three components of the focal concerns perspective on the sentencing decision of drug offenders. In addition, this study examines whether the factors that contribute significantly to sentencing decisions influence the sentences of Black and White defendants equally.

## FOCAL CONCERNS PERSPECTIVE

First developed by Steffensmeier (1980), the focal concerns perspective argues that judges base their decisions around the three focal concerns of blameworthiness, protection of the community (dangerousness), and practical constraints and consequences (Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Defendants who are viewed as more dangerous and blameworthy and whose punishment is viewed as less likely to involve practical constraints and consequences are more likely to receive a severe punishment. These focal concerns are constructed through judges' perceptions influenced by various offender and offense characteristics.

The focal concern of blameworthiness refers to the culpability of the defendant. This is mainly constructed from legal factors such as the severity of the offense and criminal history. Other offender characteristics such as history of past victimization, role the defendant performed in the offense (whether they committed the offense alone or with another defendant) (Steffensmeier et al., 1998), and mental health status (Hartley et al., 2007) have also been identified as possible factors that influence this concern. In addition, whether a defendant pleads guilty has been identified as an indicator of blameworthiness, with those who plead guilty being viewed as taking responsibility for their actions (Hartley et al., 2007).

Protection of the community refers to the level of danger the offender poses to society and addresses judges' concern with protecting society from offenders who they believe are likely to recidivate. Like the focal concern of blameworthiness, this concern is influenced by the legal factors of prior record and offense severity. Offender characteristics such as employment and education also contribute to this perception (Steffensmeier et al., 1998), as those who are employed and have higher levels of education are viewed as less likely to reoffend.

The third focal concern of practical constraints and consequences refers to the organizational constraints faced by the court system, as well as individual constraints that are specific to each defendant. Organization constraints are such things as the flow of court cases, overcrowding of correctional organization, and maintaining working relationships with the court actors. The individual constraints refer to each defendant's ability to serve time incarcerated. Factors that may influence this perception are such things as the health of the defendant, special needs, and relationships to children and family members (Steffensmeier et al., 1998, p. 767)

Adopting Albonetti's (1991) idea of bonded rationality, the focal concerns perspective also suggests that judges employ a "conceptual shorthand" when making sentencing decisions. Albonetti found that judges must often base decisions off stereotypes and past experiences because of the need to make decisions based on limited information. Steffensmeier et al. (1998) asserted that this "conceptual shorthand" caused judges to use limited information (e.g., offense seriousness, gender, race) to conclude about the three focal concerns. This concept has been especially useful in explaining the harsher sentencing of young, minority males. It suggests these offenders are being stereotyped as more dangerous, blameworthy, and better able to serve time incarcerated (Albonetti, 1991; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier et al., 1998).

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A great deal of recent sentencing literature has used focal concerns perspective to explain findings of disparity. Overall, this research has produced a great deal of support for this per-

spective (Hartley et al., 2007; Kramer & Ulmer, 2002; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier et al., 1993; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000; Steffensmeier & Kramer, 1995; 1998; Ulmer & Johnson, 2004). Legal factors (e.g., offense severity) that influence perceptions of blameworthiness and dangerousness have been found to influence sentencing outcomes. As the severity of the offense and the offender's prior record increase in severity, sentences also increase in severity (e.g., Spohn & Beichner, 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006; Steffensmeier et al., 1993; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Several other studies have found that defendants who accept blame for their actions by pleading guilty are sentenced less harshly than those who are found guilty through a trial (Albonetti, 1991; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006; Steffensmeier et al., 1993; Steffensmeier et al., 1998; Ulmer & Kramer, 1996).

