

***Preliminary Recidivism Rates:  
The Twin Rivers Sex Offender  
Treatment Program (Revised)***

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# Preliminary Recidivism Rates: The Twin Rivers Sex Offender Treatment Program

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is a *preliminary estimate* of the recidivism rates of sex offenders who have completed the Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) at the Washington State Department of Corrections' Twin Rivers Corrections Center. Estimated recidivism rates of these offenders are compared with the rates of a group of released sex offenders who did not receive sex offender treatment during incarceration.<sup>1</sup>

Recidivism is defined as a re-arrest for a felony offense, and is grouped into one of three categories: sex offense, violent offense, and non-violent offense.

In order to be selected for the treatment program, sex offenders must meet the following four requirements:

- Voluntary participation
- An I.Q. of 80 or above
- Admission of guilt
- At least one year remaining in prison

Because of these requirements, there may be significant differences between the treatment group and the comparison group that result from the *selection process* and are *unrelated* to the effects of the SOTP.

### *Findings:*

- Estimated recidivism rates of the treatment group were *slightly* lower than the rates of the comparison group; however, the differences were not statistically significant.
- In designing future research on the effectiveness of treatment, random assignment is suggested to minimize bias from self-selection into treatment programs.
- A larger sample size and a longer follow-up time would provide more information about the long-range effects of prison-based sex offender treatment and increase the likelihood of scientifically valid results.

## Introduction

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The prison-based Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) is located at the Twin Rivers Corrections Center, a medium-security prison near Monroe, Washington. This program, started in 1988, uses a combination of treatment techniques including group therapy, psycho-educational classes, behavioral treatment, drama therapy, and family involvement. Treatment lasts from a minimum of one year up to four years.

Offenders selected for the treatment program must meet the following four requirements (Washington State Department of Corrections 1993):

- Voluntary participation
- An I.Q. of 80 or above
- Admission of guilt
- A minimum of one year remaining in prison

This study describes the recidivism rates of the first program graduates (the treatment group). Recidivism is defined as a re-arrest for a felony offense, and is grouped into one of three categories:<sup>2</sup>

- Re-arrest for a sex offense
- Re-arrest for a violent offense
- Re-arrest for a non-violent offense

Estimated re-arrest rates of the treatment group were compared with the estimated re-arrest rates of a group of released sex offenders in Washington State who did not receive sex offender treatment during incarceration.

Because the program accepts only offenders who admit their guilt and voluntarily request treatment, there may be significant differences between the treatment group and the comparison group that are unrelated to the effects of the treatment program. Offenders who volunteer for treatment may have a higher motivation to change their criminal behavior, and thus would have lower recidivism rates regardless of treatment. Also, other factors that are not examined in this study, such as marital status, level of education, and socioeconomic status, may influence the results. Furthermore, the follow-up time in this study was relatively short (averaging 20 months), which does not allow evaluation of the long-term effects of treatment. ***For these reasons, this study is a preliminary estimate of recidivism rates. It is not an overall assessment of the program's effectiveness.***

## Subjects and Methods

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The **treatment group** consisted of 119 sex offenders who had completed the treatment program and resided in the community for at least one month by March 1993. Eighty-eight percent of the offenders were sentenced between 1988 and 1990. These offenders had been out of prison for an average of 20 months.

The **comparison group** consisted of a sample of 159 released sex offenders who were incarcerated in Washington State prisons during the same time period without treatment. These offenders had been out of prison for an average of 30 months.

In-state and out-of-state criminal records were obtained from official sources.

The maximum follow-up time in both groups was set at three years. Because the offenders lived in the community for various lengths of time, it was not sufficient to calculate the comparative recidivism rates by simply counting the number of re-arrests. A technique was required that could adjust for various lengths of time “at risk” for both the treatment and comparison group. The selected technique, the “life table method,” takes into account the observed re-arrest behaviors, then allows projected estimates of future recidivism rates.

## Findings

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### OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1 compares offender characteristics of the treatment and comparison groups. The results show that the treatment group included a *higher* percentage of white offenders and repeat sex offenders, but a *lower* percentage of rapists. *The analysis of recidivism took these differences into account and adjusted for them statistically.*

