

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/getting-smarter-about-sex-offenders>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

[A new study by the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management](#) released in February finds that sex offenders released from prison in Connecticut are unlikely to return to prison for another sex crime. The study followed 14,398 sentenced male offenders, as well as several sex offender subgroups, for a five-year period following their 2005 releases. In addition to tracking new arrests, new convictions, and new admissions to prison, the study distinguished between instances of general recidivism and those crimes that involved new sexual offenses.

The study found that among 746 sex offenders who were released from prison in 2005, 27 were arrested on new sex charges within five years; out of the 27, 20 (2.7 percent) were convicted and 13 (1.7 percent) were sentenced to prison for those offenses. These low recidivism rates for sex crimes appear to contradict what much of the public thinks about sex offenders that they have a high sexual re-offense rate.

The Connecticut report is significant because it tracks offenders with previous sex offense convictions and convicted offenders who were originally charged with sex offenses but who were ultimately convicted of other charges. Few studies have examined this population of people who may have committed sex crimes but avoided conviction on a sex-related charge in return for entering a guilty plea and, in an era in which 19 out of every 20 felony convictions for all crimes are obtained by guilty plea, those charged with sex crimes are part of that group. Because sex crime registries impose onerous restrictions on sex offenders and in order to spare victims from the trauma of testifying and being cross-examined in court, prosecutors frequently agree to plea down sex crimes cases so that a defendant is convicted of a non-sex crime.

Although the Connecticut study reveals recidivism rates for sex crimes that are much lower than what many in the public have been led to expect or believe, it also concluded that some sex offenders pose a high risk for committing new sexual offenses. Sex offenders are not a monolithic group, their level of dangerousness, propensity to offend, and their preferred victims differ significantly. The study found that the Connecticut Department of Corrections Sex Treatment Score was a good predictor of sexual recidivism. Its scoring is based on conviction history, assessment of police reports, pre-sentence investigations, and other information that can provide a more complete and thorough understanding of the nature and context of an offender's crimes.

This report should serve as a valuable analysis for criminal justice agencies that seek to target programs and services to the group of sex offenders who pose the highest risk of returning to prison for a sex-specific crime.

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