

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CHARACTERISTICS AND REOFFENCE-RISK FACTORS IN A SAMPLE OF IMPRISONED SEX OFFENDERS

Santiago Redondo¹, Eulalia Luque², Juan Carlos Navarro¹ and Marián Martínez¹

¹Department of Personality, Assessment and Psychological Treatment. Faculty of Psychology, University of Barcelona.

²Department of Justice, Government of Catalonia

Sex offences have great impact on their victims, as well as producing considerable public alarm, as periodically reflected in the mass media. In Spain, 5% of the total prison population are sex offenders, some of whom serve lengthy prison sentences, eventually being allowed to leave prison or move to an open regime. In such circumstances, it is important to make predictions about risk of recidivism as appropriately and accurately as possible. In this context there is a need for scientific research with Spanish samples in order to identify the most relevant risk factors. The principal aim of the case study presented here was to identify and describe the main personal and criminal career features of sexual offenders, as well as the how these are linked to risk of future recidivism. To this end, we assessed a large sample of sex offenders who had served prison sentences in Brians prison in Barcelona (Spain). Noteworthy results emerging from the assessment of the sample of sex offenders were excessive alcohol and drug use, criminal careers averaging over six years, and global recidivism, including both sexual and non-sexual offences, of 32.2%. Looking beyond these average values, significant differences emerged between recidivists and non-recidivists both in demographic variables (age at prison release, employment record and partner stability record) and criminal career variables (age at first recorded offence, number of convicted crimes, alcohol and drug use, type of victim, etc.). This study highlights the potential capacity of some of these variables for predicting future criminal behaviour.

Key words: Sex offenders, Risk of reoffence, recidivism prediction.

La delincuencia sexual constituye una problemática criminal de gran impacto para las víctimas que la sufren. Produce también una gran alarma pública entre los ciudadanos que se refleja periódicamente a través de los medios de comunicación. En España un 5% de la población penitenciaria corresponde a delincuentes sexuales, algunos de los cuales cumplen condenas de prisión prolongadas, teniendo finalmente la posibilidad de acceder a permisos de salida de prisión y a régimen abierto. En tales circunstancias resulta de gran utilidad efectuar predicciones de riesgo de reincidencia lo más adecuadas y precisas posibles. Para ello se requiere investigación científica que identifique en muestras españolas los factores de riesgo más relevantes. El objetivo principal de la investigación que se presenta aquí consistió en identificar y describir las principales características tanto personales como de carrera criminal de los agresores sexuales, y su relación con el riesgo de reincidencia futura. Para ello se evaluó una amplia muestra de agresores sexuales que habían cumplido condena en la prisión barcelonesa de Brians. En el conjunto de la muestra de agresores sexuales evaluada destaca una elevada tasa de consumo abusivo de alcohol, una duración promedio de las carreras delictivas superior a seis años, y una reincidencia global, incluida tanto la sexual como la no-sexual, de 32,2%. Más allá de estos promedios, aparecen diferencias notables entre el grupo de reincidentes y el grupo de no reincidentes tanto en variables demográficas (edad de salida en libertad, trayectoria laboral y estabilidad de la relación de pareja), como en variables de carrera delictiva (edad del primer delito sexual, número de delitos condenados, prevalencia del consumo de sustancias, tipología de las víctimas, etc.). Esta investigación pone de relieve la capacidad de algunas de estas variables como predictores del futuro comportamiento delictivo.

Palabras clave: Delincuentes sexuales, Riesgo de recaída, Predicción de Reincidencia.

INTRODUCTION

Sex offenders

Although in Western countries sexual offences tend to represent less than 1% of total reported crime, the

The original Spanish version of this paper has been previously published in *Anuario de Psicología Jurídica*, 2005, Vol. 15, 135-157

.....

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Santiago Redondo. Departamento de Personalidad, Evaluación y Tratamiento Psicológico. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad Barcelona. Spain. E-mail: sredondo@ub.edu

number of crimes actually committed is far higher. In the annual surveys on crime victims carried out in different countries, an average of 3% of respondents claim to have been the victims during the previous year of some type of sexual abuse or assault (Luque, 1999). Diverse self-report studies, in which adults are asked whether in the course of their lives they have been the victim of sexual abuse or assault, have revealed high prevalence figures: between 20% and 27% of women and between 10% and 16% of men report having been involved in at

least one sexual incident without their consent (Redondo & Sánchez-Meca, 2003; Tamarit, 2000). While it is true that the majority of such incidents are generally not clinically serious for their victims (Echeburúa & Guerricaechevarría, 2000), often consisting in mild unsolicited sexual contact by known or unknown persons, some do indeed involve considerable violence (as in the case of rape) or occur repeatedly over a long period (as occurs with much abuse in the family context –Murray, 2000), and can therefore cause their victims serious physical or psychological harm.

Despite the great social prevalence of sexual abuse and assault behaviours, there has been little comprehensive research on the topography of all these behaviours and the general characteristics of victims – still less of offenders. This is almost certainly due to the difficulty of conducting research arising from the private nature of most of these behaviours. Indeed, the vast majority of those who have sexually abused or assaulted others will be anonymous individuals who in all probability will be reluctant to come forward as research participants.

Although the true extent of this criminal problem is unknown, it is reasonable to assume a logical propensity to report the most serious cases and, naturally, that the law will identify, detain and imprison the perpetrators. In Spain's prison population as a whole, sex offenders represent around 5% of the total, or 3,000 cases (figures for 2005). Many of them are serving longer-than-average custodial sentences. It is also reasonable to assume that among the imprisoned sex offenders are the more habitual criminals, the more serious cases and those with the greatest risk of repeating sexual abuse or assault. For this reason it is criminologically relevant to study the high-risk cases that probably account for much of the population of sex offenders in prison. The present study analyzes the careers and criminal profiles of a Spanish sample of imprisoned sex offenders in relation to the risk of their committing further offences.