Other factors that affect dangerousness also have been found to significantly affect defendants' sentences. Nobiling, Spohn, and DeLone (1998) examined data from Chicago and Kansas City to assess whether employment status affected defendants' sentences. Their analysis showed that defendants in Kansas were more likely to be incarcerated if they were unemployed. In Chicago, being unemployed did not result in a greater likelihood of being incarcerated. It did, however, result in a significantly longer term of incarceration. When Black, White, and Hispanic defendants were examined separately, unemployed black defendants in Chicago received a significantly longer sentence. In Kansas City, Black defendants who were unemployed had significantly greater odds of incarceration. Additional research has similarly found that race and employment status interact to more strongly influence the sentences of minorities (Chiricos & Bales, 1991; Walsh, 1987).

Also supporting the assertion that measures of dangerousness influence sentences, Albonetti (1997) found that level of education was a significant predictor of sentence outcome. Her examination of federal drug offenders found that those with at least a high school education were less likely to be incarcerated than those without a high school education. In addition, her analysis found that White defendants were granted greater leniency for their increased levels of education.

Additional research also has found evidence supporting the practical constraints and consequences of focal concern. Crow and Bales (2006) found that shifts in organizational constraints caused by changes in sentencing guidelines affected the sentencing practices of judges. Several studies also have found that personal factors such as having children and being married can reduce a defendant's sentences. Daly (1987; 1989) has further suggested that the social cost imposed on defendants who are caring for children results in lenient treatment. Bickle and Peterson (1991) further supported Daly's theory in their analysis, showing that those who preformed child caretaker duties were less likely to be incarcerated than those without childcare responsibilities.

Several recent studies have also produced support for the claim that several extralegal variables work through conceptual shorthand to influence the three focal concerns (Harrington & Spohn, 2007; Holleran & Spohn, 2004; Kramer & Ulmer, 2002; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006; Steffensmeier et al., 1993; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Steffensmeier et al. (1998) found that race, gender, and age of the defendant all significantly influenced sentencing decisions. Spohn and Holleran (2000) examined sentencing decision in Chicago, Kansas City, and Miami. They found that middle-aged White males in Chicago and Kansas City were less likely to

receive a sentence of incarceration than young Black and Hispanic defendants. Both White and Black young males were treated more harshly than middle-aged White defendants in Miami.

The focal concerns perspective has been important to the understanding of the way that legal and extralegal factors influence sentencing decisions. Prior research has been limited, however, in its examination of the variety of factors that may influence these three focal concerns. In addition, more consideration needs to be given to variations in the influences that these characteristics may have for Black and White defendants. This study attempts to examine the focal concerns perspective using a more comprehensive list of possible offender characteristics that may influence sentencing decisions through the three focal concerns. Furthermore, this study offers insight into the different impacts these factors have for the sentences of Black and White defendants.

## METHODOLOGY

The data was collected from two sources. First, all pre-sentence investigation (PSI) reports written in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 for individuals being sentenced for either a delivery or manufacturing drug offense were collected in an urban county in Pennsylvania. Limiting the study to drug offenders ensures that perceptions of dangerousness and blameworthiness did not vary by offense type. While the use of PSI reports limits the sample to only offenders for which a report was written, the detailed information they supply allows for a more comprehensive examination of the factors that influence judges' sentencing decisions. This information makes it possible to more accurately assess the components of focal concerns theory.

The second source from which data were collected was from the offender's court dockets. The Pennsylvania Unified Judicial System (<http://ujportal.pacourts.us>) contains court dockets for each offender in the county. These dockets were utilized to obtain information on the number of charges and the final sentencing decision.

### Dependent and Independent Variables

Table 1 [next page] presents the descriptive statistics for all of the variables employed in this study. Two dependent variables were examined. The first dependent variable is a dichotomized measure of incarceration. Offenders who received sentences of incarceration are coded as 1, and those who received sentences to probation are coded as 0.

In each of the models estimated, a variable for offense severity and prior record was included. Offense severity was controlled by the offense grade (misdemeanor three, misdemeanor two, misdemeanor one, felony three, felony two, or felony one) and was entered in an ordinal scale. Prior record was controlled by calculating the defendant's number of prior felony convictions and entered as a continuous variable.

