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Sex Offender Modus Operandi Stability and Relationship With Actuarial Risk Assessment

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Abstract

Three studies conducted in Vermont yielded data on 82 sexual recidivists' index offenses (Time 1) and sexual reoffenses (Time 2) across 16 modus operandi (MO) characteristics. The current study examines the stability of these 16 characteristics between Time 1 and Time 2 offenses. Probabilities of Time 1–Time 2 characteristic combinations are reported, including when controlling for static risk as measured by the Static-99R and Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk–2 (VASOR-2). Overall, considerable stability of offenders' MO was evident between Time 1 and Time 2 offenses. Victim characteristics and offense behaviors were the most stable MO characteristics, and degree of force used and victim injury were less stable and trended toward less forceful and less injurious reoffenses. Controlling for static risk had little impact on the patterns of MO stability.

Keywords

sex offender, modus operandi, offense stability, repeat offending

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Introduction

Modus operandi (MO) is a term that has been used in law enforcement for decades, but only relatively recently have researchers focused on examining sex offenders' MO (Kaufman, Hilliker, Lathrop, Daleiden, & Rudy, 1996; Leclerc, Beauregard, & Proulx, 2007; Leclerc, Proulx, & Beauregard, 2009). Sex offender researchers have defined MO as "the patterns of behaviors that perpetrators display in the periods prior to, during, and following illicit sexual contact" (Kaufman, Hilliker, & Daleiden, 1996, p. 18). Knowledge about sex offenders' MO can provide useful information for preventing, investigating, sentencing, treating, and supervising this population (Smallbone & Wortley, 2004).

Sex offender research in this area commonly examines one or more of four MO components (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). Pre-offense behaviors focus on how the offender gained access to victims. Victim characteristics focus on victims' age, gender, and relationship to the offender. Offense behaviors concern the location, frequency, duration, and physical intrusiveness of offenses. Post-offense behaviors focus on strategies used to gain the victims cooperation in maintaining secrecy about abuse.

Descriptive MO studies have focused primarily on sex offenders against children, with an emphasis on how offenders get access and gain the compliance of victims (Leclerc et al., 2009). Much of MO research is based on Kaufman's (1991) Modus Operandi Questionnaire, which focuses on types of offender–victim interactions. Although some offenders use force in their sexual offenses, a particularly consistent finding in the MO literature is that offenders more typically use manipulation strategies. The offender gains trust by giving emotional and material attention to the victim, followed by gradually desensitizing the victim to non-sexual physical contact before progressing to sexual touch (Leclerc et al., 2009).

Another line of research has examined the stability of sex offenders' MO across sexual offenses. In Colorado, Heil, Ahlmeyer, and Simons (2003) used the polygraph to elicit sex offenders' histories and found that the majority of offenders reported that they had offended against multiple victim types. In a Minnesota residency restriction study, victims' age, relationship to the offender, and residence type were stable between earlier and later sex offenses (Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury, 2008). In Florida, Levenson, Becker, and Morin (2008) found an increased likelihood of offending both male and female children as the offender's victim target age decreased. Among Catholic priest sexual abusers, Perillo, Mercado, and Terry (2008) found that victim gender, victim age, and manipulation tactics of earlier sex offenses were predictive of a future victim's gender and how close a relationship the offender

has with the victim. Guay, Proulx, Cusson, and Ouimet (2001) found considerable stability across victim age, gender, and relationship to offender. Offenders who targeted stranger victims typically remained stable in this preference. Offenders who targeted family members were initially stable, but the likelihood of targeting extra-familial children increased after the first two offenses. Offense behavior was typically variable, particularly in offenses against familiar adult females and children.