Criminal careers and relapse of sex offenders: risk predictors

The expression “criminal career” refers to the succession of offences a person commits over a given period, which has a beginning or *onset*, a period of *maintenance* and an *end* (Farrington, 1996; Howell, 2003). According to this type of sequential analysis, criminal careers can begin being earlier or later, can involve greater or lesser activity or frequency of offences, and can last for more or less time. The study of risk predictors refers directly to the link –merely

associative or, ideally, causal– between certain precursors of risk and the dimensions of criminal careers referred to (onset, incidence, duration, etc.) (Quinsey, Lalumière, Rice & Harris, 1995).

Convicted and imprisoned sex offenders in Spain tend to be males aged between 16 and 30, an age range that coincides fairly closely with that of the general prison population. Criminality of the sex offenders is highly varied, covering a majority of people convicted for just one offence or for a small number of offences, to a few cases of highly persistent offenders. For example, in a sample of 29 offenders assessed by Garrido, Redondo, Gil et al. (1995) who had been convicted for a total of 86 sex offences, 15 had offended just once, 9 had done so between 2 and 4 times, four had committed between 6 and 10 crimes, and a single offender had committed 47 rapes. These data provide a good illustration of the range of criminality to which we have referred.

On a strictly legal-penal level, an isolated offence may be of identical (or even greater) seriousness compared to any offence committed by a habitual offender. However, in predictive terms habitual offenders present higher risk in the medium and long term, since their criminal careers are likely to be longer and there is a high probability of their offences becoming more serious and violent over time. This study specifically sets out to identify the factors that are related to risk of re-offending in sex offenders, and hence to criminal recidivism.

The variability of sex offenders in terms of their rate of criminal activity, insofar as a majority commit a single offence and a small group commit many, also results in lower rates of recidivism in sex offenders, as a group, than the general rates of criminal recidivism. International research situates recidivism in sex offenders, for follow-up periods of some five years, at around 20% (Hall, 1995; Lösel, 2002; Redondo, 2002; Sánchez-Meca, Marín & Redondo, 1996), whilst the general recidivism rate (for all types of crime) is approximately 50%. And while it is true that if follow-up periods are extended to 15 or 20 years recidivism rates in sex offenders may rise to as much as 40% (Brown, 2005; Furby, Weinrott and Blackshaw, 1989), they are still lower, on average, than those for non-sex-offenders. Thus, although the majority of sex offenders will not commit further sex crimes once they have served their sentence, we know that there is a small group of habitual or systematic sex offenders who will probably offend again (Brown, 2005). One of the most important concerns for criminal policymakers today should be how to make predictions that are as accurate as possible about

this small group of recidivists, bearing in mind the social risk they represent. In the Spanish legal-penal system this risk becomes more evident, for the case of convicted offenders, in the adoption of measures involving their partial or total release from prison, through parole, open regimes and conditional or full discharge.

The probability that a criminal will re-offend is related to the greater or lesser presence, in the offender or in his/her environment, of risk predictors. Risk predictors, then, are individual or social factors associated with an increased probability of committing new offences (Farrington, 1996).

The general research on risk predictors (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau & Cullen, 1990; Gendreau, Little & Goggin, 1996) has identified two different types of reoffence-risk factors. First of all, *static* predictors – risk factors that are personal or that belong to the offender’s past and cannot be changed. With regard to sex offenders, an example of a static factor would be sexual abuse suffered by the victim him/herself in childhood. And second, so-called *dynamic* predictors –factors of the offender or his/her environment that can still be modified (albeit partially), and whose improvement is associated with reduced risk of future criminal behaviour. In sex offenders an example of a dynamic risk factor might be a man’s distorted or erroneous thoughts that women actually want to be sexually subjugated. Both types of predictor (static and dynamic) condition the *criminal career* of persistent offenders. However, while static factors would have an unalterable harmful effect, dynamic factors may be partially modified through appropriate intervention (e.g., psychological treatment), thus reducing their pernicious effects on the individual.

Study objectives

The general objective of this study, which forms part of a broader work aimed at assessing the effectiveness of treatment for sex offenders, is to carry out an empirical analysis of the criminal careers, risk factors and criminal profiles of a sample of sex offenders serving custodial sentences at the Brians prison in the province of Barcelona, Spain.

More specifically, the research has two goals in particular. The first is to identify the *general characteristics and risk predictors presented by sex offenders*, in relation both to their “personal and criminal career variables” (such as demographic variables, criminal activity, use of alcohol-drugs, type of victim, history of penal control and clinical risk and

treatment variables) and to the different parameters of their possible “criminal recidivism”. The second objective is to study the *differential characteristics and risk predictors* presented by *recidivist* and *non-recidivist* sex offenders. It is considered that all information obtainable in relation to our objectives is relevant for the prediction of risk of reoffence, and can help both to improve the management of criminal risk in sex offenders and to customize their treatment.

PROCEDURE

Sample

The total number of sex offenders who had served their sentence and left the prison (*Centro Penitenciario Brians*), since it was opened in May 1991 until 31st December 2002 (the cut-off point for this study, enabling all participants to have a minimum period of follow-up after release), was 346. These prisoners had committed a total of over 770 sex offences (with an average of 2.23 offences per participant), which included basically rape of women (both minors and adults) and sexual assault or abuse with children. They were also responsible for more than 630 non-sexual offences (with an average of 1.84 non-sexual crimes each), including robbery with violence, theft, bodily harm and homicide.