Several case processing variables also were included for plea type (guilty plea = 0 or not guilty plea = 1) and defendant's pretrial release status (not detained = 0 or detained = 1). Offender characteristics for gender (female = 0 or male = 1), race (White = 0 or Black = 1), and age also were included. Due to the small number of Hispanic defendants and defendants of other ethnicities in the county, data collection was limited to Black and White defendants. The focal concern of blameworthiness was examined through the additional variables of presence of a codefendant (no codefendant = 0 or codefendant = 1) and mental health status (no diag-

nosed mental health problems = 0 or diagnosed mental health problems = 1). Only those who were described in the PSI as having a clinically diagnosed mental health issue were considered to have mental health problems. There was not a measure in the PSI for severity of mental illness; therefore, a control for severity was not included. Dangerousness was examined with variables for employment status at the time of sentencing (not employed = 0 or employed = 1) and education level (no high school education = 0 or high school education or GED = 1).

**TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ALL VARIABLES (N=312)**

<i>Continuous Independent Variables</i>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
Age	32	10.16	312
Prior felony convictions	3.4	3.4	312
<i>Independent Variables (nominal/ordinal)</i>		<b>%</b>	<b>n</b>
Offense severity			
Grade three misdemeanor (1)		8%	24
Grade two misdemeanor (2)		3%	8
Grade one misdemeanor (3)		2%	7
Grade three felony (4)		84%	263
Grade two felony(5)		1%	2
Grade one felony (6)		3%	8
Pretrial release			
Not detained (0)		47%	147
Detained (1)		53%	165
Plea			
Not guilty (0)		18%	55
Guilty (1)		82%	257
Race			
White (0)		39%	120
Black (1)		62%	192
Gender			
Female (0)		39%	120
Male (1)		62%	192
Mental health			
No mental health problems (0)		75%	234
Mental health problems (1)		25%	77
Codefendant			
No codefendant (0)		75%	235
Codefendant (1)		25%	77

(Table continued on next page.)

**TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ALL VARIABLES (N=312) (CONTINUED)**

<i>Independent Variables (nominal/ordinal)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Not married (0)	86%	268
Married (1)	14%	44
<b>Child support</b>		
Does not pay (0)	88%	274
Pays child support (1)	12%	38
<b>Lives with child</b>		
Does not live with child (0)	78%	246
Lives with child (1)	21%	66
<b>Education</b>		
No high school (0)	29%	91
High school (1)	71%	221
<b>Employment</b>		
Not employed full time (0)	80%	249
Employed full time (1)	20%	63
<b>Year (each coded as a dummy variable)</b>		
2000	23%	72
2001	23%	73
2002	22%	70
2003*	31%	97
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
<b>Sentence Outcome</b>		
Not incarcerated (0)	44%	138
Incarcerated (1)	56%	174

To assess the focal concern of individual practical constraints and consequences, dichotomous variables for living with a child and paying child support were included. These were chosen as better measures of practical constraints than number of children, as having children does not necessarily mean a defendant is performing any parenting responsibilities that would result in greater practical constraints and consequences. Therefore, in order to be considered a measure of practical consequence, a defendant had to be performing a parental responsibility (either actually living with their child or paying child support). In addition, a variable for marital status also was included (not married = 0 or married = 1).

Constraining the study to one location controlled for variations that may be present in the organizational practical constraints and consequences. Because all the cases were sentenced in the same county, it can be assumed that the same organizational constraints, such as space in correctional facilities and pace necessary to process cases applied equally to each case. It is

possible, however, that cases processed in different years faced different levels of constraints (also see, Peterson & Hagan, 1984, which suggested year of sentencing is a significant predictor of sentence outcome). Therefore, to control for any variation that could occur based on the year of sentencing, separate dummy variables were created for each year. For each dummy variable, 1 represents that given year, and 0 represents all other years (e.g., the dummy variable for 2003 is coded 1 for cases sentenced in 2003 and 0 for cases sentenced in 2000, 2001, or 2002). The variable for 2003 was left out of the analysis as the reference category to allow for appropriate interpretation of the coefficients.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the results for the other years (2000, 2001, and 2002) are interpreted as a comparison to those cases sentenced in 2003.