Vess and Skelton (2010) followed 2,435 New Zealand sex offenders for 15 years after their release from prison. Of the 247 known sexual reoffenders who targeted only adult or child offenders, the majority (70%) reoffended against a similar victim type. Two thirds (67.5%) of reoffenders who originally offended against children reoffended against a same-gender child. In Australia, Sim and Proeve (2010) found that victim gender was stable, but victim age was not stable within child subgroups. Most recently, Kleban, Chesin, Jeglic, and Mercado's (2013) examination of crossover offending found that among 208 offenders, 20% of offenders showed variation in victim gender, 40% showed variation in victim age, and 48% showed variation in victim relationship between prior and index offenses.

In terms of offense severity, a Swedish study found that the severity (i.e., contact vs. non-contact offending, penetration, death threats, and victim injury) of offenders' previous sexual offenses was moderately predictive of the severity of their sexual reoffenses (Sjöstedt, Långström, Sturissson, & Grann, 2004). In a California treatment outcome study, the treatment group had committed a lower number of sexual reoffenses involving sexual penetration and victim incapacitation than did the control group (Marques, Wiederanders, Day, Nelson, & van Ommeren, 2005). However, Marques and colleagues did not examine the relationship between pre-treatment and post-treatment offense characteristics; only the between-group differences were examined.

Fewer studies have examined how risk to reoffend impacts the stability of MO characteristics. Cann, Friendship, and Gozna (2007) found that the distribution of reoffenders with stable victim characteristics was skewed toward lower Static-99 risk levels, and the distribution of reoffenders with unstable victim characteristics was skewed toward higher risk levels. Sim and Proeve (2010) found that most (63.3%) adult sex offenders in their sample demonstrated some type of crossover of victim characteristics. However, they did not find significant differences in Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offense Recidivism (RRASOR) risk levels between those who had stable versus unstable offending patterns. Kleban and colleagues' (2013) examination of crossover offending found that multiple victim type offenders had higher Static-99 scores.

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between a broad selection of the MO characteristics of a group of sexual recidivists' index sexual offenses with those of their sexual reoffenses. Second, as there is limited research regarding the impact of static risk levels on MO (e.g., Cann et al., 2007; Kleban et al., 2013), this study also examined the degree to which the stability of sex offenders' MO was moderated by static risk levels.

Method

Sample

Demographic, risk score, and 5-year fixed follow-up data on 1,248 adult male sex offenders from three Vermont data sets were examined. Of the total sample, 95 (7.6%) individuals were charged with committing a new sexual offense during a 5-year fixed follow-up period. Of these 95 sexual recidivists, detailed MO data were available for 82 (86.3%) individuals. Data analyses in the present study focused primarily on these 82 individuals. A series of *t* tests revealed no significant differences between the characteristics of all 95 sexual recidivists and the 82 sexual recidivists on which this study focused. The MO characteristics of sexual offenses were based on reviews of police affidavits, pre-sentence investigation reports, and correctional case files.

All participants were male and aged 18 years or older at the time they committed at least one qualifying sex offense. A qualifying offense was a Category "A" sexual offense as defined in the Static-99 coding manual (Harris, Phenix, Hanson, & Thornton, 2003). A new sexual offense was defined as a new criminal charge for a sexual offense and included charges for a violation of supervision conditions if the incident could have been charged as a criminal sexual offense. Using these definitions, individuals whose sex crimes were limited to offenses such as prostitution, statutory rape, or child pornography possession were excluded from the study.

Of the three data sets used in the present study, one examined the recidivism rates of 172 sex offenders who were released from Vermont prisons between 1989 and 1993 (McGrath, Hoke, Livingston, & Cumming, 2001). The second data set followed 208 sex offenders who were placed in the community in Vermont between 1995 and 2001 (McGrath, Cumming, Hoke, & Bonn-Miller, 2007). The final data set contained 887 sex offenders, which was the near exhaustive cohort of sex offenders placed in the community in Vermont between 2001 and 2005 (McGrath, Lasher, Cumming, Langton, & Hoke, 2014). Duplicate cases among data sets ($n = 19$) were removed, so the total sample size in the present study was smaller than the sum of the participants in the three data sets.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics for 82 Sexual Recidivists.