From the above population we took a study sample of 123 participants, made up of two equivalent groups: a subsample of 74 controls who had not been treated and another 49 participants who had received psychological treatment. Specifically, the treatment consisted in the application of an intense cognitive-behavioural programme (applied daily for a minimum of 1 year) designed by Garrido and Beneyto (1996). This programme includes diverse therapeutic ingredients aimed at developing offenders’ emotional conscience and empathy, at reducing their cognitive distortions and justification mechanisms, and at preventing relapses, all in accordance with other research and with international practice in this field (Brown, 2005; Budrionis & Jongsma, 2003; Marshall, 2001; Marshall & Fernandez, 1997; Marshall & Redondo, 2002; Rice, Harris & Quinsey, 2001; Navarro, 2004; Redondo & Sánchez-Meca, 2004). In the present study the variable treatment/non-treatment is considered as just one more variable in the criminal career of those studied, and the absence of treatment has been analyzed as a possible predictor of risk, among others, of criminal recidivism.

In order to assess the criminal recidivism of each participant we carried out (through a retrospective

design) a follow-up of the cases over an average period of 3 years and 8 months (with a range of follow-up from 1 to 7 years and a standard deviation of 612 days) after participants' discharge from prison.

Instruments for the collection and coding of data

For the collection of data in this study we designed a coding scheme with 52 variables, structured, according to purposes, on the basis of two broad categories: A) *personal and criminal career variables*, which included demographic variables, criminal activity, use of alcohol-drugs, victim typologies, penal control record, clinical variables, and possible application of treatment, and B) different parameters of *criminal recidivism* –or criterion variables–, analyzed in relation to the risk predictors. All the groups of “A” variables –or risk predictors– were selected for their criminological relevance in accordance with general research on criminal careers. Within the framework of each group we included those variables which were theoretically most relevant and which, moreover, could be obtained from the documentary information on the participants.

The variable coding scheme was defined a priori in a theoretical fashion, and was subsequently checked empirically through the coding of 10 cases. As a result of this test the scheme was modified and adjusted to the available information, and the data for all the cases in the study were coded. This process was carried out by a psychologist with expertise in this field (prison psychologist) and by a psychologist who had carried out the practical part of her degree course in this research context and who, moreover, was trained in the collection and coding of such information.

The information necessary for this work was obtained from the following documentary sources:

- *Prison files* on paper (which contain data on offences committed by the prisoner, criminal career, sentences received, periods of freedom, etc.).
- *Classification and treatment protocols* on paper: which contain psychological, criminological, educational and social assessments, records and reports on the participants and their activities in prison and outside, on their educational and vocational training, on their personal and family antecedents, and so on.
- *Prison information on computer*, which summarizes all the information from paper files and protocols. Computerized format also makes it easy to check whether the participant has returned to prison after reoffending.

In the collection and coding of all this information we took into account the principles and legal guidelines relating to the privacy and anonymity of data of a personal nature.

The collection and coding process lasted six months. Despite the fact that the majority of the variables coded were objective data that only had to be transcribed from the information source, in order to ensure the accuracy of the coding we employed two types of measure:

1. We carried out an *independent dual coding* for 40 cases of some variables that could involve some degree of subjectivity and inference (*unstable employment record, unstable or non-existent couple relationship, seriousness of the offences and abusive consumption of alcohol*). In all cases the percentage of inter-coder agreement was over 92.5, thus supporting the reliability of the coding of these variables. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus among the coders.
2. *Crossed revision by coders*. Initially, coding was carried out by variables (e.g., educational level, age at first offence, number of crimes committed, possibility of reoffence) for the participants in the sample. However, once this process had been completed and all the cases coded, a careful crossed revision of the whole database was made, this time not by variables but by participants, following their life records. This revision process permitted us to detect and correct some date errors.

Results: global sample and differences between recidivists and non-recidivists

With regard to the two specific objectives of this study (the first concerning identification of the general characteristics and risk predictors for the sex offenders as a whole, and the second concerning identification of the differences between the groups of recidivists and non-recidivists), Tables 1 to 4 show the main results obtained. Each table refers to a specific group or *cluster* of variables assessed (demographic, criminal career, clinical risk, and treatment).

The first and second columns of each table show (and number) the different risk predictors assessed, including both quantitative variables (e.g., lower age of participants on prison release), which are shown as means (\bar{x}), and categorical variables (e.g., educational level below school-leaving certificate), which are shown in percentages (%).

The following three columns show the scores for the *main characteristics and risk predictors* of the *global*

sample (third column), of the non-recidivist sex offenders (fourth column) and of the recidivist sex offenders (fifth column). The third column, corresponding to the *global sample*, includes data for all the variables analyzed. In contrast, the fourth and fifth columns, corresponding to the non-recidivist and recidivist sex offenders groups, respectively, only show the scores where there were significant differences between the two groups of participants.

Thus, from the bivariate analysis of sex-offence recidivism (for a total sample of 123), we found explanatory capacity of such recidivism in 26 variables – those in which the non-recidivists and the recidivists show statistically significant differences, indicated in the customary way by means of one or two asterisks (*) according to error probability.

Finally, in the sixth column of Tables 1 to 4 we provide an answer, for each risk factor in which there were significant differences between recidivists and non-recidivists, to the question: “Risk factor for the recidivist group?” The principal goal of this study is, as stated above, to identify the risk factors or predictors most closely related to sex-offence recidivism. To this end we assigned to each variable or risk predictor for which significant differences between groups was obtained, on the basis of the research results, a direction of its influence as a risk factor.

For example, it was considered that a “clearly unstable employment record” (variable 4, Table 1) has a negative valence; in other words, it is predictive of risk. Given that in the recidivist group a significantly higher percentage of participants have “clearly unstable employment records”, this factor would be operating as a risk predictor affecting the recidivist group, and thus probably increasing their likelihood of reoffending. In order to indicate this probable negative influence, in the sixth column –which, as explained above, corresponds to the question: “Risk factor for the recidivist group?”– the response assigned is “Yes”. This has been done for each variable or risk factor, insofar as it is considered that the difference found between the groups constitutes a risk predictor for the recidivist group. Thus, through detailed study of the differential scores between the groups, the reader can readily obtain a more global picture of the weight of the risk factors in the recidivist group simply by checking the number of “Yes” responses (compared to those of “No”) in the sixth column.

