

## POSTER

### Offense Specialization in Juvenile Sexual and Non-Sexual Offenders

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Research has indicated that criminal offenders typically exhibit versatility and diversity in their criminal behavior. Despite this evidence, it is often assumed that sexual offenders are highly specialized. This assumption may be part of the driving force behind the development of specialized treatment programs for sexual offenders and legislation related to sexual offender registration and community notification. Research is therefore needed to examine whether sexual offenders specialize in sexual offenses or are more generalized offenders. Results of these studies could be used to develop more effective treatment programs for offenders and more effective public policy that maximizes public safety and efficiently manages the most dangerous offenders.

Results of studies examining the specialization and generality of criminal behavior in adult sex offenders reveal that though sexual offenders are generally criminally versatile, rapists may be more versatile and child molesters more specialized in their offending patterns. Despite the recent increase in attention to the specialization of adult sexual offenders, this has yet to be examined in samples of juvenile sexual offenders (JSOs). The examination of these constructs in JSOs is important for reasons that are similar to those for adults. Specifically, JSOs are often mandated to participate in lengthy specialized treatment. If JSOs are found to specialize in sexual crime, treatment aimed primarily at reducing sexual deviance and developing appropriate sexual behaviors is warranted. However, if JSOs are found to be generalists in their offending, treatment aimed at reducing general deviance, criminal attitudes, and criminal behaviors may be more appropriate. In addition, laws that were previously applied solely to adult sexual offenders, such as registration and community notification, are now being applied to juveniles. It is therefore necessary to accurately identify whether JSOs are likely to specialize and persist in committing sexual crime in order to efficiently allocate resources to protect the public and avoid unnecessarily subjecting less dangerous juveniles to the lifelong consequences of these measures.

The purpose of this study is to examine the type and magnitude of crime specialization in a sample of juvenile sexual and non-sexual offenders who were committed to a high risk juvenile corrections facility between the years of 1999 and 2007. The sample consists of over 1000 youth, comprised of approximately 75%

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nonsexual offending delinquents (delinquents) and 25% JSOs, who were between the ages of 13 and 20 (mean = 16) at the time of their admission to the facility. The sample will be divided into four groups: three groups of JSOs and one group of delinquents. The JSOs will be divided into groups based on the age of their victims: those who offended only children (child offenders), only peers or adults (peer offenders), and both children and peers or adults (mixed offenders). Victims will be considered children if they were 4 or more years younger than the JSO and age 12 or younger. Only offenders with two or more adjudicated offenses (sexual or nonsexual) will be included in this study.

The primary goal will be to compare the type and magnitude of specialization between the offender groups. Specialization will be measured using the *diversity index*, an individualized measure of offense specialization (McGloin, Sullivan, Piquero, & Pratt, 2007) that indicates the probability that any two offenses from an individual's offense history belong to different crime categories (Miethe, Olson, Mitchell, 2006). The higher the diversity index, the more diversity in an offender's history; the closer the diversity index is to zero, the greater the level of specialization. The equation for the diversity index (D) follows, where  $p$  is the proportion of offenses in crime category  $m$  (McGloin et al., 2007):

$$D = 1 - \sum_{m=1}^M p_m^2$$

In this study, the diversity index will be calculated for each offender group for four broad crime types (Sexual, Violent, Property, and Public Order) and nine specific crime types common to juveniles incarcerated in a high-risk facility (sex offense against a child, sex offense against a peer/adult, assault & battery, larceny/grand theft, weapons offenses, drug offenses, vandalism, robbery, and trespassing & disorderly conduct). Within group comparisons will be conducted to determine in which offense type (broad and specific) each offender group is likely to specialize; between group comparisons will be conducted to determine whether groups are more likely to specialize in certain crime types. Exploratory analyses will also be conducted to examine whether demographic and psychosocial variables predict offense specialization. The results of this study will be discussed in terms of the similarity to findings with adult offenders and implications for treatment and policy related to juvenile offenders.

## References

Miethe, T. D., Olson, J. & Mitchell, O. (2006). Specialization and persistence in the arrest histories of sex offenders. A comparative analysis of alternative measures and offense types. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 204-229.

McGloin, J. M., Sullivan, C. J., Piquero, A. R. & Pratt, T. C. (2007). Local life circumstances and offending specialization/versatility. Comparing opportunity and propensity models. *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency*, 44, 321-346.