Age (*SD*)	32.4 (10.6)
Ethnicity White (%)	97.6
Years education (*SD*)	11.0 (1.9)
Employed (%)	64.4
Primary offender type (%)	
Rapist	28.0
Male child molester	11.0
Female child molester	40.2
Incest offender	9.8
Non-contact offender	11.0
Risk scores *M* (*SD*)	
Static-99R	4.0 (2.2)
% low risk	12.2
% moderate-low risk	29.3
% moderate-high risk	37.8
% high risk	20.7
VASOR-2 reoffense scale	10.4 (4.2)
% low risk	11.0
% moderate-low risk	20.7
% moderate-high risk	29.3
% high risk	39.0

Note. VASOR-2 = Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk–2.

Table 1 further details the characteristics of the final sample ($N = 82$) used in primary analyses. In terms of primary offender type, those who committed contact sexual offenses against extra-familial children aged 15 years and younger were considered child molesters. Those who committed contact sexual offenses against victims aged 16 years or older were considered rapists. Incest offenders were individuals who sexually assaulted their biological children or step-children. Non-contact sex offenders committed offenses such as exhibitionism and voyeurism.

Measures

Static-99R. The Static-99R is a 10-item actuarial instrument designed to assess the recidivism risk of adult males known to have committed at least one sexual offense (Helmus, Thornton, Hanson, & Babchishin, 2012). Items are identical to the Static-99, with the exception of updated age weights. The 10 items pertain to sexual and non-sexual offense history, victim characteristics, and

offender demographics. A recent meta-analysis of 63 studies found a moderate relationship between Static-99 and sexual recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2009). The authors of the Static-99 and Static-99R now recommend that evaluators use the revised version of the scale.

Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk–2 (VASOR-2). The VASOR-2 is an actuarial instrument designed to assess sexual recidivism risk and offense severity of adult males known to have committed at least one sexual offense. It is composed of 12 items designed to assess the recidivism risk. The instrument has shown good interrater reliability as measured by intraclass correlation (ICC = .88) and moderate predictive ability for sexual reoffense as measured by area under the curve (AUC = .74, $p < .001$; McGrath, Lasher, et al., 2014). The AUC statistic represents the probability that a randomly selected recidivist will have a higher score on a risk measure than a randomly selected non-recidivist, with .5 representing chance-level prediction and 1.0 representing perfect prediction (Rice & Harris, 2005).

The VASOR-2 also includes a Severity Factors Checklist composed of four offense severity factors, three of which were contained in the databases used in this study. McGrath and colleagues (2001) found that these items could be scored with fair to good reliability (offense behavior ICC = .93; force used ICC = .84; and victim injury ICC = .78).

MO Variables

Table 2 shows the 16 MO variables examined in the present study. Definitions of adult, unrelated, and incest victims are consistent with offender type definitions described earlier. Definitions of other MO variables in Table 2 are detailed in the VASOR-2 scoring manual (McGrath, Hoke, & Lasher, 2013).

Overview of analyses. Analyses focused on examining the stability of recidivist sex offenders' MO between their index sexual offense (Time 1) and sexual reoffense (Time 2). Each MO characteristic was analyzed using a 2 × 2 table, representing the presence or absence of the characteristic at Time 1 and Time 2. Using an application of Bayes' Theorem (Wollert, 2012), we examined the probability of MO characteristics showing stability between Time 1 and Time 2 offenses and the probabilities of a different type of offense occurring. Likelihood ratios (LR) examined the significance of these probabilities from each 2 × 2 matrix with a chi-square distribution (degrees of freedom = 1). LRs that are 1.00 or greater but not significant may indicate incremental validity of the association and general trends in the data. LRs examined probabilities specific to each combination of Time 1 and Time 2 MO characteristics. To calculate

Table 2. Observed Sample Distribution.