## RESULTS

### Statistical Analyses

Because sentencing type was measured as a dichotomy, multivariate logistic regression was utilized (Menard, 2002) to assess the impact of the independent variables on likelihood of being incarcerated. Additional models for White and Black defendants also were assessed to determine whether the explanatory factors have a different impact on the dependent variables, based on the race of the offenders (Brame, Paternoster, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 1998; Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 1998). In order to test whether the independent variables had significantly different effects for White and Black defendants, z scores were calculated using the following formula:

$$z = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{(se_1)^2 + (se_2)^2}}$$

**TABLE 2: LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE SENTENCE TYPE (N=312)**

<i>Variable</i>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Offense severity	.350	.150	5.490*	1.420
Prior felony charges	.097	.035	7.554**	1.102
Pretrial release status	.273	.282	.936	1.314
Plea	.603	.373	2.615	1.828
Mental Health Status	.060	.314	.037	1.062
Education	-.610	.304	4.040*	.543
Employment	-.389	.351	1.228	.677
Codefendant	-.024	.328	.006	.976

(Table continued on next page.)

1. Failure to leave one dummy variable out of the analysis will result in an exact linear function of the other dummy variables included in the analysis. Thus, the variables will be perfectly correlated and will not allow for coefficient estimations (Lewis-Beck, 1980).

**TABLE 2: LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE SENTENCE TYPE (N=312)  
(CONTINUED)**

<i>Variable</i>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Marital Status	-.508	.400	1.614	.602
Gender	.974	.377	6.676**	2.649
Race	.728	.299	5.931*	2.071
Age	-.016	.014	1.439	.984
Lives with child	-.219	.349	.393	.803
Pays child support	-1.098	.431	6.481*	.334
Year 2000	-1.931	.407	22.544**	.145
Year 2001	-1.299	.389	11.180**	.273
Year 2002	-1.082	.400	7.337**	.339
Constant	-.227	.805	.080	.797
-2 Log-likelihood	345.517			
Model Chi-Square	81.208**			
Cox & Snell R2	.230			
Nagelkerke R2	.308			

NOTE: \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

### Multivariate Results

The logistic regression estimates for likelihood of incarceration are presented in Table 2. As shown in the table, the severity of the offense had a significant effect on whether a defendant received a sentence of incarceration. With each increase in severity, the likelihood of a defendant being incarcerated also increased ( $b = .350$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Likelihood of incarceration also increased as the number of prior felonies a defendant has increased ( $b = .097$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Several other extralegal factors that are considered to influence judges' perceptions of dangerousness and blameworthiness also reached statistical significance. Whites were significantly less likely to be incarcerated than Black defendants ( $b = .728$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In addition, the coefficient for gender also was significant ( $b = .974$ ;  $p < .01$ ), with males being more likely to receive a sentence of incarceration than females. Age, on the other hand, did not have a significant effect on judges' decisions. Defendants with a high school education were also less likely to receive incarceration than those without a high school education ( $b = -.610$ ;  $p = .05$ ).

Several other variables that are theorized to have an effect on sentences did not reach significance in the sample. Those who had a codefendant were not significantly less likely to receive a sentence of incarceration. Additionally, suffering from a mental illness did not appear to have a significant effect on judges' decisions to incarcerate a defendant.

For the practical constraints variables, those paying child support were significantly less likely to receive incarceration than those who did not have the responsibility of paying support to children ( $b = -1.098$ ;  $p = .05$ ). The other practical constraints variables of living with a child and being married did not reach significance. Additionally, the control variables for years of

sentencing also were significant. Those who were sentenced in 2000, 2001, and 2002 were less likely to receive a sentence of incarceration than those sentenced in 2003.

