

Public Abstract

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Title:Criminal Behavior Patterns of Adolescents and Young Adults Who Have Histories of Sexual Offenses

The development of criminal trajectories among sexual offenders (SOs) was explored in two studies. Study 1 focused on identifying distinct criminal trajectories, and Study 2 examined the association between these trajectories and psychosocial characteristics. Participants were 1,725 youths and their parents who were part of the National Youth Survey, which followed youths from adolescence through early adulthood. Individual youths completed a self-report delinquency measure in seven waves of the study, and youths and their parents completed measures assessing cognitive, family, peer, and academic domains in the first wave. One hundred thirty-one individuals reported committing at least one sexual offense across the seven waves. Results from Study 1 indicated three criminal trajectories (i.e., low, moderate, and chronic) and that SOs generally did not have different criminal trajectories during adolescence and early adulthood than did nonsexual index offenders (NIOs). Similar proportions of SOs and NIOs were found on the three trajectories. Results from descriptive analyses in Study 1 suggested that there were subgroups of SOs whose general patterns of criminal behavior were different from each other, indicating that SOs likely represent a heterogeneous population. Study 2 demonstrated that SOs and NIOs in the chronic trajectory generally reported more intrapersonal and interpersonal problems than did SOs and NIOs in the moderate-level trajectory, who, in turn, reported more such problems than did SOs and NIOs in the low-level trajectory. Findings suggest that the development of problem sexual behavior is similar to the development of other criminal behaviors. Implications for research and treatment are discussed.