Time 1 Characteristic	(*n*)	Time 2 Characteristic *n*			
Victim characteristics[a]		Adult victim	Male child	Female child	Incest victim
Adult victim	(22)	13	1	3	0
Unrelated male child	(7)	0	6	0	0
Unrelated female child	(33)	13	1	14	1
Incest victim	(8)	1	1	2	2
Unknown	(12)	1	1	2	0
		Stranger victim		Acquaintance victim	
Stranger victim	(29)	14		15	
Acquaintance victim	(53)	5		48	
Offense behavior		Non-contact offense	Fondling offense	Digital or oral offense	Penile penetration
Non-contact offense	(12)	8	2	1	1
Fondling offense	(16)	3	7	5	1
Digital penetration or oral-sexual behavior	(12)	4	2	2	4
Penile penetration of vagina or anus	(42)	5	9	5	23
Force used		No force used	Use of excessive force	Use of deadly weapon	
No force used	(74)	69	3	2	
Use of excessive force	(5)	5	0	0	
Use of deadly weapon	(3)	2	1	0	
Victim injury		No injury inflicted	Minor injury inflicted	Treated for injury	
No injury inflicted	(73)	71	1	1	
Minor injury inflicted	(1)	0	1	0	
Treated for injury	(8)	7	0	1	

Note. Time 1 = index sexual offense; Time 2 = sexual reoffense.
[a]Information not available for non-contact offenses, cases excluded from these summations.

probabilities controlled for static risk level, a total adjusted distribution was calculated by weighting and recombining risk-stratified distributions within the sample.

Finally, we examined three key differences among the probabilities. Univariate ANOVAs examined whether a significant difference was evident between the stable Time 1–Time 2 characteristic probabilities and unstable Time 1–Time 2 characteristic probabilities. Repeated measures (RM)

ANOVAs tested for overall significant differences between zero-order and controlled probabilities. Q-tests examined whether significant variability was present within the stable category probabilities across the three subsamples used in these analyses.

Results

Table 2 shows the distribution of participants' MO characteristics between Time 1 and Time 2 offenses. Among the 82 sexual recidivists, 2 reoffended against more than one type of victim. One reoffender had an adult victim and a male child victim, and another reoffender had a hands-on offense against an adult victim and a non-contact offense conviction. Victim age and gender information was not available for non-contact offenses. Consequently, cases where victim age and gender were not available were excluded from examinations of victim characteristics.

Table 3 shows zero-order probabilities and LRs for the 82 recidivists. To illustrate, Table 3 shows that there was a 76.4% chance that a recidivist who committed a Time 1 contact sex offense against an adult would commit a new contact sex offense against another adult victim. The associated LR of 3.95 ($p < .05$) indicates the 76.4% probability is statistically significant. Conversely, participants who offended against adults at Time 1 had an 17.6% chance of offending an unrelated female child at Time 2, but the associated LR of .42 indicates it is not a significant probability. Of additional illustrative note, although there was a 97.3% chance that a recidivist who committed a Time 1 "no (physical) injury inflicted" sex offense would commit a similar Time 2 sex offense, the associated LR was not statistically significant but the LR of 1.82 indicates incremental validity for this probability.

Table 4 shows the distribution of participants' MO characteristics, probabilities, and LRs when controlling for Static-99R risk level. The patterns of probabilities in Table 4 were similar to the zero-order probabilities in Table 3, indicating that overall controlling for risk had little impact on the stability of sex offenders' MO. However, differences may be present when subjects are clustered in fewer groups, and the stranger–no stranger category contained the smallest cluster of subgroups. Figure 1 graphically demonstrates differences in the stranger–no stranger category between risk levels. Controlling for VASOR-2 yielded very similar results, which are available from the authors on request.

ANOVAs indicated a significant difference in the mean probabilities of stable characteristics versus unstable characteristics for zero-order probabilities, $F(1, 52) = 12.10$, $p = .001$, and when controlled for Static-99R, $F(1, 52) = 8.88$, $p = .004$, and VASOR-2, $F(1, 52) = 9.41$, $p = .003$, risk levels.