Several variables were removed from the model due to their failure to reach statistical significance. In addition, these variables did not have a significant impact on the total explained variance of the model. Therefore, to make the model more parsimonious, the variables for mental health status, living with a dependent child, and codefendant were removed. As shown in Table 3 (below), the remaining coefficients were not significantly impacted. The more parsimonious model was then split by race to determine whether the independent variables differently affect the sentences of White and Black defendants.

**TABLE 3. PARSIMONIOUS LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS  
FOR THE SENTENCE TYPE (N=312)**

<i>Variable</i>	<b>b</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Offense severity	.340	.148	5.304*	1.405
Prior felony charges	.098	.035	7.880	1.103
Pretrial release status	.277	.281	.974	1.320
Plea	.626	.372	2.833*	1.871
Education	-.629	.302	4.349*	.533
Employment	-.378	.350	1.166	.685
Marital Status	-.546	.393	1.923	.579
Gender	1.041	.356	8.565**	2.833
Race	.750	.295	6.449*	2.116
Age	-.017	.014	1.525	.983
Pays child support	-1.116	.426	6.857**	.327
Year 2000	-1.904	.398	22.895**	.149
Year 2001	-1.294	.384	11.344**	.274
Year 2002	-1.067	.397	7.218**	.344
Constant	-.267	.738	.130	.766
-2 Log-likelihood	346.208			
Model Chi-Square	82.152**			
Cox & Snell R2	.231			
Nagelkerke R2	.310			

NOTE: \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 4 [next page] shows the first race-specific model which examined the factors influencing the likelihood of incarceration separately for White and Black offenders. Based on the z-scores two factors had significant interactions with race. Not being employed had a significantly stronger impact on the likelihood of incarceration for Black defendants than White defendants. The other variable that had a significantly greater effect on Black defendants than White defendants was the control variable for being sentenced in 2002.

TABLE 4: SPLIT MODEL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR DETERMINANTS OF INCARCERATION

<i>Variable</i>	White (N =120)				Black (N = 192)				<i>Z</i>
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>	
Offense severity	.484	.228	4.507*	1.623	.280	.207	1.825	1.323	0.66
Prior felony charges	.090	.045	3.978*	1.094	.125	.054	5.281*	1.133	0.50
Pretrial release status	.851	.502	2.877	2.341	.055	.370	.022	1.056	1.28
Plea	1.232	.902	1.868	3.429	.674	.435	2.397	1.962	0.56
Education	-.586	.525	1.243	.557	-.686	.408	2.819	.504	0.15
Employment	.559	.517	1.170	1.750	-1.480	.543	7.429*	.228	2.72*
Gender	1.319	.514	6.579**	3.740	.805	.555	2.105	2.236	0.68
Age	-.012	.021	.297	.988	-.026	.019	1.968	.974	0.49
Pays child support	-.613	.858	.511	.542	-.882	.525	2.828	.414	0.27
Year 2000	-2.166	.702	9.530*	.115	-2.513	.631	15.838**	.081	0.37
Year 2001	-.768	.585	1.724	.464	-2.118	.627	11.417**	.120	1.57
Year 2002	-.219	.639	.118	.803	-2.056	.651	9.968*	.128	2.01*
Constant	-1.895	1.195	2.513	.150	2.011	1.097	3.360	7.468	
-2 Log-likelihood	132.796				196.763				
Model Chi-Square	31.923**				56.233**				
Cox & Snell R2	.234				.254				
Nagelkerke R2	.313				.347				

\* p &lt; .05 \*\* p &lt; .01

## DISCUSSION

The current study offered a more extensive examination of the three components of the focal concerns perspective in an attempt to develop a more thorough understanding of how judges make sentencing decisions. In addition, this study examined whether these components differently affected the sentencing of Black and White offenders. The results indicate strong support for the focal concerns perspective. The legal variables of offense severity and prior felony convictions were both found to be significant in the decision to incarcerate. This supports the focal concerns perspective that suggest these variables result in the offender being perceived by judges as more dangerous and blameworthy.