**Table 1:  
OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS**

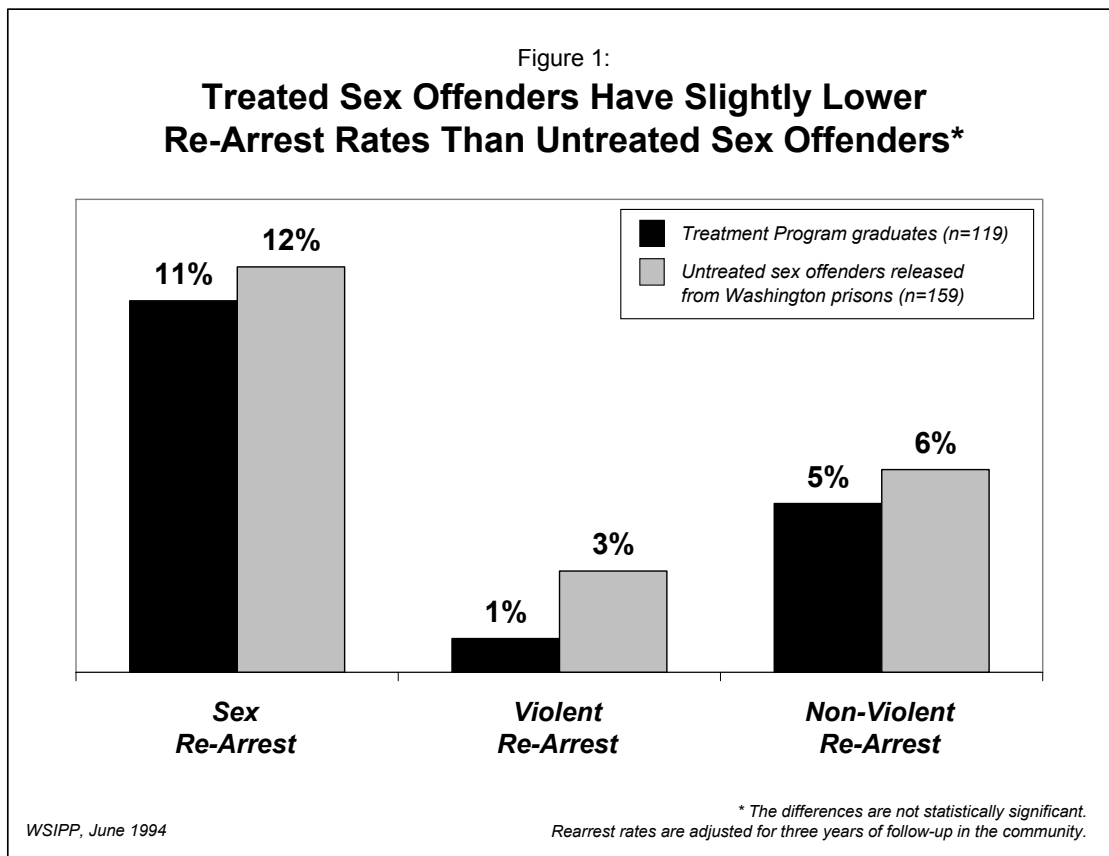
Characteristics	Treatment Group (n=119)	Comparison Group (n=159)
Average Age	35 years	34 years
White*	90%	84%
Non-White	10%	16%
Prior Adult Convictions of Any Kind? <sup>3</sup>		
Yes	45%	40%
No	55%	60%
Prior Adult Non-Sex Felony Convictions		
Yes	22%	22%
No	78%	78%
Prior Adult Sex Conviction*		
Yes	18%	8%
No	82%	92%
Rapists <sup>4*</sup>	15%	25%
Child Molesters	85%	75%
SSOSA Eligibility <sup>5</sup>		
Eligible	71%	78%
Not Eligible	29%	22%

\* *The difference between the two groups is statistically significant.*

## ESTIMATED RECIDIVISM RATES

For sex and violent offenses, recidivism rates for the treatment group were *slightly lower* than the rates for the comparison group throughout the three-year period. At three years after release, the re-arrest rates for sex offenses and violent offenses were 11 and 1 percent, respectively, for the treatment group; and 12 and 3 percent, respectively, for the comparison group (Figure 1). These differences were not statistically significant. For non-violent offenses, the estimated re-arrest rate was also not significantly different: 5 percent for the treatment group, and 6 percent for the comparison group.

The treatment and comparison groups differed in terms of race, prior sex offenses, and type of offense. *These factors were adjusted statistically<sup>6</sup>* to assess the independent effect of the treatment program. *The adjusted differences in recidivism rates between the two groups remained statistically non-significant.*



## Conclusions and Discussion

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During the three years of follow-up, estimated recidivism rates in the treatment group were lower than those in the comparison group for sex and violent offenses, but these difference were not statistically significant.

To obtain valid information on the effectiveness of treatment, future research should emphasize the following design elements:

- **Minimize bias from self-selection.** For example, the Sex Offender Treatment and Evaluation Project at Atascadero Hospital in California randomly assigned all sex offenders who volunteered for treatment into either a treatment group or a control group (Marques et al. 1993).
- **Use a larger sample size and longer follow-up time** (at least five years) to obtain sufficient statistical power, as well as information about the long-range effects of treatment. The Institute's seven-year follow-up study of sex offenders revealed that, of the sex offenders who reoffended sexually (regardless of whether they received treatment), 86 percent did so within five years (Washington State Institute for Public Policy 1994).



## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A November 1993 version of this paper reported a slightly different re-arrest rate for non-violent offenses in the control group; further analysis has revealed this rate to be 6 percent rather than 7 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Offenders were classified according to their first re-arrest following release.

<sup>3</sup> These include prior adult felony or misdemeanor convictions, excluding traffic misdemeanor convictions.

<sup>4</sup> Rapists are those who were convicted of Rape (First, Second, or Third Degree) for the original offense. These crime categories most typically include offenders whose victims are adults. Most of the remaining offenders offended against child victims and are grouped as child molesters. Some of these child molesters were convicted of Rape of a Child.

<sup>5</sup> The Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative (SSOSA) allows eligible sex offenders to receive community supervision and treatment. The statute does not allow the following offenders to receive SSOSA: offenders convicted of Rape in the First or Second Degree, offenders with prior sex offense convictions, and offenders with sentences longer than eight years.

<sup>6</sup> The adjustment was made using logistic regression analysis, a multivariate method in which the dependent variable is dichotomous.

## References

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Marques, J.K. et al. (1992): "Findings and Recommendations from California's Experimental Treatment Program." In: G. C. N. Hall and R. Hirschman (Eds.), *Sexual Aggression: Issues in Etiology and Assessment, Treatment, and Policy*. Washington, DC: Hemisphere.

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