

Australian Institute of Criminology Summary of Findings

On whether sexual offending against adults translates to risks of offending against adults

Taking into account the limitations of the available evidence, the AIC report noted that it is not possible to ascertain a definitive level of risk to children from adult offenders who sexually offend against adults but the available evidence suggests limited cross over into either contact or non-contact offences against children¹. Generally the research identified that:

- both adult contact and non-contact sexual offenders tend to be specialised and rarely commit offences in other categories of sexual offending (for example, against children, against different genders and/or contact/non-contact);
- intra-familial child sex offenders demonstrate higher levels of specialisation than extra-familial child sexual offenders. However, both types of child sex offender have been shown to rarely sexually offend against adults; and
- the greatest levels of specialisation have been identified for persons charged with indecent images offences.

On evaluations of risk assessment tools

The AIC report noted that *actuarial tools demonstrate the greatest predictive ability and are highly useful when attempting to estimate an individual's risk of re-offending. Structured professional judgement tools do not predict re-offending and may be most useful to practitioners attempting to manage the risk posed by an individual offender*².

Recidivism

The AIC report identified that adult sexual offenders and violent offenders are more likely than child sexual offenders to have recorded criminal histories covering several years and offence types. Several studies have shown relatively low recidivism rates for those who commit sexual offences against children. However, most of these studies focus on sexual offence re-offending exclusively. Studies examining differences between intra- and extra-familial sexual offenders have demonstrated that extra-familial offenders are more likely to demonstrate versatility in offending and to offend across non-sexual categories of offences³.

Treatment programs

There are few methodologically rigorous evaluations of programs for either sex or violent offenders⁴. Programs should be multidimensional and tailored to offender needs.

For some young people exemplifying problematic sexual behaviours, early intervention using multi-systemic therapy and cognitive behavioural treatment has been identified to reduce the likelihood of future sexual offending.

¹Australian Institute of Criminology *Review of contemporary literature to inform decision-making under the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012, 2014* pp.4-5

² *ibid.*, p.6

³ *ibid.*, p.7

⁴ *ibid.*

Recidivism and maturity

The AIC review identified that:

- Offending behaviour decreases as age increases for all types of offenders. Age of first offence is a good predictor of continued offending behaviour with some studies demonstrating an increased likelihood of specialised violent offending if age of onset is in mid-adolescence.
- Most offenders are not specialised in their offending patterns and may commit a range of different offences over time; however most sexual offending is specialised.
- Recidivism in sexual offenders is generally low but there are differences in patterns of offending between and within sex offender groups.
- Sexual offenders against adults (compared with offenders against children) are more likely to:
 - demonstrate versatility in criminal behaviour;
 - re-offend sooner; and
 - start criminal offending (including sexual offenses) at an earlier age.
- Extra-familial sex offenders against children (compared with intra-familial sex offenders) are more likely to:
 - victimise males;
 - have a younger age of onset of offending;
 - re-offend with sexual offences; and
 - have a greater level of criminal versatility⁵.

Offending patterns over time and the factors that tend to suggest the risk of future offending

The report noted that offending patterns of sexual offenders vary by type of sexual offender. Although it is unclear precisely why these patterns differ, research has suggested that:

- the reason for the offending differs between adult and child sexual offences. Child sexual offending may be driven by sexual desire/arousal which may only decline in late adulthood thus leading to longer periods of this type of offending;
- opportunities for offending differ for people who commit sexual offences against adults versus children. Most adults will have access to other adults through various social situations. Access to children is more restricted.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp.8-9