

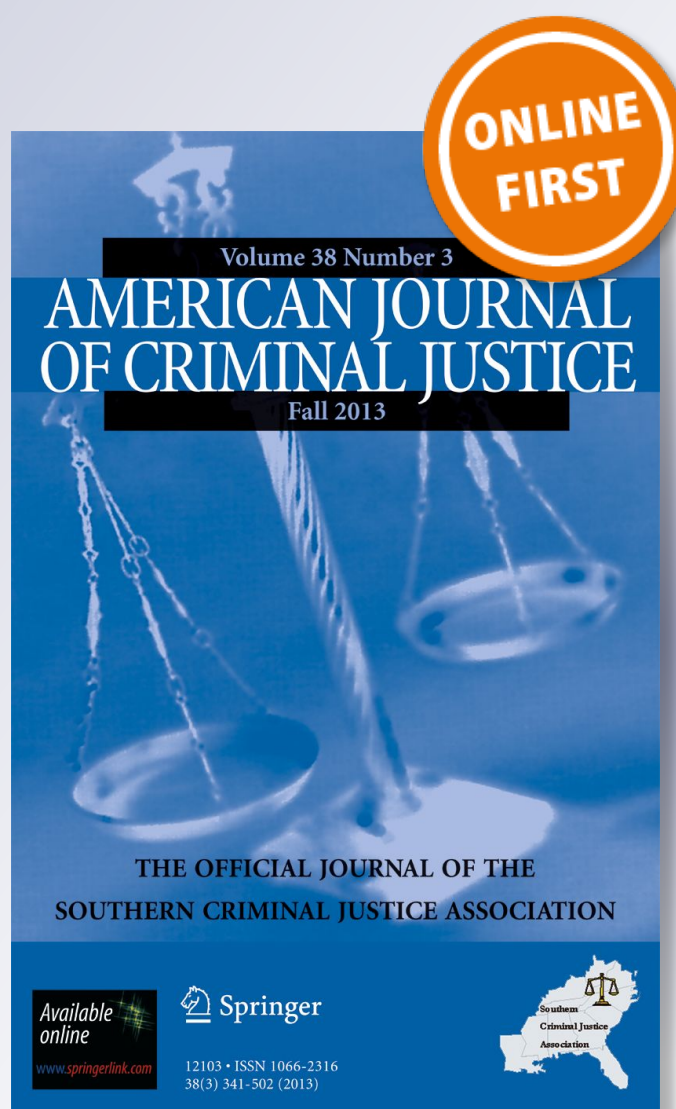
# *An Assessment of Recidivism of Female Sexual Offenders: Comparing Recidivists to Non-Recidivists over Multiple Years*

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# An Assessment of Recidivism of Female Sexual Offenders: Comparing Recidivists to Non-Recidivists over Multiple Years

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## Abstract

In this study, we examine recidivism in a cohort of 471 registered, adult female sexual offenders for an average follow-up of 18.83 years. About half (52%) of the female sexual offenders were re-arrested for a subsequent offense during the follow-up period. Nine percent were re-arrested for a violent offense, and 7 % were re-arrested for a sexual offense. Recidivists for any offense, compared to non-recidivists, were younger, had more extensive criminal histories, and were more likely to have a sexual assault as an index offense. Recidivists for violent (non-sexual) offenses, compared to non-recidivists, were younger, had more extensive criminal histories, and were more likely to have a male victim for an index offense. Recidivists for sexual offenses, compared to non-recidivists, had more prior arrests for any offense, more prior arrests for alcohol/drug offenses, and were more likely to have an acquaintance victim for an index offense. These results are compared to prior studies.

**Keywords** Female sexual offenders · General recidivism · Violent recidivism · Sexual recidivism

Men are more likely than women to sexually offend. Various sources estimate that female sexual offenders comprise less than 10% of all sexual offenders known to law enforcement officials (for a summary, see Vandiver, Braithwaite, & Stafford, 2017). Official

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estimates, however, probably underestimate the true number of female sexual offenders. Victimization surveys indicate that the number of female sexual offenders is considerably greater than official estimates (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2007).

Much more is known about male than female sexual offenders. Researchers, however, have begun to find that female sexual offenders differ in important ways from their male counterparts. For example, female sexual offenders are more likely than male sexual offenders to have been physically abused (Allen, 1991) and have more psychological problems (Lewis & Stanley, 2000), including suicide attempts (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000).

There are few estimates of the percentage of female sexual offenders who recidivate and few studies of whether predictors of male sexual-offender recidivism (e.g., offense type, victim type, and arrest history) also predict recidivism of female sexual offenders. The issue is important for managing female offenders, from both a criminal justice and a therapeutic perspective, because conclusions about recidivism of male sexual offenders may not generalize to female sexual offenders.

In the current study, we examine recidivism in Vandiver & Kercher's (2004) cohort of 471 registered, adult female sexual offenders, which is one of the largest in the literature. The average follow-up period in this study is 18.83 years, which is longer than any other study to date. Recidivism is measured by an index arrest, which is the arrest after the arrest that led to an offender's registration. Additional information is also examined, including details of the index arrest, such as the type of offense that led to it, offender age, victim age, victim sex, and relationship between offender and victim. We later build on the Vandiver & Kercher (2004) study and identify factors that distinguish recidivists from non-recidivists. Identification of these factors is an initial step in addressing the needs of female sexual offenders in a way that reduces future victimization. First, however, it is necessary to briefly consider recidivism of male sexual offenders before considering female offenders in general and female sexual offenders in particular.

## Recidivism of Male Sexual Offenders

Static risk factors (i.e., factors that do not change over time), along with dynamic factors (i.e., those that can change over time), are better than clinical judgments in predicting male sexual recidivism (Craig, Browne, Stringer, & Beech, 2005). Given the large number of relevant studies, we focus on meta-analytical studies and other studies that have produced consistent findings about male sexual recidivism. Static factors, which are included in several assessment tools (e.g., Static-99R, Static-2002R, Risk Matrix 2000/S, and SORAG), include prior sexual offenses, offender age, victim sex, and offender's relationship to victim. There is greater sexual recidivism among young male offenders and those with male and stranger victims (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Helmus, Thornton, Hanson, & Babchishin, 2012). Dynamic factors associated with greater sexual recidivism of male sexual offenders include deviant sexual interests, sexual preoccupations, antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy/lack of emotional intimacy, grievance/hostility (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010), employment instability (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005), emotional congruence with children, lifestyle impulsivity, poor cognitive problem-solving skills, and negative social influences (Mann et al., 2010).