In the demographic variables or predictors the following results can be highlighted (see Table 1):

Global sample. A high percentage of participants have

unstable or non-existent couple relationships (69.1%), though over half (52.8%) have children; more than half have a lower educational level than that of a simple school-leaving certificate (55.1%), while a high proportion have an unstable employment record (41%). Finally, mean age on prison discharge (as defined in the present study) for the sex offenders in our sample was 38.6 years.

Differences between recidivists and non-recidivists. Recidivist sex offenders differ significantly from non-recidivists in three relevant risk factors: in that a smaller percentage have children (36.4% compared to 57.9%) (the fact of having children is considered in this context, in principle, as a protective factor against risk of recidivism; thus, not having them is considered a risk factor), in that a larger percentage have a clearly unstable employment record (56.8% compared to 37.3%), and that they are, on average, younger at the time of leaving prison (32.9 years compared to 40.9).

As indicated in the sixth column, all these differences constitute risk factors for the recidivist group.

Criminal career factors

Global sample. As regards the criminal career of the sample as a whole, the following aspects are noteworthy (see Table 2):

- With regard to the *criminal activity* of the sample, first sex offence was committed, on average, at age 31.8 years (this is not necessarily the age at first offence, since there may be previous ones that have not come to light); they have been convicted of an average of 2.33 sex offences (plus 1.84 non-sexual offences, giving a total of 4.07 convictions per participant); mean seriousness of the sex offences is high, at 2.7 points (on a scale of 1-4, according to the

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	Global sample	Differences recidivist/non-recidivist sex offenders		Risk factor for the recidivist group?
		Non-recidivists	Recidivists	
1 Unstable or non-existent couple relationship (%)	69.1%			
2 One or more children (%)	52.8%	57.9%	36.4%**	Yes
3 School leaving cert. or lower (%)	55.1%			
4 Clearly instable work record (%)	41%	37.3%	56.8%*	Yes
5 Lower age at release (\bar{x})	38.6	40.9	32.9**	Yes

NOTE: t significances (for quantitative variables) or χ^2 (for categorical variables) are represented by means of an asterisk (*) for p 0.01 and by means of two asterisks (**) for p 0.05.

violence used), and there is a high rate of criminal specialization (\bar{x} = 0.79, on a scale of 0-1). Length of criminal career of the set of those assessed (time between first and last offence) was 2,225 days (= 6.1 years).

- As regards *use of alcohol and drugs*, a high percentage (74.2%) have antecedents of abusive consumption, mainly (85.3% of cases) alcohol.
- As far as the *victims* are concerned, the vast majority of those in our sample committed the offences on women (81.23%), generally aged over 14 years (62.1%, as against 37.9% who had convictions for offences against under-14s) and more often than not on strangers (60.4%, compared to 39.6% who had offended against people known to them previously). These data suggest a predominance in our sample of

high-risk offenders, in general rapists of women unknown to them, which implies a high degree of planning and consolidation of the criminal career.

- With regard to *penal control*, almost half the participants (45.2%) have received 2 or more custodial sentences, they have served an average of 2,108 days in prison (= 5.8 years), and a significant percentage (38.2%) have spent as much as or more time in prison than in freedom over the last few years of their life (between the first [convicted] offence and the last).

Figure 1 provides the main criminal activity data for the global sample. Above the graph are the scores for seriousness of the sex offences (with a mean seriousness of 2.75 points, on a scale of 1-4), the rate of criminal specialization (with a ratio between sex offences and total offences of 0.79) and the length of criminal career to date (with a mean of 6.18 years). The bar graph shows the mean figures per participant for sex-offence convictions (2.23 offences), non-sexual offence convictions (1.84) and total convictions (4.07).

Differences between recidivists and non-recidivists. The *non-recidivist and recidivist groups* (for sex offences) differ significantly (see Table 2) in the majority of factors relating to “criminal activity”, “use of alcohol-drugs”, “victims” and “penal control”. Specifically, the following differences can be observed between them:

- As regards *criminal activity*, recidivists were significantly younger than non-recidivists on committing their first (convicted) sex offence (25.2 years compared to 34.3 years) and had been convicted of more sex offences (4.32 as against 1.67) and total offences (6.86 compared to 2.92); moreover, mean length of their criminal career to date was much greater (9.5 years compared to 1.9 years).
- In relation to *use of alcohol-drugs*, considering the total of those who abused alcohol (85.3%), recidivists were significantly less likely to abuse alcohol than non-recidivists (70.6% compared to 89.2%), whilst for the total of those who took other drugs (14.7%), recidivists were significantly greater consumers than non-recidivists (29.4% compared to 10.8%).
- As far as *victims* are concerned, a smaller percentage of recidivists had been convicted for offences against under-14s (17.9%, compared to 42.3% of non-recidivists) and people previously known to them (5.3%, compared to 52.5% of non-recidivists) Offending against minors and known people tends to