Examination of the remaining variables of dangerousness show that defendants' level of education also was significant, suggesting that as level of education increases the likelihood of incarceration decreases. Employment, however, was not found to have a direct effect on likelihood of incarceration in the full model. Variables for having a codefendant and mental health status that could symbolize reduced blameworthiness of the defendant, however, were not significant.

Support for the practical constraints and consequences concern also was found when examining the effect of paying child support. The other factors used to assess practical constraints and consequences (living with a child and marital status), however, did not significantly affect the decision to incarcerate a defendant. This might be due to the type of crime examined. Daly's qualitative interviews (1987) suggested that judges may only grant leniency for parental responsibilities to some types of offenders. Certain offenders, such as drug offenders, are viewed by judges as unfit parents and not worthy of leniency.

Similar to prior research (e.g., Harrington & Spohn, 2007; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006; Steffensmeier et al., 1993; Steffensmeier et al., 1998) Black defendants and male defendants were more likely to be incarcerated than White defendants and female defendants. This finding is consistent with the conceptual shorthand model, suggesting that being male and a minority results in greater perceptions of dangerousness and blameworthiness. When the models were split by race, employment status was significant for Black males, with unemployed Black males being more likely to be incarcerated. This is consistent with prior research conducted by Nobling et al. (1998), which suggests that unemployment status influences the sentences of minorities more than the sentences of White defendants. The focal concerns perspective could also explain this finding. As suggested by Steffensmeier and Demuth (2000) "focal concerns and their interplay are complex..."(p. 709). Therefore, it is likely that employment status and race interact to incite stereotypical images of dangerousness and blameworthiness.

Many of the variables that significantly impacted the decision to incarcerate (e.g., race, gender, education, prior record) are also found to be significant in the prediction of recidivism rates. Spohn (2007) found that males had higher rates of recidivism than females, and Black defendants had higher rates of recidivism than White defendants. Her analysis also showed that those with more extensive prior records and those who had a high school diploma had lower rates of recidivism than those without a high school diploma. Therefore, there seem to be some parallels between judges' focuses and the recidivism research.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study offered some insight into the different factors influencing judicial decisions of Black and White defendants, it suffered from a few limitations. First, because of the detailed data collected, the study was limited to one jurisdiction and one offense type. This led to a relatively small sample size, which made it impossible to examine a variety of interactions (gender and race). It also is possible that the current findings might be limited to drug offenders. The examination of other offenses may produce different results.

It is important that future research offer a more comprehensive examination of sentencing decisions. Reliance on existing datasets (e.g., Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission data) has resulted in the majority of the recent sentencing research focusing on few variables. While it is apparent that these variables greatly influence judicial decision making, it is important that other factors (employment status, education, familial attachments) be examined if a more thorough understanding of judicial perceptions is to be developed. In addition, future research should examine how the race and gender of judges influence their use of the conceptual shorthand as well as their perceptions of the three focal concerns. Collecting more detailed information on larger samples can further our understanding of how judges' perceptions are shaped and how different factors may vary by defendant characteristics.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Gibson, C., & Vandiver, D. M. (2008). *Juvenile Sex Offenders*. Westport, CT: Praeger.**

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In *Juvenile Sex Offenders*, Camille Gibson and Donna Vandiver offer enlightenment upon the subject of juvenile sex offending by challenging the conventional wisdom, explaining that neither popular beliefs nor legal applications can be justified with the sex offending data available. They proceed to argue that the evidence extant only supports the beliefs of the public and the statutory juvenile/criminal justice responses in the most serious of juvenile sexual offenses.

Definitions and descriptions of juvenile sex offending are offered in Chapter 1. The authors wrestle with the concept of juvenile sexual behaviors, contrasting abnormal preoccupation with sex with normal curiosity. Types of juvenile sex offenses, the circumstances in which these transgressions take place, and the likelihood of discovery and arrest are discussed next. Finally, the authors offer advice on how to recognize inappropriate juvenile sexual interest and behavior, and suggest appropriate steps to resolve these issues. Not forgotten are recommendations for caregivers to ensure the protection of children both from sexual molestation and from their own development of inappropriate intimate behaviors.