Male sexual offenders who commit some types of sexual offenses are more likely to sexually recidivate than others. Hanson and Bussière (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 61 adult male, sexual-offender recidivism studies with 23,393 offenders who were followed for an average of four to five years. They reported that male rapists had a higher sexual recidivism rate (18.9%) than male child molesters (12.7%). In a later meta-analysis, Hanson (2002) followed 4673 male sexual offenders from 10 study samples for 2 to 23 years. Male child molesters with non-related victims had the highest sexual recidivism rate—19.5%. Male rapists had a 17.1% sexual recidivism rate, and male child molesters with a related victim (i.e., incest) had the lowest rate—8.4%.

## Female Offenders

Little attention has been given to female offenders in general (Andrews et al., 2012), not just female sexual offenders. Researchers, however, have identified several predictors of (general) criminal recidivism that are shared by male and female offenders (Andrews et al., 2012; Walters & Lowenkamp, 2016). For example, the Level of Service Inventory-Revised, an assessment to predict recidivism of male offenders, is also a reliable predictor of recidivism of female offenders (Smith, Cullen, & Latessa, 2009). Other researchers have found that factors such as extensive criminal histories, pro-criminal attitudes, education/employment, family, and substance abuse are strongly associated with general recidivism of both girls/women and boys/men (Andrews et al., 2012), suggesting the suitability of a gender-neutral approach for predicting recidivism.

Some factors, however, are better predictors of recidivism for female offenders as compared to male offenders. Andrews et al. (2012) have found that although substance abuse predicts recidivism for both male and female offenders, it is a better predictor of female recidivism. Similarly, while Van Voorhis, Wright, Salisbury, and Bauman (2010) have indicated that many predictors of recidivism for male offenders are also useful for predicting recidivism of female offenders, the addition of gender-specific factors for female offenders yields better predictions. Blanchette and Brown (2006) have noted that additional factors, such as adult victimization, parenting strains, and financial problems, may be more germane to recidivism of female than male offenders and should be considered in a gender-centered approach for predicting recidivism.

Female recidivists are often more likely than their male counterparts to have a history of traumatic events or childhood trauma (Messina & Grella, 2006). The combination of trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and co-occurring substance use and/or psychiatric disorders can lead to other problems for female offenders, such as unemployment, homelessness, and loss of child custody. Messina and Grella (2006) have found that incarcerated women with histories of childhood trauma, compared with incarcerated women without childhood trauma, have the earliest and most serious involvement in illegal drugs and other crimes (beginning at ages 15 to 20). Moreover, early traumatic experiences, coupled with chronic substance abuse, are better predictors of subsequent criminal behavior for women than men (McClellan, Farabee, & Crouch, 1997; Messina & Grella, 2006).

## Characteristics of Female Sexual Offenders

Women who sexually offend are typically young, in their 20s or 30s, and white (Faller, 1988; Faller, 1987; Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). The majority choose young victims they know (Vandiver, 2006b). Although some researchers have found high rates of mental illness among female sexual offenders (e.g., Kaplan & Green, 1995; Lewis & Stanley, 2000), they have relied on clinical samples, resulting in a likely overestimate of the prevalence of mental illness. Researchers have widely recognized that female offenders are diverse and there is a need for a gender-centered approach to interventions (Gobeil, Blanchette, & Stewart, 2017).

Similar to female offenders in general and male sexual offenders (Jespersen, Lalumière, & Seto, 2009; Siegel & Williams, 2003), childhood sexual abuse and other childhood traumas are common among female sexual offenders. Approximately half of female sexual offenders in three studies reported sexual abuse as children (Faller, 1987; Miccio-Fonseca, 2000; Wolfe, 1985). Moreover, approximately three-quarters of female sexual offenders in two other studies (Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Pothast & Allen, 1994) reported childhood sexual abuse.

## Female Sexual-Offender Recidivism

Only a few researchers have estimated the percentage of female sexual offenders who sexually recidivate, and even fewer have identified factors that distinguish female sexual recidivists from female non-sexual recidivists. Currently, assessments of female sexual offenders use tools created for male sexual offenders. Identification of factors that predict recidivism of female sexual offenders allows for more accurate assessment of them and, subsequently, more effective treatment.

Sandler and Freeman (2009) examined a large sample of 1466 female sexual offenders. All of the women were convicted of a registerable sexual offense, and 2 % were re-arrested for a sexual offense over a five-year period. Although they reported both bivariate and multivariate results, the bivariate results are discussed here to correspond with what is reported later for the current study. Female sexual recidivists were more likely than female non-sexual recidivists to have at least one prior misdemeanor conviction, at least one prior felony conviction, at least one prior drug conviction, and differ with regard to their index offense. Recidivists were more likely than non-recidivists to have been convicted of promoting/patronizing child prostitution.

The same authors, in a prior study (Freeman & Sandler, 2008), also examined sexual re-arrests of a group of 390 registered female sexual offenders. They found that only six (1.5%) sexually recidivated. Given the small number of sexual recidivists, the researchers were not able to identify factors that distinguished recidivists from non-recidivists.

In another study, 135 female sexual offenders prosecuted during an 11-year period for at least one hands-on offense were classified as one-time only offenders who committed only one sexual offense (16.3%), generalists who committed both sexual offenses and other serious non-sexual offenses (26.7%), or specialists who committed typically more than one sexual offense in combination with typically no other serious offense (57.0%) (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2011). It is important to note that



this study was not conducted primarily to assess recidivism and relied on a methodology not usually used in recidivism studies. The findings, therefore, may not be comparable to other studies. While recidivism studies usually identify index offenses in a cohort of sexual offenders and prospectively follow the cohort, Wijkman et al. (2011) identified a retrospective cohort and assessed their entire criminal history, likely exaggerating the number of recidivists.