CRIMINAL CAREER FACTORS	Global sample	Differences recidivist/non-recidivist sex offenders		
		Non-recidivists	Recidivists	Risk factor for the recidivist group?
CRIMINAL ACTIVITY				
6 Lower age at first sex offence (\bar{x})	31.8	34.3	25.2**	Yes
7 More convicted sex offences (\bar{x})	2.23	1.67	4.32**	Yes
8 More convicted non-sexual offences	1.84			
9 More total convicted offences (\bar{x})	4.07	2.92	6.86**	Yes
10 Greater mean seriousness of sex offences [$(so_i \cdot ser_i)/so_i$] (\bar{x})	2.75			
11 Rate of criminal 0.79 specialization (vs versatility) (\bar{x})				
12 Length of previous criminal career [age at last crime — age at first crime = days] (\bar{x})	2,225.4 [=6.1 years]	706.5 1.9 years	3,473.7** 9.5 years	Yes
ALCOHOL-DRUG USE				
13 Antecedents of alcohol/drug use (%)	74.2%			
14 Of consumers (100%): Alcohol abuse (%)	85.3%	89.2%	70.6%*	No
15 Of consumers (100%): Other drug (not alcohol) abuse (%)	14.7%	10.8%	29.4%*	Yes
VICTIMS				
16 Women victims (%)	81.3%			
17 Victims under 14 (%)	37.9%	42.3%	17.9%*	Yes
18 Victims previously known (%)	39.6%	52.5%	5.3%**	Yes
PENAL CONTROL				
19 Two or more prison sentences for different offences (%)	45.2%	23.0%	100.0%**	Yes
20 More total time spent in prison (\bar{x}) (in days)	2,108.1 [=5.8 years]	1,957.9 5.4 years	2,989.6** 8.2 years	Yes
21 Ratio freedom/prison time 1 (over previous years has spent more time in prison than free) (%)	38.2%			
Note: Note: t significances (for quantitative variables) or χ^2 (for categorical variables) are represented by means of an asterisk (*) for p 0.01 and by means of two asterisks (**) for p 0.05.				

correspond to child abuser profiles, whilst the opposite (victims are over 14 and strangers) tends to correspond to profiles typical of rapists. The latter generally have poorer prognosis in relation to re-offending. See also Figure 2.

- Finally, with regard to *penal control*, 100% of recidivist sex offenders had served two or more prison sentences for different offences (compared to just 23% of non-recidivists), and they had spent much longer in prison (8.2 years, compared to 5.4 years for non-recidivists).

As can be seen in the sixth column of Table 2, practically all (9 out of 10) the differences found constitute risk factors for the recidivist group.

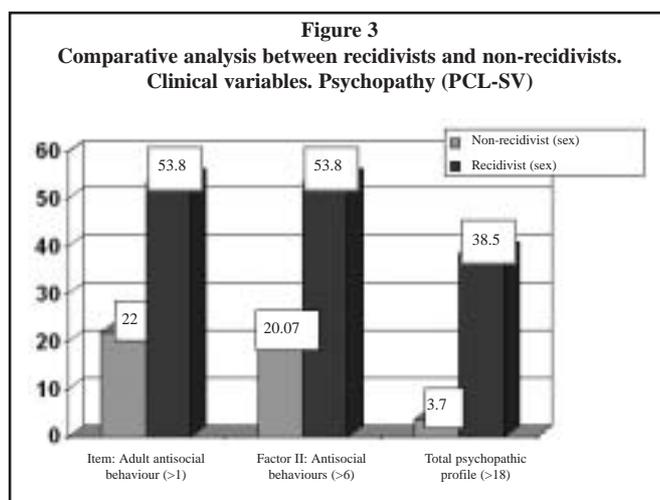
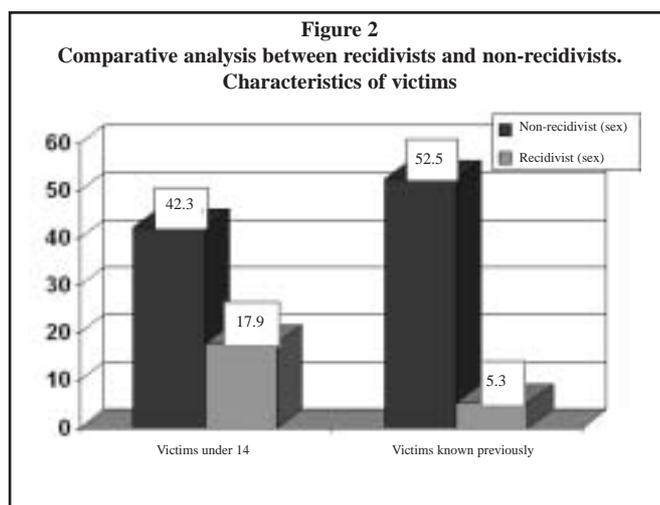
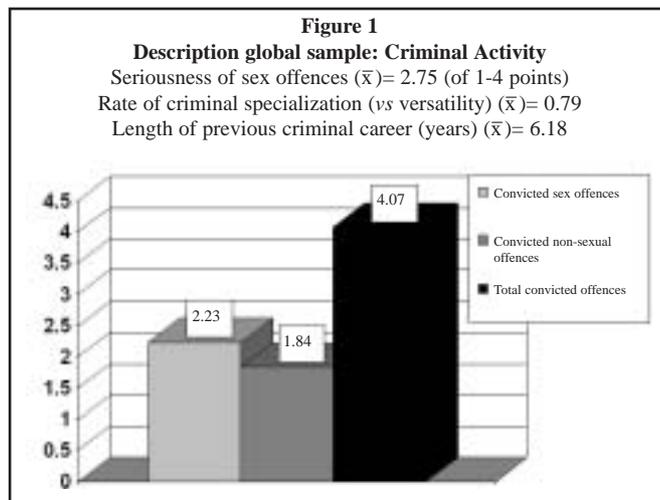
Clinical risk variables

Global sample. As regards the clinical risk variables considered, high percentages of those in the global sample scored on the different items of the *Psychopathy Scale* (based on the *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised: Screening Version* (PCL-SV); Hart, Cox & Hare, 1995), with notable scores in the Factor I variables (psychopathic traits), such as *Liar* (71,4%), *Lack of remorse* (88.1%), *Lack of empathy* (83.3%), and *No acceptance of responsibility* (90.5%), as well as the Factor II (antisocial behaviours) variable *Impulsive* (92.9%). A total of 60.7% of the participants obtained scores equal to or higher than the mid point (≥ 6) for Factor I (*psychopathic traits*) as a whole, while 26.2% surpassed this mid point (≥ 6) for Factor II (*antisocial behaviours*). However, according to the PCL-SV, only 6% of the participants present *serious psychopathic profile* (≥ 18 points on the PCL-SV).