Table 3. Offense–Reoffense Characteristic Probabilities.

Time 1 Characteristic	Time 2 Characteristic Probability (Likelihood Ratio)			
Victim characteristics[a]	Adult victim	Male child	Female child	Incest victim
Adult victim	0.764 (3.95*)	0.059 (0.33)	0.176 (0.42)	0 (0)
Unrelated male child[b]	0 (0)	1.00	0 (0)	0 (0)
Unrelated female child	0.448 (0.99)	0.034 (0.19)	0.483 (1.82)	0.034 (0.70)
Incest victim	0.167 (0.24)	0.167 (1.04)	0.333 (0.98)	0.333 (9.83**)
	Stranger victim		Acquaintance victim	
Stranger victim	0.483 (3.09)		0.517 (0.32)	
Acquaintance victim	0.094 (0.35)		0.906 (2.90)	
Offense behavior	Non-contact offense	Fondling offense	Digital or oral offense	Penile penetration
Non-contact offense	0.667 (6.20*)	0.167 (.62)	0.083 (0.48)	0.083 (0.17)
Fondling offense	0.188 (0.72)	0.438 (2.41)	0.313 (2.41)	0.063 (0.12)
Digital penetration or oral-sexual behavior	0.333 (1.55)	0.167 (0.62)	0.167 (1.06)	0.333 (0.91)
Penile penetration of vagina or anus	0.119 (0.42)	0.214 (0.85)	0.119 (0.72)	0.548 (2.21)
Force used	No force used	Use of excessive force		Use of deadly weapon
No force used	0.932 (1.29)	0.041 (0.65)		0.027 (1.11)
Use of excessive force	0.800 (0.37)	0.200 (3.85*)		0 (0)
Use of deadly weapon	0.667 (0.19)	0.333 (7.70**)		0 (0)
Victim injury	No injury inflicted	Minor injury inflicted		Treated for injury
No injury inflicted	0.973 (1.82)	0.014 (0.56)		0.014 (0.56)
Minor injury inflicted[b]	0.951	0.024		0.024
Treated for injury	0.875 (0.36)	0 (0)		0.125 (5.71*)

Note. Time 1 = index sexual offense; Time 2 = sexual reoffense.
[a]Information not available for non-contact offenses, cases excluded from these analyses.
[b]Likelihood ratios not calculable for this category due to conditions with zero cases. Observed probabilities are provided.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

RMANOVAs found differences between the zero-order probabilities and probabilities controlled for Static-99R risk level, $F(1, 53) = 5.719$, $p = .02$, but not when controlling for VASOR-2 risk level, $F(1, 53) = 3.03$, $p = .09$. There were, however, no differences between Static-99R-controlled and VASOR-2-controlled probabilities, $F(1, 53) = 1.55$, $p = .22$. Q-test statistics

Table 4. Offense–Reoffense Characteristic Probabilities Controlling for Static-99R Risk Level.