Most notable, the largest percentage (57%,  $n = 77$ ) of women were identified by Wijkman et al. (2011) as specialists, and among this group, “two-thirds had committed two or more sexual offences and 40% [committed] five or more” (p. 40). Specialists were distinguishable from one-time offenders and generalists on several factors; specialists were more likely to have committed hands-off offenses (e.g., took pictures or produced videos of children) in addition to a hands-on offense, and they committed very few other serious sexual offenses. They were also significantly more likely than one-time only offenders and generalists to have a history of childhood sexual abuse and to have both male and female victims. Specialists also began offending at an older age and had a shorter criminal career.

Bader, Welsh, and Scalora (2010) reported a higher sexual recidivism rate of female sexual offenders than prior studies. This study also differed methodologically from other studies in that it relied on more than one measure of recidivism. The researchers found that 17.5% of 57 females convicted of child molestation were charged with a subsequent sexual offense during an average follow-up period of 4.9 years. A broader definition of recidivism that included criminal charges, together with reports of inappropriate sexual behavior to Child Protective Services or law enforcement, yielded six more female recidivists or a 28.1% recidivism rate. Allegations of child sexual abuse may not warrant criminal charges and may overestimate sexual offenses among these women. Also, prostitution-related offenses were included in the study, and prior research has shown that women who commit prostitution-related offenses have a higher recidivism rate than those who commit other types of sexual offenses (Cortoni, Sandler, & Freeman, 2015; Sandler & Freeman, 2009).

Table 1 summarizes the reported sexual recidivism rates of female offenders for studies with known follow-up periods. The sexual recidivism rates of female sexual offenders are low in three studies and high in two others. Recidivism measures in the studies include arrests (Broadhurst & Loh, 2003; Freeman &

**Table 1** Summary of findings about sexual recidivism of female sexual offenders from prior studies

	Female sexual offenders <i>N</i>	Time assessed	Sexual recidivism <i>N</i> (%)
Published studies			
Sandler and Freeman (2009)	1466	Up to 14.5 years	32 (2.2%)
Freeman and Sandler (2008)	390	4 years*	6 (1.5%)
Wijkman et al. (2011)	135	11 years	51 (37.8%)
Bader et al. (2010)	57	4.9 years*	16 (28.1%)
Broadhurst and Loh (2003)	43	5.7 years*	0 (N/A)

\*Average follow-up period reported

Sandler, 2008; Sandler & Freeman, 2009), prosecutions (Wijkman et al., 2011), and a combination of arrests with reports of inappropriate sexual behavior to law enforcement and/or Child Protective Services (Bader et al., 2010). Most of the studies have small sample sizes.

## Methods

Data for the present study came from four sources. The first was the Texas Department of Public Safety's (DPS) sex-offender registry. It included the offender's name and demographic information, along with registration date, date of conviction, and information about the offense that led to registration. Victim information included age, sex, and the relationship between offender and victim (relative, acquaintance, stranger). Additionally, criminal histories were obtained from the Texas DPS in 2001 and again on April 22, 2015. Each offender's criminal history included prior arrests, dates of arrests, conviction statuses, and sentences imposed. The third data source was prison records from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. This information was used to obtain the length of time each offender was imprisoned. Data were also collected from individual police departments for a subsample of offenders to determine actual offense date and thereby reduce measurement error associated with pseudo-recidivism (explained in greater detail later).

Data for all adult female sexual offenders<sup>1</sup> from the Texas sex-offender registry, as of April 27, 2001, were used ( $N=471$ ). This method captured a cohort of female sexual offenders who were registered as of this particular day. As depicted in Fig. 1, the cohort included offenders who could have begun their registry on that day or any day prior to that day (potentially, the beginning of the registry on September 1, 1991).

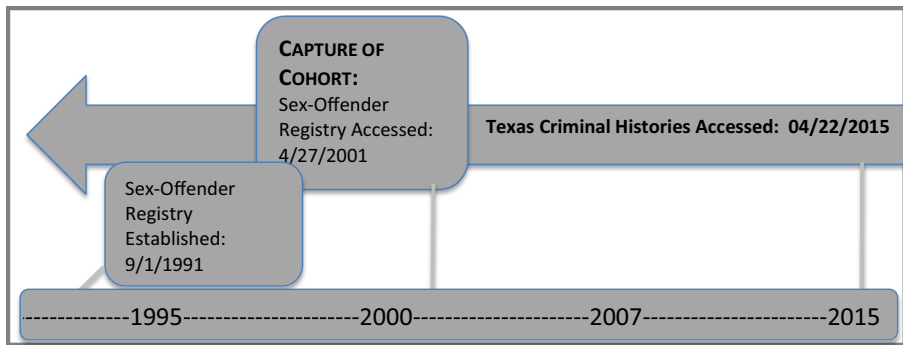
Given that the registry began in 1991, it is possible that some women who were registered as sexual offenders were not captured in this cohort. When the registry began, offenders were required to register only for the length of their correctional supervision (i.e., probation or parole). Women who were not under correctional supervision on the capture date (April 27, 2001) were not included.

Of the 471 registered female sexual offenders included in this study, most ( $n=383$ ) were arrested between September 1, 1991 (beginning of registry) and prior to April 27, 2001 when the cohort was captured; however, some ( $n=88$ ) were required to register for an arrest that occurred prior to 1991. The arrests of these women occurred between 1988 and the end of August 1991. They were required to register because they were court/board ordered to register or due to retroactive application of the sex-offender registry requirements.

A court/board order allows Texas judges and the parole board to require a person to register when it would not otherwise be required (V. Castilleja, personal communication, June 24, 2017). For example, a judge can require sex-offender registration when someone pleads guilty to a non-sexual offense (e.g., injury to a child) instead of a

<sup>1</sup> The offenders were arrested for: any type of sexual assault, any type of indecency with a child, kidnapping with the intent to commit a sexual offense, burglary with the intent to commit a sexual offense, incest, indecent exposure, lewd/immoral/indecent behavior, online solicitation of a minor, child pornography, prohibited sexual conduct, or sexual performance of a child.