In addition to the PCL-SV we applied a *risk scale* (which took into account factors such as number of sex-offence convictions, signs of paraphilia, aggressiveness, cognitive distortions, etc.), and on which participants obtained a mean risk score of 16.41 points; however, this result is difficult to interpret without a more detailed analysis of the distribution of the variable, given the disparity of possible scores on this scale.

Differences between recidivists and non-recidivists. In terms of their scores on the PCL-SV, recidivist and non-recidivist sex offenders differ significantly in their percentage scores for the items “irresponsible” (≥ 1), “antisocial behaviour in adolescence” and “adult antisocial behaviour”. A greater proportion of recidivists score ≥ 6 points in Factor II of the PCL (53.8% of participants) and in Psychopathic Profile (≥ 18 points) (38.5% of participants). See also Figure 3.

On the *Risk Assessment Scale* the recidivist group had obtained higher averages in six of the nine risk factors assessed. Moreover, average risk score for recidivists had been far superior (45.07 points) to that of the non-recidivists (13.19 points).



Both on the Psychopathy Scale and on the Risk Assessment Scale all the differences found between the groups constitute risk factors for the recidivist group.

Treatment

Global sample. As regards the treatment variable, of the sample as a whole 39.8% received treatment. Thus, as explained earlier, 49 made up the treatment group and 74 the control group, giving a global sample of 123 participants assessed.

Differences between recidivists and non-recidivists. In

the expected direction, having received treatment or not is a significant risk variable for differentiating between the recidivists and non-recidivists: fewer recidivists (14.3%) than non-recidivists (46.5%) had received treatment. In principle, and in parallel with other variables considered, receiving treatment is associated with lower probability of reoffending. Therefore, the fact that fewer participants in the recidivist group had received treatment constitutes another reoffence-risk factor for them.

Criminal recidivism of the global sample

Finally, Table 5 shows the *sex-offence recidivism* of the whole sample studied, which was 19.8% for an average follow-up period of 3 years and 8 months (a figure that corresponds with those of Spanish and international research in the field, which situates the average for sex-offence recidivism at around 20% of cases). As for non-sexual offence recidivism, this was 12.4%, giving a sum total of recidivism, for all types of offence, of 32.2%. Participants who reoffend (sex crimes) take an average of 593 days (1.6 years) to do so, and mean seriousness of the new offences (by degree of violence) is 2.56 points (on a scale of 1-4), a slightly lower but very similar figure to that for seriousness of the offences committed previously (2.75).

Discussion: profiles of recidivist and non-recidivist sex offenders

The present study is a pioneering one in the Spanish context in the field of analysis of the characteristics and

CRIMINAL RISK VARIABLES	Global sample	Differences recidivist/non-recidivist sex offenders		
		Non-recidivists	Recidivists	Risk factor for the recidivist group?
Psychopathy: PCL-SV				
22 Superficial (1) (%)	29.4%			
23 Grandiose (1) (%)	23.8%			
24 Deceifful (1) (%)	71.4%			
25 Lacks of remorse (1) (%)	88.1%			
26 Lacks of empathy (1) (%)	83.3%			
27 Doesn't accept responsavility (1) (%)	90.5%			
28 Impulsive (1) (%)	92.9%			
29 Poor behavioral control (1) (%)	48.8%			
30 Lack goals (1) (%)	45.2%			
31 Irresponsible (1) (%)	50.0%	45.1%	92.3%**	Yes
32 Adolescence antisocial behaviour (1) (%)	13.1%	9.8%	61.5%**	Yes
33 Adult antisocial behaviour (1) (%)	27.4%	22.0%	53.8%*	Yes
34 Factor I: Psychopathic features (6) (%)	60.7%			
35 Factor II: Antisocial behaviours (6) (%)	26.2%	20.7%	53.8%*	Yes
36 Psychopathic profile (total) (18) (%)	6.0%	3.7%	38.5%*	Yes
Risk assessment scale				
37 Number of sex offences (with different victims) (\bar{x})	11.71	8.53	36.9*	Yes
38 Paraphilias (\bar{x})	0.34	0.25	1.08*	Yes
39 Degree of aggressiveness in offences (\bar{x})	0.46			
40 Cognitive distortions (\bar{x})	0.75			
41 Alcoholism/Drug-dependence (\bar{x})	0.47			
42 Low personal resources (\bar{x})	0.81	0.67	1.15*	Yes
43 Sexual excitability to deviant stimuli (\bar{x})	1.4	1.20	2.69**	Yes
44 PCL-SV (Psychopathy) score (\bar{x})	0.50	0.45	1.46*	Yes
45 Unstable lifestyle (\bar{x})	1.53	1.33	2.85*	Yes
46 Total risk (\bar{x})	16.41	13.19	45.07**	Yes

Note: t significances (for quantitative variables) or χ^2 (for categorical variables) are represented by means of an asterisk (*) for p 0.01 and by means of two asterisks (**) for p 0.05.