Time 1 Characteristic	Time 2 Characteristic Probability (Likelihood Ratio)			
Victim characteristics[a]	Adult victim	Male child	Female child	Incest victim
Adult victim	0.734 (3.47)	0.006 (0.04)	0.122 (0.23)	0 (0)
Unrelated male child[b]	0 (0)	1.00	0 (0)	0 (0)
Unrelated female child	0.406 (0.86)	0.003 (0.02)	0.376 (1.00)	0.001 (0.02)
Incest victim	0.159 (0.24)	0.017 (0.11)	0.290 (0.68)	0.018 (0.44)
	Stranger victim		Acquaintance victim	
Stranger victim	0.194 (0.81)		0.806 (1.23)	
Acquaintance victim	0.035 (0.12)		0.965 (8.23**)	
Offense behavior	Non-contact offense	Fondling offense	Digital or oral offense	Penile penetration
Non-contact offense	0.392 (2.00)	0.061 (0.20)	0.017 (0.09)	0.047 (0.09)
Fondling offense	0.097 (0.33)	0.201 (0.78)	0.079 (0.45)	0.035 (0.07)
Digital penetration or oral-sexual behavior	0.205 (0.80)	0.061 (0.20)	0.036 (0.20)	0.215 (0.50)
Penile penetration of vagina or anus	0.057 (0.19)	0.081 (0.27)	0.025 (0.14)	0.398 (1.21)
Force used	No force used	Use of excessive force	Use of deadly weapon	
No force used	0.994 (13.80***)	0.005 (0.09)	0.001 (0.06)	
Use of excessive force[b]	1.00	0	0	
Use of deadly weapon	0.962 (2.00)	0.049 (1.00)	0 (0)	
Victim injury	No injury inflicted	Minor injury inflicted	Treated for injury	
No injury inflicted	0.999 (35.50***)	0.001 (0.03)	0.001 (0.03)	
Minor injury inflicted[b]	0	1.00	0	
Treated for injury	0.993 (7.00**)	0 (0)	0.006 (0.23)	

Note. Time 1 = index sexual offense; Time 2 = sexual reoffense.
[a]Information not available for non-contact offenses, cases excluded from these analyses.
[b]Likelihood ratios not calculable for this category due to conditions with zero cases. Observed probabilities are provided.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

($df = 3$) for stable characteristics ranged from 0.06 to 1.87, indicating that variation in probabilities across the three samples did not have more variance than would be expected by chance.

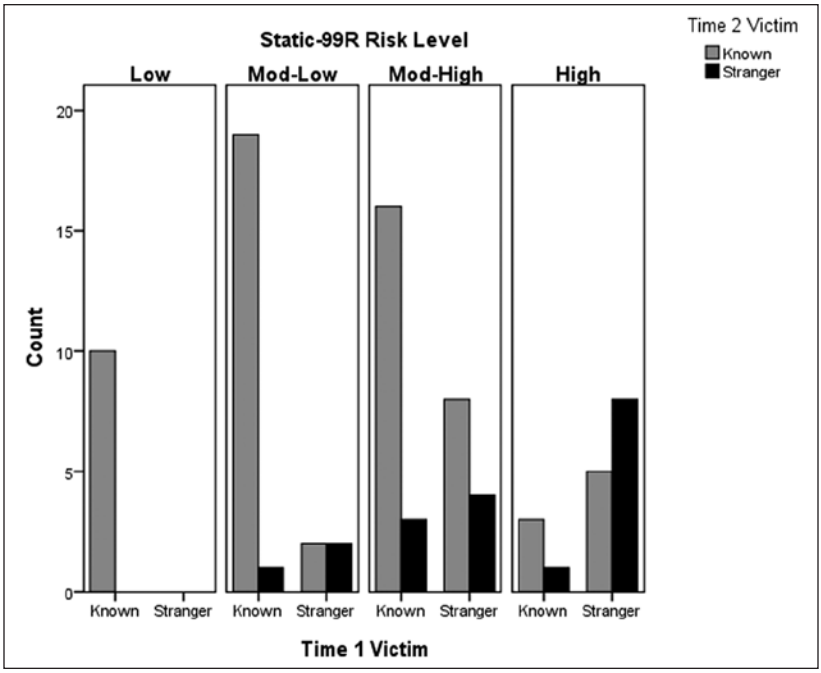

Figure 1. Stability of stranger victims stratified by Static-99R risk level (N = 82).

Discussion

The present study examined the stability of sexual recidivists' MO between their index sexual offense (Time 1) and sexual reoffense (Time 2) over 5-year fixed follow-up periods. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Sjöstedt et al., 2004), the present results indicate that, in general, offenders' MO trends toward remaining stable. However, some notable variability in offenders' interests and behaviors was evident, which is consistent with research on crossover offending (Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Mittelman, & Rouleau, 1988; Heil et al., 2003).