**Fig. 1** Description of data gathered for cohort. Notes. All of the female sexual offenders in the study were registered on 4/27/2001. Their registration could have begun anytime from 9/1/1991 (first day registry was established) to 4/27/2001 (the day the cohort was captured). Re-arrest includes the time from the index arrest (arrest for the offense that led to an offender's registration) through 4/22/2015, the day the criminal histories were accessed

sexual offense for which the person was arrested (e.g., indecency with a child). Also, the parole board can require sex-offender registry. An example would be when a person committed a sexual offense before implementation of the sex-offender registry, later committed a non-sexual offense (e.g., robbery), served a prison sentence for that offense, and was considered for parole. The parole board could order the person to register as a sexual offender.<sup>2</sup>

Offenders who were arrested before September 1, 1991 could also have been included by a retroactive application of the sex-offender registration requirements in 1997. Those convicted of a sexual offense after 1970 were required to retroactively register if they were incarcerated, on probation, or on parole (DePrang, 2015). Thus, either through a court/board order or retroactive application of sex-offender registration requirements, 88 of the female sexual offenders had arrests before September 1, 1991.

Arrests occurring prior to the index arrest were considered prior arrests. Any arrest after the index arrest was considered a re-arrest and, hence, recidivism. The observation period was calculated from the index arrest date to April 22, 2015 when the criminal histories were accessed. Time spent in prison was subtracted from the period. The observation period ranged from 2.58 years to 41.41 years,<sup>3</sup> with an average of 18.83 years ( $SD = 4.00$ ). Only two female sexual offenders were observed for less than five years.

At the time the cohort was captured, offenders convicted of particular sexual offenses (indecency with a child-exposure, prohibited sexual conduct/incest, indecent exposure-2nd conviction, compelling prostitution, lewd/immoral/indecent behavior, online solicitation of a minor, possession/promotion of child pornography, attempt to solicit/commit any sexual offense) were required to register for 10 years. Those convicted of violent sexual offenses (indecency with a child-contact, sexual assault, sexual performance by a child, aggravated kidnapping with intent to commit a sexual offense, burglary or kidnapping with intent to commit a sexual offense) were required to register for life.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information about parole guidelines can be found here: [https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/policies\\_directives/policies\\_directives.html](https://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/policies_directives/policies_directives.html).

<sup>3</sup> Eighty-eight of the offenders committed their index offense between 1980 and up to September 1, 1991, prior to implementation of the sex-offender registry. This included offenders who were court/board ordered to register.

## Sex

Sexual offenses are difficult to measure with official data because many victims do not report their victimization to law enforcement officials (Denov, 2004) and many offenders are never arrested. The resulting underestimation may be greater for female than male sexual offenders because sexual behavior of women is more often minimized by treatment providers and law enforcement officials (Becker, Hall, & Stinson, 2001; Center for Sex Offender Management, 2007; Denov, 2004). Bader et al. (2010) examined this underestimation by comparing recidivism measures. As mentioned earlier, there was a 17.5% sexual recidivism rate for female sexual offenders when employing only criminal charges, but there was a 28.1% recidivism rate when reports to Child Protective Services were also considered. Arrests from criminal histories, however, remain the most accessible data and the most frequently used in sexual-offender studies. Thus, this study measures recidivism with arrests. It has been well documented that assessing long-term recidivism is difficult, and researchers can only assess records available to them (Hanson, Steffy, & Gauthier, 1993).

## Pseudo-Recidivism

One issue considered in this study is pseudo-recidivism, which involves treating several offenses in a “crime spree” as separate instances of recidivism (Phenix, Doren, Helmus, Hanson, & Thornton, 2008). For example, a person could be arrested for a sexual offense (index arrest) at Time 1 and later be arrested for another sexual offense committed before Time 1. This would be pseudo-recidivism. Additional scenarios are also possible, including long-term sexual abuse that is identified years or decades later with other victims coming forward after the first report. There would be no actual recidivism following the arrest at Time 1.

It has been estimated that pseudo-recidivism applies to about 5 % of sexual offenders (Babchishin, Hanson, & Helmus, 2012, p. 445). In this study, all offenders who sexually recidivated within one year of the index arrest were identified ( $n = 82$ ). The criminal history reports of 25 offenders included the actual date the offense occurred. Thirteen of the 25 involved pseudo-recidivism (i.e., multiple sexual offenses that occurred before the index arrest), and 12 did not. For an additional 57 offenders, the offense date was missing from the criminal history. For those, the arresting police department was contacted and asked for the offense date.<sup>4</sup> Forty of those were cases of pseudo-recidivism, and five were new charges. For the remaining 12 offenders, the police department did not release information. To err on the side of caution, those cases were identified as pseudo-recidivism and treated in the analyses as non-sexual recidivism. Thus, of the 82 offenders who had re-arrests within one year of the index offense, 65 were identified as pseudo-recidivists, and 17 had new sexual offenses after the index arrest.

<sup>4</sup> This strategy was recommended by Karl Hanson and has been employed in his prior research efforts (personal communication, September 4, 2014).

## Registered Female Sexual Offenders

The 471 female sexual offenders comprised 1.6% of the 29,376 registered sexual offenders in Texas as of April 27, 2001. Eighty-eight percent of the women ( $n = 415$ ) were Caucasian, and 12% ( $n = 56$ ) were African American. Reliable indicators of ethnicity (e.g., Hispanic) were unavailable. According to the sex-offender registry, the ages of the female sexual offenders at the time of the index arrest ranged from 18 to 77 ( $\bar{x} = 32$ ;  $SD = 8.8$ ).