	(\bar{x}) or %
48 Sex-offence recidivism (%)	19.8%
49 Non-sexual offence recidivism (%)	12.4%
50 Total recidivism (%)	32.2%
51 Mean seriousness of sex-offence recidivism (\bar{x})	(\bar{x}) = 2.56
52 Mean time taken to reoffend (sex offences) (\bar{x})	(\bar{x}) = 592.9

TREATMENT	Global sample	Differences recidivist/non-recidivist sex offenders		
		Non-recidivists	Recidivists	Risk factor for the recidivist group?
Psychopathy: PCL-SV				
47 Have received treatment (%)	39.8%	46.5%	14.3%*	Yes

Note: t significances (for quantitative variables) or χ^2 (for categorical variables) are represented by means of an asterisk (*) for p 0.01 and by means of two asterisks (**) for p 0.05.

risk factors of imprisoned sex offenders. It focuses in particular on the differences (in a wide range of demographic, criminal career and clinical risk variables) between recidivist and non-recidivist sex offenders. On the basis of the previous results, and by way of synthesis of all the empirical information obtained, Table 6 shows what could be the most typical “profiles” of *recidivist* and *non-recidivist* sex offenders.

As it can be seen, the *non-recidivist* sex offenders assessed in this study present the following personal and criminal career characteristics: they committed their first (convicted) sex offence at an average age of 34, they have a criminal record of 1-2 convicted sex offences and 3 offences in total; their previous criminal career had lasted around 3 years; the majority (75%) had served just one prison sentence, lasting an average of 5.5 years; they leave prison at around age 40; they generally have stable employment records; 60% have children; they tend to abuse alcohol; their victims are females, both under-14s and over-14s, and in half of the cases previously known to them; only 3.7% present a psychopathic profile, and they score lower on all the items of the risk scale (different victims, paraphilias, low level of personal resources, deviant sexual excitability, unstable lifestyle), with a total risk score of 13.19 points; finally, almost half of those who do not reoffend (46.5%) had received specific treatment for sexual aggression.

As regards the *recidivists*, they committed their first (convicted) sexual offence at an earlier average age (25 years); they had been convicted of an average of 4 sex offences and 7 offences in total; their previous criminal career had lasted 9 years, almost treble the length of the non-recidivists’; they had served multiple prison sentences, with a mean duration of 8 years; they leave prison at an earlier age, around 33; more than half have unstable employment records; less than 40% have children; although there is marked abuse of alcohol, a third preferentially consume other drugs; their victims are unknown adult females; a high percentage, 38.5%, present a psychopathic profile, and they score higher on all the risk scale items, with a total score on that scale of 45.07 points (three times the score of the non-recidivists); finally, just 14.3% had received treatment.

Thus, among the characteristics that distinguish recidivists from non-recidivists are a wide range of static or unmodifiable risk factors that constitute aspects of their own individuality (e.g., younger, high psychopathic profile, high sexual excitability) or their past experience (e.g., longer criminal career, unstable

employment record, “stranger” victim profile). Together with these essentially static factors we also found a relevant difference between the recidivists and non-recidivists groups as regards the percentage of them that had received treatment. This difference points to a series of dynamic factors –such as communication skills, emotional development or empathy– that constitute goals of the treatment applied to sex offenders. As already mentioned, almost half of those who did not reoffend (46.5%) had received treatment, whilst only 14.3% of those who reoffended had done so.

From a theoretical perspective, the static and dynamic risk factors would be operating jointly in the same individual. This means that although, in the best of cases, some dynamic risk factors (e.g., lack of empathy) might be attenuated by the treatment, the static risk factors referred to previously (and difficult or impossible to modify) continue to have a negative effect and to maintain the risk of reoffending. Thus, the expected positive effects of the application of treatment would be modulated downwards by the influence of *static risk factors*, more obstinate and treatment-resistant insofar as they correspond essentially to the offender’s past.

The data in Tables 1 to 4 largely confirm this theoretical prediction, since, on analyzing the characteristics of the *non-recidivists* (regardless of whether or not they have been treated) and the characteristics of the *recidivists* (again, regardless of the treatment factor), there emerge interactions with risk

Profile of non-recidivists	Profile of recidivists
Committed first (convicted) sex offence around age 34	Committed first (convicted) sex offence around age 25
Have been convicted of 1-2 sex offences and 3 offences in total	Have been convicted of 4 sex offences and 7 offences in total
Previous criminal career of around 3 years	Previous criminal career of around 9 years
75% have served just one prison sentence and have been imprisoned for 5.5 years	Have spent various spells in prison, with mean duration of 8 years
Leave prison more mature: around age 40	Leave prison younger: around age 33
Majority have stable work records	Over half have instable work records
Around 60% have children	Less than 40% have children
Tendency for alcohol abuse	Generally abuse alcohol, but 1/3 preferentially use other drugs
Victims have been both over-14s and under-14s; in most cases known to them previously	Victims are unknown females over 14
Psychopathy (PCL): 20% of them score on Factor II (antisocial behaviour) and 3.7% have <i>psychopathic profile</i>	Psychopathy: more than 1/2 score on Factor II (antisocial behaviour) and 38.5% have <i>psychopathic profile</i>
Risk: score lower on all the items: -Different victims -Paraphilias -Low personal resources -Deviant sexual excitability -Unstable lifestyle Total risk score = 13.19	Risk: score lower on all the items:-Different victims -Paraphilias -Low personal resources -Deviant sexual excitability - Unstable lifestyle Total risk score = 45.07
46.5% have received treatment	14.3% have received treatment

factors that are basically *static*. Moreover, such risk factors are more prevalent in the recidivist group. This can be confirmed in the following way: as already mentioned, for each significant difference between the recidivist and non-recidivist groups, in the final column of Tables 1 to 4 a “Yes” or “No” has been assigned according to whether the factor in question is considered to constitute a risk factor, from a theoretical perspective, for the *recidivist* group. As it can be seen, there are 24 “Yes” answers (out of a possible 25), which conclusively signifies that the recidivists, in addition to having received proportionally less treatment (14.3%), present more of the various static risks which undoubtedly play a decisive role in prolonging their criminal careers (with or without treatment).

