

SEX OFFENDERS

A Criminal Career Approach

Edited by Arjan Blokland and Patrick Lussier

 WILEY Blackwell

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This edition first published 2015
© 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sex offenders (John Wiley & Sons)

Sex offenders : a criminal career approach / edited by Arjan Blokland and Patrick Lussier.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-97545-9 (cloth) – ISBN 978-0-470-97546-6 (pbk.) 1. Sex offenders.

2. Sex offenders–Rehabilitation. 3. Sex crimes. I. Blokland, Arie Aart Jan, 1973–
II. Lussier, Patrick. III. Title.

HV6556.S4257 2015

364.15'3–dc23

2015008528

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Brushstrokes © Stella Levi/iStockphoto

Set in 10.5/13pt Minion by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

Sex Offenders

For my loving wife and daughters, Lucile, Dagmar, and Jytte.
Arjan Blokland

To my three loves, Nadine, Émile, and Lily Madeleine.
Patrick Lussier

Notes on Contributors

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In addition to his membership on over a dozen editorial boards of journals in criminology and sociology, he has also served as Executive Counselor with the American Society of Criminology, Member of the National Academy of Sciences Panel Evaluating the National Institute of Justice, Member of the Racial Democracy, Crime and Justice Network at Ohio State University, and Member of the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on Adolescent Development & Juvenile Justice.

Professor Piquero has given congressional testimony on evidence-based crime prevention practices in the area of early-family/parent training programs, and has provided counsel and support to several local, state, national, and international criminal justice agencies.

Professor Piquero is past recipient of the American Society of Criminology's Young Scholar and E-Mail Mentor of the Year Awards, Fellow of both the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and has also received numerous teaching awards including the University of Florida's College of Arts & Sciences Teacher of the Year Award and the University of Maryland's Top Terp Teaching Award.

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Franklin E. Zimring, University of California, Berkeley, USA Franklin E. Zimring is Simon Professor of Law and Wolfen Distinguished Scholar at the University of California at Berkeley. His recent writing includes *An American Traveesty: Legal Responses to Adolescent Sexual Offending*, a paperback version of which was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2009.

Forewords

This is a brilliant, path-breaking book that should be of great interest to all criminologists and psychologists. As the title indicates, the book details the many different ways in which findings from criminal career research can contribute to knowledge and policies on sex offenders. As the editors point out, sex offending has generally been studied as a clinical or medical problem, with a focus on individual pathology and an emphasis on retrospective case-control studies and risk assessment. Criminologists have generally studied versatile offenders who commit many different types of crimes. There have been no major prospective longitudinal studies that have focused primarily on sex offenders, largely because of the belief that they are too rare to study in community samples. The major developmental and life-course theories have rarely been applied to explain sex offending, although Stephen Smallbone and Jesse Cale propose a very interesting theory and usefully compare and contrast features of general and sex offending.

There is much to admire in this book. Different types of sex offenders are investigated and compared, especially "hands-on" versus "hands-off" sex offenders. There are praiseworthy efforts to study sex offending in major longitudinal studies such as the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, the Pittsburgh Youth Study, and the Philadelphia and Racine cohort studies, as well as in longitudinal studies of offender samples. All the major dimensions of criminal careers are studied, including prevalence, frequency, ages of onset and desistance, continuity, specialization, life-course transitions, escalation, and de-escalation. Other important topics are investigated, including criminal career trajectories and age-period-cohort effects. Research results are described from several different countries, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands. There is a chapter on the neglected topic of female sex offenders.

This book has important implications for public policy regarding sex offenders. Generally, they have a low probability of persistence and specialization in sex offenses, calling into doubt compulsory registration policies. Kiminori Nakamura

and Alfred Blumstein document how their risk of offending can decline to zero or to a rate similar to that of nonoffenders. Knowledge from criminal career research should be provided to criminal justice personnel who have to deal with sex offenders, including judges, probation officers, and parole board members.

Despite the great advances in knowledge described in this book, it is clear that sex offending needs to be studied in large-scale prospective longitudinal surveys, extending from childhood into adulthood, with frequent face-to-face interviews as well as criminal record data. The yield of sex offenders could be increased by choosing high-risk male samples in large cities. In addition, more efforts should be made to link up knowledge about individual development with situational and environmental factors that encourage sex offending. Also, more attempts should be made to formulate developmental and life-course theories of sex offending. The editors and contributors should be warmly congratulated for their Herculean – and successful – efforts to push forward the frontiers of knowledge about sex offending.

David P. Farrington,
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For a majority of people, sex offenders nurture deviant sexual fantasies and plan sexual assaults all day long. Furthermore, these criminals are considered recidivists who specialize in sexual crimes. In this view, there is only one way to deal with these incurable perverts – long-term incarceration. Are these beliefs about sex offenders confirmed by scientific studies on these offenders' motivations and criminal careers? Do all sex offenders have the same motivation to commit their crimes? Are all sex offenders sexual recidivists and specialists in sexual crime? In sum, are sexual offenders a unique and distinct type of criminal who deserve their own theoretical framework distinct from that of other forms of crime?

In the 1960s, Kurt Freund developed a methodology, known as phallometric assessment, to determine whether sex offenders have a sexual preference for sexual aggression (i.e., sexual abuse of children, rape of women). After 50 years of research on this topic, there is clear evidence that approximately half of sexual aggressors of children prefer to have sex with children rather than with adults. However, the other half do not present this sexually deviant preference. On the other hand, only 20% of sexual aggressors against women (i.e., those characterized as sadistic rapists) prefer sexual coercive activities to consensual sex. In sum, a deviant sexual preference is absent in the majority of sex offenders. These results highlight the heterogeneity of motivations for sexual offenses – which include, apart from deviant sexual preference, a proclivity to use sex as coping strategy, antisociality, opportunism, and anger (see Chapter 3 by Smallbone & Cale).