Of the 471 female sexual offenders, 22 had been arrested for at least one sexual offense before their index arrest. Nineteen of the female sexual offenders had one prior arrest for a sexual offense, and three had two prior sexual-offense arrests. With regard to their index arrest, the 471 offenders had been arrested for 561 sexual offenses before April 27, 2001. The most common arrests were for indecency with a child-sexual contact ( $n = 188$ ; 34%), sexual assault of a child ( $n = 94$ ; 17%), and aggravated sexual assault of a child ( $n = 76$ ; 14%). Other arrests included aggravated sexual assault ( $n = 54$ ; 10%), sexual assault ( $n = 52$ ; 9%), indecency with a child-exposure<sup>5</sup> ( $n = 35$ ; 6%), sexual performance/child induce/authorize ( $n = 29$ ; 5%), compelling prostitution ( $n = 11$ ; 2%), and possession/promotion of child pornography ( $n = 9$ ; 2%). The remaining arrests included prohibited sexual conduct ( $n = 5$ ), court/board ordered registration<sup>6</sup> ( $n = 3$ ), kidnapping/aggravated kidnapping with sexual intent ( $n = 3$ ), and sexual perform child produce/direct/promote ( $n = 2$ ).

Victim age for the index offense ranged from infancy to 97 ( $\bar{x} = 11.6$ ;  $SD = 7.1$ ).<sup>7</sup> Half of the victims were male, while 47% were female (missing = 12; court ordered/pornography = 5). Approximately half of the victims (51%) were acquainted with their offender, while 41% were related, and 8% were strangers. Of the 68 who had been arrested for more than one sexual offense at the time of the index offense, 14 had both male and female victims. Thus, the majority with more than one victim showed a preference for only female ( $n = 28$ ) or male victims ( $n = 26$ ).

## Analytical Strategy

Descriptive statistics are first used to examine the re-arrests of the 471 female sexual offenders. Re-arrests are examined for: (1) any offense, (2) violent offenses (excluding sexual offenses), and (3) sexual offenses. Next, offenders who were re-arrested are compared to offenders who were not re-arrested for any offense, violent offenses (non-sexual), and sexual offenses. Effect-size statistics (Cohen's  $d$ ) are used to interpret the comparisons. Previous researchers have used effect-size statistics for both metric and categorical variables with dichotomized outcomes, as is the case here (Sánchez-Meca, Marin-Martinez, & Chacón-Moscoso, 2003). We rely on Cohen's (1988) interpretation of the magnitude of an effect size:  $.2 - <.5 =$  small,  $.5 - <.8 =$  medium, and  $.8+ =$  large.

<sup>5</sup> Indecency with a child-exposure is not synonymous with indecent exposure. Indecency with a child-exposure involves a sexual activity with a person younger than 17 years old and involves exposing one's genitals to the child or causing the child to expose his/her genitals for the purpose of the offender's sexual arousal/gratification. Indecent exposure involves simply exposing one's genitals to a victim for sexual arousal/gratification.

<sup>6</sup> The original sexual offense could not be ascertained from the available data.

<sup>7</sup> Information for eight of the offenders was missing. An additional five offenders committed offenses in which a specific victim was not identified (i.e., court/board ordered to register or committed possession of pornography).

## Results

Fifty-two percent of the female sexual offenders ( $n = 243$ ) had at least one re-arrest for any offense after the arrest that led to their registration (i.e., index arrest). The number of re-arrests ranged from 0 to 13, with an average of 1.28 arrests ( $SD = 1.97$ ). More than 100 offenders ( $n = 112$ ) were arrested for one additional offense; 44 were arrested for two offenses; and 87 were arrested for three or more offenses.

Only 9 % ( $n = 41$ ) of offenders had a violent (non-sexual) arrest after the index arrest. The number of violent arrests ranged from 0 to 4 and averaged less than one per offender ( $\bar{x} = 0.12$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ). Thirty-one offenders were arrested for one violent offense; four were arrested for two; five were arrested for three; and one was arrested for four violent offenses.

Seven percent ( $n = 34$ ) of the offenders had a sexual re-arrest (excluding arrests for failure to register) after the index arrest. All were re-arrested for just one sexual offense. These offenses included: sexual assault/aggravated sexual assault ( $n = 15$ ), indecency with a child, expose/sexual contact ( $n = 12$ ), promotion of prostitution/aggravated promotion of prostitution ( $n = 3$ ), public lewdness ( $n = 2$ ), prohibited sexual contact ( $n = 1$ ), and sexual performance of a child ( $n = 1$ ).

Similar to prior sexual-offender recidivism research (e.g., Prentky, Lee, Knight, & Cerce, 1997), a table was created to assess recidivism rates at different time gates over a 25-year period (see Table 2). The table shows cumulative re-arrests at each time gate for any offense, violent offenses, and sexual offenses. The time gates exclude any time in prison. It took only to the five-year time gate for 29% of the offenders to be re-arrested for any offense, which is more than half of the 52% total that was re-arrested over the 25-year period. In contrast, violent and sexual re-arrests occurred at a relatively slow, but steady, rate throughout the 25-year period.

### Comparison of Recidivists to Non-Recidivists for any Offense

Several factors distinguished recidivists ( $n = 243$ ) from non-recidivists ( $n = 228$ ) for any offense (see Table 3). Recidivists, on average, were younger than non-recidivists at the time of arrest for their index offense. Recidivists were, on average, 29 years old ( $SD = 7.49$ ) at the index arrest, while non-recidivists were, on average, 32 years

**Table 2** Cumulative re-arrests for any, violent, and sexual offenses after index offense for seven time gates ( $N = 471$ )

	Number and percentage of 471 offenders re-arrested within:						
	1 year <i>n</i> (%)	5 years <i>n</i> (%)	10 years <i>n</i> (%)	15 years <i>n</i> (%)	20 years <i>n</i> (%)	25 years <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
Any re-arrest	36 (7.6)	134 (28.5)	182 (38.6)	220 (46.7)	236 (50.1)	239 (50.7)	243 (51.6)
Violent (Non-sexual) re-arrest	3 (0.6)	17 (3.6)	23 (4.9)	35 (7.4)	40 (8.5)	41 (8.7)	41 (8.7)
Sexual re-arrest	0 (0.0)	21 (4.4)	27 (5.7)	28 (5.9)	31 (6.6)	32 (6.8)	34 (7.2)

Note. Each time gate is cumulative, adding new arrests to previous time-gate arrests

