

Does familiarity with the victim lead to lighter sentencing for sexual offenders?

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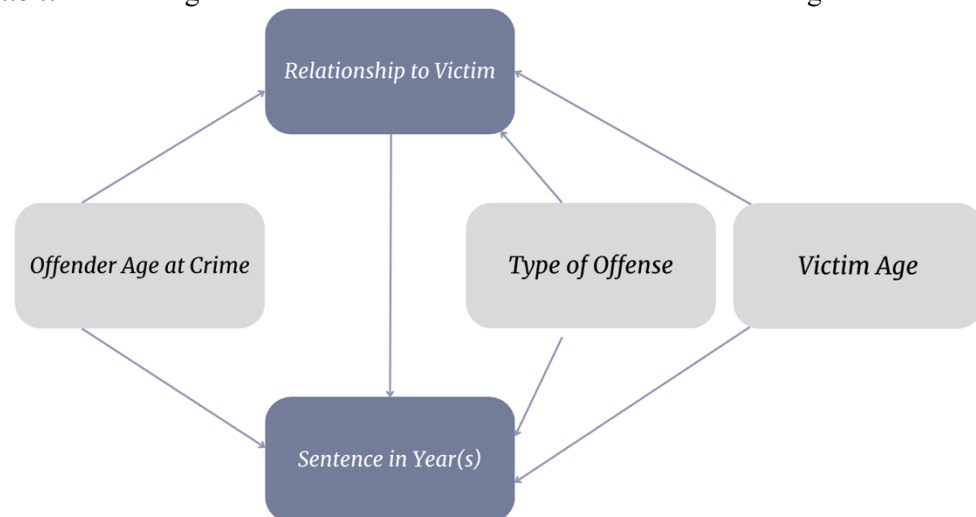
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1. Introduction

Sexual crimes are among the most serious offenses and involve complex sentencing decisions. Nowadays, one debated factor is whether the victim–offender relationship affects outcomes (McCormick & al., 1998). While crimes by known offenders may seem more severe, they often occur in private, lack witnesses, and are harder to prove. Victims may hesitate to report, which can lead to lighter sentences for non-stranger offenders despite the gravity of the offense.

Could non-stranger offenders receive lighter sentencing?

- **Prediction:** Non-stranger offenders receive less severe sentences than stranger offenders.



2. Data

The dataset used in this analysis was obtained through Web scrapping. It contains cleaned and structured information extracted from the public registry of sex offenders available on the official website of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) (<https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/nsor/>). The data covers key variables such as the offender's age at the time of the crime, the victim's age and gender, the type of offense committed, the relationship between offender and victim, and the length of the sentence (in years). After cleaning and preprocessing, a total of 357 valid entries were retained (N = 357, see Figure 1).