Over the past 20 years, Karl Hanson has conducted an ambitious research program on recidivism by sexual aggressors. This program has produced two meta-analyses that indicate that the sexual recidivism rate in sexual offenders is only 17%. Clearly, a majority of sex offenders do not recidivate. Those who do recidivate are

characterized by sexual problems (deviant sexual preference, sexual coping) and by antisociality (e.g., psychopathy). Finally, sex offenders have a higher rate of recidivism for nonsexual crimes than for sexual ones. This last result seriously calls into question the belief that sexual aggressors specialize in sexual crimes. In addition, the results of Proulx and Lussier's large-scale empirical study (600 participants) indicate sexual crimes represent two thirds of crimes committed by child sexual abusers but only one third of crimes committed by sexual aggressors of women. Thus, beliefs about sexual aggressors' recidivism rates and specialization in sexual crime are largely unsupported by empirical evidence. Furthermore, in sexual aggressors, criminal career heterogeneity appears to be the rule rather than the exception.

Apart from recidivism, the criminal career characteristics of sexual aggressors have received little attention. However, Blokland and Lussier's contribution here is an exception to this rule. In fact, this book is a landmark, since it presents state-of-the-art empirical results and theoretical discussions related to the criminal career of sexual aggressors. Furthermore, it suggests new avenues of research. The first part of the book includes three chapters that establish links between, on the one hand, developmental and life-course criminology, and on the other, the literature on sex offenders. Thus, Thakker and Ward (Chapter 2) speculate about the influence that factors suggested by leading theories of sexual aggression have on different parameters of sexual aggressors' criminal careers. In Chapter 3, Smallbone and Cale present similarities (e.g., versatility, the fact that a small proportion of offenders commit a large proportion of crimes) and differences (e.g., age of onset, desistance patterns) between the criminal careers of general offenders and sexual aggressors. In addition, they present an original theory of sexual aggression that integrates concepts from both developmental criminology and research on sexual aggression. Such a new theory is necessary because developmental dimensions of sexual offending may not be simply reduced to those of nonsexual crimes.

In the second part of this book, we find original empirical studies on the criminal career of different types of sexual aggressors, such as adolescent offenders, adult offenders, female sexual offenders, and sexual murderers. Furthermore, in this second part, the authors analyze a large variety of criminal career parameters (e.g., age of onset, specialization, escalation, and desistance), as well as the factors associated with them. The 11 chapters of this section constitute the most ambitious research program ever conducted on the criminal career of sexual aggressors, and provide a unique perspective on the longitudinal patterning of sexual and nonsexual crimes committed by sexual aggressors.

The third part of this book concerns policy issues. If a majority of sex offenders are not recidivists specialized in sexual crimes, then several of the current measures to deal with these criminals are not appropriate (e.g., long-term incarceration, public notification). The authors in this part of the book discuss alternative ways of dealing with sex offenders. Their proposals are based on empirical evidence about the criminal career of different types of sex offenders, rather than on the general population's fear and desire for retaliation. Their proposals offer promising avenues for the reduction of the frequency and the severity of sexual aggression in our society.

I find this book to be of very high quality on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Furthermore, I consider this book to be the cornerstone of a line of research on the criminal career of sexual aggressors – a heterogeneous group of offenders who present both specific criminogenic factors (e.g., deviant sexual preference) and general criminogenic factors (e.g., antisociality and psychopathy). Blokland and Lussier are two outstanding researchers, and they are to be congratulated for so successfully merging contributions from some of the most prominent researchers in the fields of sexual aggression and developmental criminology. In each of the chapters of this book, the authors successfully integrate these two traditions of research, which have rarely intersected in the past.

Jean Proulx,
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Preface

The idea for this book came about following discussions during the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology in Los Angeles in 2010. At the time, there were growing concerns of a widening gap between scientific knowledge on sex offenders on the one side and recent trends in policy development on the other. In fact, in several countries, scholars were coming forward to criticize emerging repressive policies on the grounds that not only they were not effective, they were detrimental to the prevention of sexual violence and abuse. There was also a widening gap occurring between general knowledge about the criminal career and emerging policies. For example, in Canada, about 90% of individuals legally defined as dangerous offenders and serving indeterminate prison sentences are sex offenders.

Sex offenders are typically in their forties when given a dangerous offender status, a period where criminal careers are usually fading even for the most chronic offenders. In the United States, juvenile sex offenders are increasingly subject to sex offender registration, and public notification to deter them from future offending and to minimize continuity in adulthood. Similar policies are being adopted in several European countries as well. Yet, the idea of continuity in sex offending is in sharp contrast to the observation that most juvenile offenders do not become adult criminals. Our discussion led us to two important conclusions that became driving forces behind the conception and elaboration of this book. The first observation had to do with the relative absence of criminologists from the arena of research on sexual violence and abuse.

Traditionally, the individual committing sex crimes had not been the subject of much empirical work by criminologists. Yet, in our opinion, recent criminological research in the areas of criminal career and life-course perspective had much to offer to the field of sexual violence and abuse. Driven by several longitudinal cohort studies in different countries, criminologists had made several important findings in the past three decades with respect to the understanding of the onset of criminal activity, its persistence and aggravation, and more recently on desistance from