**Table 3** Bivariate analysis of factors distinguishing recidivists from non-recidivists for any offense

At time of arrest for index offense:	Non-recidivists ( <i>n</i> = 228)	Recidivists ( <i>n</i> = 243)	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Magnitude of effect size	95% CI
	<i>M</i> or proportion ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> or proportion ( <i>SD</i> )			
Offender age	32.19 (9.74)	28.94 (7.49)	0.375	Small	[0.191, 0.555]
Offender younger than 25 (Y/N)	.21 (.41)	.33 (.47)	-0.272	Small	[-0.451, -0.088]
Number of prior arrests	0.53 (1.19)	1.22 (2.30)	-0.373	Small	[-0.553, -0.189]
Two or more prior arrests (Y/N)	.10 (.30)	.23 (.42)	-0.354	Small	[-0.534, -0.170]
Number of prior violent arrests	0.07 (0.33)	0.13 (0.52)	-0.137		[-0.317, 0.044]
Number of prior sexual arrests	0.04 (0.20)	0.07 (0.29)	-0.121		[-0.301, 0.061]
Number of prior alcohol/drug arrests	0.11 (0.48)	0.34 (0.94)	-0.305	Small	[-0.485, -0.121]
Index offense included sexual assault (Y/N)	.57 (.50)	.47 (.50)	0.200	Small	[0.017, 0.380]
Victim age	11.69 (5.44)	12.01 (8.32)	-0.045		[-0.226, 0.136]
Any male victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.58 (.50)	.52 (.50)	0.121		[-0.062, 0.303]
Any female victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.45 (.50)	.51 (.50)	-0.120		[-0.302, 0.063]
Any related victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.44 (.50)	.39 (.49)	0.101		[-0.090, 0.291]
Any acquaintance victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.47 (.50)	.53 (.50)	-0.120		[-0.310, 0.072]
Any stranger victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.07 (.26)	.10 (.30)	-0.107		[-0.297, 0.085]

<sup>a</sup> 9 cases missing (4 were re-arrested, and 5 were not re-arrested)

<sup>b</sup> 48 cases missing (25 were re-arrested, and 23 were not re-arrested)

old (*SD* = 9.74). The magnitude of Cohen's *d*, however, was small (0.38). Also, a larger percentage of recidivists (33%) than non-recidivists (21%) were younger than 25 years old at their index arrest (Cohen's *d* = -0.27).

Recidivists for any offense had more prior arrests than non-recidivists, (Cohen's *d* = -0.37). Recidivists had an average of 1.22 (*SD* = 2.30) arrests prior to the index arrest, compared to an average of less than one (0.53, *SD* = 1.19) arrest for offenders who were not re-arrested. A comparison of the two groups with regard to having more than two arrests before the index arrest (yes/no) also revealed a small effect (Cohen's *d* = -0.35), with 23% of recidivists compared to only 10% of non-recidivists having at least two prior arrests. Recidivists also had more prior alcohol/drug arrests (Cohen's *d* = -0.31) and were less likely to have a sexual assault as their index arrest (Cohen's *d* = 0.20) when compared to non-recidivists. Recidivists had an average of 0.34 (*SD* = 0.94) alcohol/drug arrests before the index arrest, compared to an average of 0.11 arrest (*SD* = 0.48) for non-recidivists. Less than half of recidivists had a sexual assault as their index arrest (47%), while this was true of 57% of non-recidivists.

Recidivists and non-recidivists for any offense did not differ substantially with regard to the number of prior violent or sexual arrests. Also, none of the victim characteristics (victim age, victim sex, and relationship between the offender and victim) distinguished recidivists from non-recidivists (effect sizes less than 0.20).

### Comparison of Recidivists to Non-Recidivists for a Violent Offense

As shown in Table 4, several factors distinguished recidivists ( $n = 41$ ) from non-recidivists ( $n = 430$ ) for a violent (non-sexual) offense. Recidivists were, on average, younger than non-recidivists at the time of their index arrest, and the effect size was almost medium (Cohen's  $d = 0.48$ ). Recidivists were, on average, 27 years old ( $SD = 6.86$ ), and non-recidivists were, on average, 31 ( $SD = 8.88$ ). Furthermore, a larger percentage of recidivists (41%) than non-recidivists (26%) were younger than age 25 at the time of their index arrest (Cohen's  $d = -0.34$ ).

**Table 4** Bivariate analysis of factors distinguishing recidivists from non-recidivists for violent (non-sexual) offenses

At time of arrest for index offense:	Non-recidivists ( $n = 430$ )	Recidivists ( $n = 41$ )	Cohen's $d$	Magnitude of effect size	95% CI
	$M$ or proportion ( $SD$ )	$M$ or proportion ( $SD$ )			
Offender age	30.88 (8.88)	26.67 (6.86)	0.482	Small	[0.157, 0.801]
Offender younger than 25 (Y/N)	.26 (.44)	.41 (.50)	-0.343	Small	[-0.661, -0.019]
Number of prior arrests	0.80 (1.64)	1.85 (3.39)	-0.566	Medium	[-0.880, -0.240]
Two or more prior arrests (Y/N)	.16 (.36)	.27 (.45)	-0.307	Small	[-0.626, 0.016]
Number of prior violent arrests	0.08 (0.36)	0.27 (0.92)	-0.435	Small	[-0.754, -0.111]
Number of prior sexual arrests	0.06 (0.26)	0 (0)	0.241	Small	[-0.080, 0.560]
Number of prior alcohol/drug arrests	0.19 (0.61)	0.68 (1.59)	-0.657	Medium	[-0.976, -0.330]
Index offense included sexual assault (Y/N)	.52 (.50)	.46 (.51)	0.126		[-0.195, 0.445]
Victim age	11.86 (7.06)	11.85 (7.31)	0.001		[-0.319, 0.322]
Any Male Victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.56 (.50)	.45 (.50)	0.225	Small	[-0.101, 0.548]
Any female victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.47 (.50)	.55 (.50)	-0.154		[-0.477, 0.172]
Any related victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.41 (.49)	.40 (.50)	0.030		[-0.316, 0.376]
Any acquaintance victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.50 (.50)	.49 (.51)	0.034		[-0.312, 0.380]
Any acquaintance victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.50 (.50)	.49 (.51)	0.034		[-0.312, 0.380]
Any stranger victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.09 (.28)	.09 (.28)	0.018		[-0.328, 0.363]