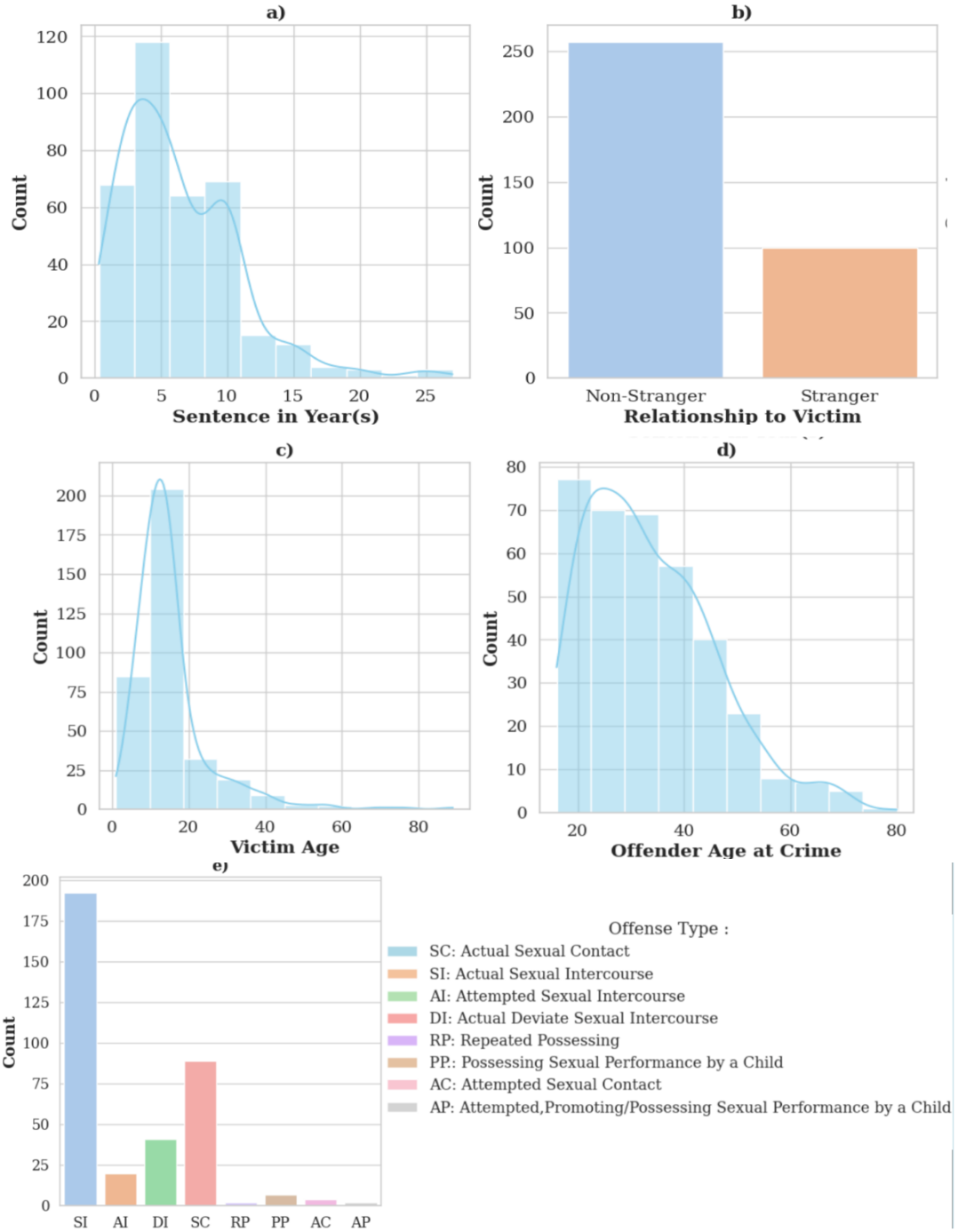


Figure 1 – Monovarietal description of the dataset: (a) sentence (in years), (b) relationship to victim, (c) victim age, (d) offender age at crime and (e) offense type.

3. Methods

To test the prediction, we performed a multivariate linear regression to evaluate the influence of relationship to victim on the sentence they have been condemned to, while considering both the age of the victim and the offender at the time of the crime, and the type of offense. The reference categories (Non-Stranger (Relationship to Victim) and Attempted Sexual Contact (Offense Type)) do not appear in the equation below, as including them could lead to multicollinearity issues.

$$\text{Sentence}_i = b_0 + b_1 \text{Relationship}(\text{Stranger})_i + b_2 \text{Offender Age}_i + b_3 \text{Victim Age}_i + b_4 \text{AI}_i + b_5 \text{AP}_i + b_6 \text{DI}_i + \dots + b_{10} \text{SI}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

4. Results

The analysis shows that the variables explain 6.3% of the variation in sentencing outcomes ($R^2 = 0.063$, see **Figure 2**). Among all predictors, only one variable has a statistically significant effect: being a stranger to the victim is associated with a significantly longer sentence ($b = 1.2046$, $p = 0.032$). None of the other predictors, including offender age, victim age, or specific offense types, show a statistically significant relationship with sentence length in this model (all $p > 0.05$).

	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	Standard error
Intercept	5.7041	0.017	2.375
Relationship – Stranger	1.2046	0.032	0.560
Ofd Age	-0.0160	0.421	0.020
Vtm Age	0.0078	0.737	0.023
Atpd Sex Int	0.3933	0.870	2.405
Atpd Poss Perf Child	-1.0826	0.778	3.834
Act Deviate Sex Int	1.0286	0.655	2.301
Atc Poss Perf Child	0.4821	0.862	2.773
Repeated Poss	2.6997	0.478	3.805
Act Sex Contact	-0.8287	0.712	2.245
Act Sex Int	1.5322	0.491	2.225

_____ Offense Type

R^2	0.063
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Figure 2 – Multivariate linear regression results showing the impact of the relationship to victim, the offender age at crime, and different offense types on the length of sentence.

5. Conclusion

Our results support the hypothesis that offenders who are strangers to the victim receive significantly longer sentences than non-stranger offenders. Nevertheless, none of the other variables, including offender age, victim age, or type of offense, showed a significant effect on sentencing. This suggests that, in this dataset, the relationship to the victim may be a more decisive factor than demographics or offense details.

6. References

Relationship to victim predicts sentence length in sexual assault cases | Office of Justice Programs. (n.d.). <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/relationship-victim-predicts-sentence-length-sexual-assault-cases>

Web scrapping site: *The official New York State Sex Offender Registry*. (n.d.). NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services. <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/nsor/>