To conclude, in relation to the objectives set, the present study contributes, first of all, empirical information on a wide range of characteristics and risk factors (*static and dynamic*) of a Spanish sample of imprisoned sex offenders. And secondly, it highlights a series of significant differences in these risk factors between the group of convicted sex offenders that end up reoffending (sex crimes) and those that do not. These results constitute an original empirical contribution in the field of sexual offences, and can be relevant both for increasing our knowledge about sex offenders (particularly in the Spanish context) and for improving predictions about future behaviour.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, D. & Bonta, J. (2003). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (3rd ed.). Cincinnati (USA): Anderson Publishing Co.
- Andrews, D., Zinger, I., Hoge, R. D., Bonta, J., Gendreau, P. & Cullen, F. T. (1990). Does correctional treatment work? A clinically relevant and psychologically informed meta-analysis. *Criminology*, 28 (3), 369-404.
- Brown, S. (2005). *Treating Sex Offenders: An introduction to sex offender treatment programmes*. Cullompton, Devon (UK): Willan Publishing.
- Budrionis, R., & Jongsma, A.E. (2003). *The Sexual Abuse Victim and Sexual Offender Treatment Planner*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Echeburúa, E. & Guerricaechevarría, C. (2000). *Abuso sexual en la infancia: víctimas y agresores. Un enfoque clínico*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Farrington, D.P. (1996). The explanation and prevention of youthful offending. In P. Cordelia & L. Siegel (eds.) *Readings in contemporary criminological theory*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Furby, L., Weinrott, M.R., & Blackshaw, L. (1989). Sex Offender Recidivism: A Review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 105 (1), 3.30.
- Garrido, V., & Beneyto, M.J. (1996). *El control de la agresión sexual. Un programa de tratamiento para delinquentes sexuales en prisión y en la comunidad*. Valencia: Ed. Cristobal Serrano Villalba.
- Garrido, V., Redondo, S., Gil, A., Torres, G., Soler, C., & Beneyto, M.J. (1995). *Delinqüens sexuals en les presons*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Gendreau, P., Little, T., & Goggin, C. (1996). A meta-analysis of the predictors of adult offender recidivism: What works? *Criminology*, 34(4), 575-607.
- Hall, N.G. (1995). Sexual offender recidivism revisited: A meta-analysis of recent treatment studies. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 63, 802-809.
- Hart, S.D., Cox, D.N., & Hare, R.D. (1995). *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version*. Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.
- Howell, J.C. (2003). *Preventing and Reducing Juveniles Delinquency* (cap. 1-6, pp. 1-129). Thousand Oaks (CA, USA), SAGE Publications
- Lösel, F. (2002). ¿Sirve el tratamiento para reducir la reincidencia de los delinquentes sexuales? In S. Redondo, *Delincuencia sexual y sociedad* (pp. 361-396). Barcelona: Ariel.
- Luque, E. (1999). *Les víctimes del delict*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Marshall, W.L. (2001). El tratamiento & su eficacia. In W.L. Marshall: *Agresores sexuales*. (Estudios sobre violencia, nº 6). Barcelona: Ariel/Centro Reina Sofía para el Estudio de la Violencia.
- Marshall, W.L., & Fernandez, Y.M. (1997). Enfoques cognitivo-conductuales para las parafilias: el tratamiento de la delincuencia sexual. In V. Caballo (Ed.): *Manual para el tratamiento cognitivo-conductual de los trastornos psicológicos, Vol. I*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
- Marshall, W.L. & Redondo, S. (2002). Control & tratamiento de la agresión sexual. In S.Redondo (Coord.), *Delincuencia sexual y sociedad* (pp. 301-328). Barcelona: Ariel.
- Murray, J.B. (2004). Psychological Profile of Pedophiles and Child Molesters. *The Journal of Psychology*, 134(2), 211-224.
- Navarro, J.C. (2004). *El tratamiento de los agresores sexuales en prisión*. I Congreso de Psicología Jurídica & Forense en Red, 3-14 de Mayo de 2004.
- Quinsey, V.L., Lalumière, M.L., Rice, M.E., & Harris,

- G.T. (1995). Predicting sexual offenses. In J.C. Campbell (Ed.), *Assessing dangerousness: Violence by sex offenders, batterers, and child abusers* (pp. 114-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Redondo, S. (2002). Delincuencia sexual: mitos & realidades. In S. Redondo (coord.), *Delincuencia y sociedad* (Chap. 1, pp. 35-52). Barcelona: Ariel.
- Redondo, S. & Sánchez Meca, J. (2003). Guía de tratamientos psicológicos eficaces para la delincuencia juvenil. In M. Pérez, J.R. Fernández Hermida, C. Fernández Rodríguez, & I. Amigo Vázquez, *Guía de tratamientos psicológicos eficaces III. Infancia & adolescencia* (pp. 183-214). Madrid: Pirámide.
- Rice, M.E., Harris, G.T., & Quinsey, V.L. (2001). Research on the treatment of adult sex offenders. In J.B. Ashford, B.D. Sales, & W.H. Reid (Ed.), *Treating Adult and Juvenile Offenders With Special Needs*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sánchez-Meca, J., Marín, F., & Redondo, S. (1996). Evaluación internacional de la reincidencia en el delito. In J. Funes & J. Sánchez-Meca, J. (Coord.), *Reincidència: en la Justícia de Menors. Avaluació Internacional*. Barcelona. Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Tamarit, J.M. (2000). *La protección penal del menor frente al abuso y explotación sexual*. Colección Derecho y Proceso Penal, nº 2. Elcano (Navarra): Editorial Aranzadi.