<sup>a</sup> 9 cases missing (1 was re-arrested; 8 were not re-arrested);

<sup>b</sup> 48 cases missing (6 were re-arrested; 42 were not re-arrested)



Several factors associated with criminal history also distinguished recidivists from non-recidivists for a violent offense: number of prior arrests, whether the offender had two or more prior arrests (yes/no), number of prior arrests for violent crimes, number of prior arrests for sexual offenses, and number of prior arrests for alcohol/drug offenses. Recidivists had, on average, 1.85 prior arrests ( $SD = 3.39$ ), while non-recidivists averaged less than one prior arrest ( $\bar{x} = 0.80$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ; Cohen's  $d = -0.57$ ). About 27% of recidivists, compared to 16% of non-recidivists, had two or more prior arrests. Offenders who were re-arrested for a violent offense had an average of 0.27 prior arrests for violent offenses ( $SD = 0.92$ ), compared to an average of 0.08 prior arrests for non-recidivists ( $SD = 0.36$ ; Cohen's  $d = -0.44$ ). Violent recidivists, however, had, on average, fewer prior sexual arrests than violent non-recidivists (0 compared to .06,  $SD = 0.26$ ); Cohen's  $d = 0.24$ ). Violent recidivists had an average of 0.68 ( $SD = 1.59$ ) prior alcohol/drug arrests, while the average for violent non-recidivists was 0.19 ( $SD = 0.61$ ), and the magnitude of the effect was medium, nearing large (Cohen's  $d = -0.66$ ).

With regard to victim characteristics, violent recidivists differed from non-violent recidivists only with regard to victim sex for the index offense. Fifty-six percent of violent non-recidivists, compared to 45% of violent recidivists, had male victims for their index offense (Cohen's  $d = 0.23$ ). Also noteworthy, violent recidivists and violent non-recidivists did not differ substantially with regard to victim age, having a sexual assault as their index arrest, and relationship between the victim and offender.

### Comparison of Recidivists to Non-Recidivists for a Sexual Offense

As shown in Table 5, three factors distinguished recidivists ( $n = 34$ ) from non-recidivists ( $n = 437$ ) for a sexual offense: number of prior arrests, number of prior alcohol/drug arrests, and having an acquaintance victim for the index offense. While the effect sizes for the number of prior arrests and having an acquaintance victim were small (Cohen's  $d = -0.32$  for both), the effect size for prior alcohol/drug arrests was medium (Cohen's  $d = -0.56$ ). Those who were re-arrested for a sexual offense had an average of 1.44 prior arrests for any offense ( $SD = 3.15$ ), while those not re-arrested had an average of 0.84 prior arrests ( $SD = 1.74$ ). Sixty percent of sexual recidivists, compared to 49% of the sexual non-recidivists had an acquaintance victim for their index offense. Also, offenders who were re-arrested for a sexual offense had an average of 0.62 prior alcohol/drug arrests ( $SD = 1.44$ ), while those not re-arrested had an average of 0.20 prior alcohol/drug arrests ( $SD = 0.67$ ).

Sexual recidivists and non-recidivists did not differ substantially on most factors (see Table 5). They did not differ with regard to their age at the index arrest, whether they were younger than 25 years old, whether they had two or more prior arrests, the number of prior violent or sexual arrests, victim age for the index offense, whether they were arrested for a sexual assault for their index offense, and victim characteristics (victim sex or relationship between the victim and offender), except for having an acquaintance victim.

**Table 5** Bivariate analysis of factors distinguishing recidivists from non-recidivists for sexual offenses

At time of arrest for index offense:	Non-recidivists ( <i>n</i> = 437)	Recidivists ( <i>n</i> = 34)	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Magnitude of effect size	95% CI
	<i>M</i> or proportion ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> or proportion ( <i>SD</i> )			
Offender age	30.62 (8.89)	29.18 (7.48)	0.164		[-0.187, 0.512]
Offender younger than 25 (Y/N)	.27 (.44)	.35 (.49)	-0.192		[-0.539, 0.159]
Number of prior arrests	0.84 (1.74)	1.44 (3.15)	-0.320	Small	[-0.667, 0.032]
Two or more prior arrests (Y/N)	.16 (.37)	.21 (.41)	-0.134		[-0.482, 0.216]
Number of prior violent arrests	0.10 (0.45)	0.06 (0.34)	0.090		[-0.259, 0.439]
Number of prior sexual arrests	0.05 (0.25)	0.09 (0.29)	-0.164		[-0.512, 0.186]
Number of prior alcohol/drug arrests	0.20 (0.67)	0.62 (1.44)	-0.560	Medium	[-0.907, -0.205]
Index offense included sexual assault (Y/N)	.52 (.50)	.47 (.51)	0.100		[-0.250, 0.448]
Victim age	11.95 (7.08)	10.71 (6.99)	0.175		[-0.175, 0.523]
Any male victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.55 (.50)	.52 (.51)	0.060		[-0.295, 0.414]
Any female victim (Y/N) <sup>a</sup>	.48 (.50)	.52 (.51)	-0.080		[-0.433, 0.275]
Any related victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.42 (.49)	.33 (.48)	0.184		[-0.189, 0.554]
Any acquaintance victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.49 (.50)	.60 (.50)	-0.321	Small	[-0.053, 0.691]
Any stranger victim (Y/N) <sup>b</sup>	.08 (.28)	.10 (.31)	-0.071		[-0.442, 0.301]

<sup>a</sup> 9 cases missing (1 was re-arrested; 8 were not re-arrested);

<sup>b</sup> 48 cases missing (4 were re-arrested; 44 were not re-arrested)

## Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine recidivism among a cohort of 471 female sexual offenders, which, to date, is one of the largest cohorts in the literature. Prior published studies have included samples of 1466 (Sandler & Freeman, 2009), 390 (Freeman & Sandler, 2008), 135 (Wijkman et al., 2011), 57 (Bader et al., 2010), and 43 sexual offenders (Broadhurst & Loh, 2003). Also, no other study has followed a sample of sexual offenders for longer than a decade, while this study used an average of 18.83 years of follow-up data. Thus, this study adds to prior studies by examining the long-term recidivism of a relatively large number of female sexual offenders.