Causes of juvenile sexual offending and examples of cases are discussed in Chapter 2. An overview of each of the major theories of delinquency is included.

Chapter 3 emphasizes the extremely broad range of behaviors classified as juvenile sex offenses, as well as the great differences in levels of seriousness of those acts. The offenses range from the common sexual curiosity of children in their first few years of life on one end of the spectrum, to some of the most serious sex offenses, such as aggravated sexual assault, at the other end of the spectrum.

The legal and ethical problem highlighted is that sex crime statutes are written to deal with the most serious and extreme cases; yet in their application, the severe penalties of the law are applied equally to those at both ends of the behavioral spectrum. The authors bemoan the fact that the law is applied in the manner of "one size fits all." This strict and unyielding legal application leads to extreme penalties for the most benign offenses and acute disruption into the lives of relatively innocent, inquisitive children. Further, research evidence is brought to bear which counters the conventional rhetoric of sex offenses: Analysis of the juvenile sex offenses data shows that most juvenile offenders are highly amenable to treatment and will not re-offend after being sensitized to that which is considered incorrect sexual behavior and guided to practice acceptable behavior.

Chapter 4 deals with juvenile sex offender typologies, of which there are many. The importance of the subject of typologies is explained by the need for proper assessment: The proper legal and treatment responses are totally dependent upon correct assessments.

The less common sex offenders are the topic of Chapter 5: Herein are discussed cases such as very young offenders, female offenders, and those with developmental disabilities.

Three topics are highlighted by Philip Ikomi, the author of Chapter 6. Much hope for rehabilitation is given in the development of the first topic: juvenile offender recidivism. The

author explains that while the most serious offenders and repeat offenders are the more likely to recidivate, most who have committed lesser offenses are most likely to respond positively to treatment, and therefore will not re-offend. Chapter 6 also contains a survey of assessment instruments and a listing and explanation of treatment approaches.

The authors state, "Chapter 7 is an indictment on our legal response to juvenile sex offenders with ideas about how circumstances might improve (p. viii)." The authors decry the state application of punishment and criminal labeling in place of rehabilitation and guidance for juveniles. One of the major issues raised is that the decision whether to process a child in juvenile courts or in the adult courts is left in the hands of the district attorney: Therefore, an accused juvenile becomes a pawn for the political ambitions of that district attorney who wishes to appear to the public as being *hard on crime*.

In summary, Chapter 8 is dedicated to clearly establishing the conventional myths of juvenile sex offenses and offenders. Citizens are urged to learn the true circumstances illuminated in *Juvenile Sex Offenders* and that, once those true circumstances are known and accepted, "we can do better as individuals and collectively to protect the more vulnerable among us (p., viii)."

*Juvenile Sex Offenders* is a valuable addition to the quickly-expanding literature of juvenile justice. In the publication of this tome, Gibson and Vandiver have boldly stepped forward as myth-slayers. They show that much of conventional knowledge is misguided or completely wrong. They illustrate case after case in which punishment was grossly misapplied by the state. It is the hope of this reviewer that their battle (for justice, equity, and concern for children) might succeed against the inordinate and relatively unsubstantiated public fear, and against the capriciousness and vengeance of the legal and justice systems.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Clark, J. (2010). *The American Jury: Issues and Commentary*. Dubuque Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing.**

Laura Milagros Hardy, University of Texas at San Antonio

Professor John W. Clark examines issues which impact American Juries. The chapters within this book are strategically designed to offer both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. According to Clark, within the area of jury research, there are numerous articles and books that describe the logistics and systematic procedure of the courtroom process. However, all too often, many do not describe the issues of the “real-world juror.” The idea of a real world juror is very important to the author. As the book unfolds, the reader learns that Clark has interviewed and administered surveys to over 4,000 summoned jurors. Given this, there is no doubt a strength of this book is its ecological validity. Generally speaking, courts around this country have been off limits to academics. Thus, the author has broken significant ground by reaching out to the courts and engaging in conversations with real world jurors. This fact alone escalates the importance of this book. Specifically, the voice of men and women of all races, income stratifications, occupations, and household size is being heard.