About half (52%) of the female sexual offenders in this study were re-arrested for any offense after the index arrest, and 9 % were re-arrested for a violent (non-sexual) offense. The findings regarding arrests for any offense and violent offenses were comparable to prior studies—higher re-arrest rates for any offense and lower rates of violent re-arrests (Freeman & Sandler, 2008).

Seven percent of the female sexual offenders in this study were re-arrested for sexual offenses after their index arrest. The existing research on female sexual-offender recidivism has revealed mostly lower recidivism rates, with two studies reporting no sexual recidivism (Broadhurst & Loh, 2003), and another two reporting approximately 2 % sexual-recidivism rates (Sandler & Freeman, 2009). One other study, however, reported a 28.1% rate of sexual recidivism by relying on multiple data sources (Bader et al., 2010), and another (Wijkman et al., 2011) reported a sexual-recidivism rate of 37.8% when assessing a cohort retrospectively rather than the usual prospective method.

This study identified a large number of pseudo-recidivists who were re-arrested for a sexual offense after their index arrest, but whose sexual offense occurred before the index arrest. Precautions should be taken to account for pseudo-recidivism in future studies of sexual recidivism. This is especially important in studies with short follow-ups because they are likely to overestimate recidivism if pseudo-recidivism is ignored.

In this study, sexual recidivism occurred steadily during the follow-up period; and, therefore, studies with lengthier follow-up periods will reveal higher recidivism rates than studies with shorter follow-up periods. Also, studies relying on more than one measure of recidivism (e.g., criminal arrests and reports to Child Protective Services) will yield higher recidivism rates. Measurement of sexual offenses is difficult, and future research should consider using multiple measures of sexual recidivism.

Higher rates of sexual recidivism in this study may be due to its lengthy follow-up. Even with the same follow-up, however, there is a higher rate of sexual recidivism in this study. The Sandler and Freeman (2009) study reported a 1.8% sexual re-arrest rate at five years, compared to a 4.46% sexual re-arrest rate at five years in the current study. The difference in the rates is nominal, however, given the small number of offenders it would take to increase or decrease the recidivism rate by a few percentage points. Furthermore, when compared to male rates of sexual recidivism (Hanson & Bussière, 1998), this study still revealed substantially lower sexual recidivism of female offenders.

This study corroborated prior studies of recidivism of criminal offenders (in general), male sexual offenders, and female sexual offenders in that offenders arrested at a young age with more prior arrests had higher recidivism rates for any and violent offenses. It should be noted, however, that some predictors of male sexual recidivism did not distinguish recidivists from non-recidivists in this study, supporting Andrews et al.'s (2012) suggestion of a need for a gender-centered approach for predicting recidivism. In prior studies, male sexual offenders with male victims were more likely than offenders with female victims to recidivate, yet victim gender did not distinguish recidivists from non-recidivists in this study. Also, it is widely reported in the male sexual-offender literature that offenders with a stranger victim (as compared to someone known to or related to the offender) are more likely to recidivate (Hanson & Bussière, 1996). The relationship between the victim and the offender did distinguish female recidivists from female non-recidivists in this study—yet it was those with acquaintance victims who were more likely to sexually recidivate. Thus, this research corroborates others' findings that predictors of sexual recidivism of female sexual offenders may differ from predictors of male sexual recidivism (Sandler & Freeman, 2009).

Additional factors that distinguished sexual recidivists from non-recidivists in this study included the number of prior arrests and prior alcohol/drug arrests. This was somewhat comparable to Sandler and Freeman's (2009) finding that female sexual

offenders who had at least one misdemeanor conviction, at least one felony conviction, at least one drug conviction, and a large number of prior convictions were more likely to sexually recidivate. Future research should assess nuances of criminal histories to more fully explore predictors of recidivism (e.g., include measures of arrest vs. conviction and misdemeanors vs. felonies).

It will be more difficult to identify predictors of female than male sexual offending because of the small samples of female sexual offenders currently available, in combination with their low recidivism rate. Predictors, however, may include dynamic risk factors, emotional and personality characteristics, and other characteristics of the sexual offense, such as whether offenders acted alone or with co-offenders. Prior studies have found that a large percentage (at least 30% and possibly up to 50%) of female sexual offenders acted in concert with another person (Vandiver, 2006a; Williams & Bierie, 2015), usually a male with whom the female offender was romantically involved (Vandiver, 2006a). This should be examined in future research. Also, researchers have noted that while single factors have only a small association with recidivism, combining factors can be useful (Helmus & Thornton, 2015).

The findings from this study, along with consideration of findings in prior studies, make several contributions to the literature aside from identifying factors that predict recidivism of female sexual offenders. First, the offender's age at the time of offense has usually been a significant predictor of any type of recidivism for male and female offenders, with younger offenders more likely to recidivate than older offenders (Moffitt, 1993; Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995; Sampson & Laub, 1995). While that was true of female sexual offenders who recidivated for any type of offense and subsequent violent (non-sexual) offenses, offender's age was not significantly related to recidivism for sexual offenses.

The findings in this study should be interpreted with caution. Although we examined a large cohort of female sexual offenders, the data were for one state. The cohort was comprised of convicted offenders and, therefore, did not include those who pled sexual offenses down to non-sexual offenses, unless they were court/board ordered to register. The cohort was captured on a single date and did not include offenders who completed their registration prior to that date. The results, therefore, may not generalize beyond this cohort. This study was also limited in that it did not assess recidivism that could have occurred in other states or whether offenders died during the follow-up. Furthermore, the low rate of sexual recidivism makes it difficult to identify predictors of it. Although efforts were made to reduce the effects of pseudo-recidivism, only the first year after the index arrest was assessed for this problem. Although most instances of pseudo-recidivism can be identified by assessing offenders who have two sexual arrests in a short time frame (e.g., one year) (see generally: Phenix et al., IP), some cases of pseudo-recidivism can occur years apart and, therefore, may not have been captured in this study.

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