With respect to the chapters, the introduction does an excellent job of describing the stimulus and spirit of the book. Here, the reader also learns that Clark has surrounded himself with very competent researchers concerned with jury decision making. The introduction also reveals the ten issues which are covered in the book. The first issue examined focuses on summoned jurors who have disabilities. Here, Clark asks, how do we treat jurors with auditory, visual, and mobility challenges? As demonstrated within the chapter, there needs to be significant gains to ensure these individuals are allowed to serve and represent the cross-section of the community. At present, these individuals face many obstacles in the pursuit to perform their civic duty.

Chapter 2 examines the issue of pretrial publicity. This is a major concern given the role the media plays in our society. With respect to the media, Clark makes the reader aware that we live during a time when an individual can obtain information from a variety of outlets. However, the question is how does this information impact a prospective juror? To demonstrate the impact of pretrial publicity, the author uses the Kobe Bryant criminal case. Chapter 3 investigates the relationship between personality and jury decision making. This chapter seriously questions whether an individual’s personality traits have any bearing on whether they are selected or excluded from jury service. This study is the first of its kind to examine personality with a large sample size. As a side note, this study also provides some interesting findings regarding demographics and juries.

Chapter 4 discusses the controversial issue of peremptory challenges. Within the literature, much has been written about race and peremptory challenges. However, this chapter approaches the issue from an examination of Latino jurors and their experiences with being excused from jury service. Interestingly, this chapter uses social psychological factors in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the jury process. The fifth chapter addresses the issue of technology use and jurors. Again, the author uses real world jurors in the quest to understand the relation-

ship between technology use and jury decision making. Ultimately, the reader learns jurors are influenced by technology use in the courtroom. Chapter 6 provides the reader with an insight into eyewitness testimony. Without question, eyewitness testimony is harmful in the courtroom. However, as Clark illustrates, the number of wrongful convictions based on eyewitness testimony is alarming. To complicate the situation, jurors throughout this country embrace the witness who points a finger and identifies a defendant as the one who did it. Regrettably, jurors do not understand that the error rate is high.

Chapter 7 takes on the issue of labeling. Specifically, how do youth psychopathy labels influence jurors? This chapter suggests that the term “psychopath” has become a colloquial term used by popular media to characterize an individual as particularly evil and vicious. This quantitative chapter examines the use of labels within the context of a 16-year-old male juvenile who is being charged with aggravated assault. Chapter 8 offers an examination of the controversial issue of Jury Nullification. Here, the reader is taken through a journey that begins with the significance and historical development of nullification. This is followed by a discussion of the social psychology of jury nullification. The chapter concludes with an examination of decisional law involving nullification.

Chapter 9 provides a dynamic observation into the world of jury consultants. Clark asks the reader to consider whether jury consultants should even be allowed. Further, if consultants are used, how do we quantify whether they succeed or fail? The final chapter in this book examines the issue of stress and jurors. The author reveals that all too often the legal community fails to recognize the effects that jury service has on jurors and offers real-world examples of jurors who, after jury duty, required counseling. Clark insists many trials are graphic and visual in nature. With this, jurors who observe days or weeks of graphic testimony often experience anxiety and depression. This chapter concludes with a cry for establishing jury debriefing programs throughout the country.

This is an excellent book. The reader is awakened to the dynamics of the real-world juror. The issues examined in this book demonstrate the complexities of the American jury. According to Clark, the goal of this book was to provide the reader with a better understanding of jurors, juries, and the realities of the court system. This goal was definitely achieved. This book is appropriate for such disciplines as criminal justice, sociology, psychology, and political science. Appropriate courses include but are not limited to courts, special topics, judicial process and psychology and law. Further, this book is also germane to law school courses in trial advocacy. This passionate and well-crafted book is highly recommended.