In particular, the examined victim characteristics were significantly stable or trended toward stability. Among recidivists, those who offended against an adult or incest victim at Time 1 were likely to reoffend against the same victim type at Time 2. Even more specialized were the few (n = 6) Time 1 unrelated male child offenders, all of whom offended against unrelated male children at Time 2. No characteristic was found to be significant when a Time 1 offense was against unrelated female children, but the highest probability

of a Time 2 offense was for offending against unrelated female children again. In terms of reoffense risk, among men who sexually abuse children, detected rates of sexual recidivism are lowest among incest offenders, slightly higher among men who molest unrelated female children, and highest among men who molest unrelated male children (Harris & Hanson, 2004)

These present findings are consistent with past research that has found stability in victim gender (Cann et al., 2007; Guay et al., 2001; Kleban et al., 2013; Sim & Proeve, 2010; Sjöstedt et al., 2004; Vess & Skelton, 2010), victim age (Cann et al., 2007; Sjöstedt et al., 2004; Vess & Skelton, 2010), and relationship between offender and victim (Cann et al., 2007; Sim & Proeve, 2010; Sjöstedt et al., 2004). Having a stranger victim here did not show stability. When a Time 1 victim was a stranger, the probability of a Time 2 victim being a stranger or acquaintance was nearly equal. Some instability in sex offender's MO has been hypothesized by Woodhams and Labuschagne (2012) to be accounted for by recidivists viewing their victims as similar when they are in fact measurably different, such as misperceiving victim age.

In terms of force used and victim injury, few recidivists (10%) used excessive force or a weapon in the commission of a Time 1 sexual offense and few recidivists (11%) committed sexual reoffenses in which victims sustained physical injury. Although this group of offenders trended toward using less force in Time 2 offenses, the only significant findings of these characteristics were that there was a moderate probability that offenders continue using force in subsequent offenses and a moderately low probability that a victim will be treated for injuries sustained. Similarly, Sjöstedt and colleagues (2004) found moderate stability of death threats and injury in their sample.

The results of offense behavior characteristics were the least conclusive. Although committing a non-contact offense was significantly stable between Time 1 and Time 2, other types of offenses showed only trends toward stability. Sjöstedt and colleagues (2004) described the stability of offenses involving characteristics such as physical contact or penetration as "fair," but they examined only the presence of these characteristics and not the qualitative degrees of injury and intrusiveness as we have done here.

The pattern of MO stability found across participants' Time 1 and Time 2 sexual offenses showed modest changes when controlled for risk level. Although the trend in victim type stability seen in Table 3 was less pronounced in Table 4, in general, the patterns of MO characteristic stability between Time 1 and Time 2 was not strongly impacted by controlling for risk. Considering the small size of some of the subdivisions by risk level, it is difficult to thoroughly explore these differences. However, because the stranger–no stranger category was the only dichotomous MO variable, we further examined its distribution when controlled for risk. As shown in Figure 1, only offenders

classified as high risk to sexually reoffend on the Static-99R who had Time 1 stranger victims showed greater rates of Time 2 stranger victims.

In addition to the small size of some of the subgroups, the low incidence of some MO characteristics proved to be a limitation of this study as it may have affected the statistical significance of the current findings. Furthermore, the databases from which the current sample was drawn from did not include some characteristics previously examined in other MO studies, such as having deviant fantasies, gaining the trust of victims, and engaging in post-offense grooming behaviors (Leclerc et al., 2009; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000).

Other limitations of the present study included the low sexual recidivism base rate resulting in a relatively small sample size of recidivists, which is a common issue in sex offender research (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Helmus et al., 2012). In addition, MO information is often difficult to obtain (Zgoba & Levenson, 2012), and this was the case in this study as well. As noted, across the three databases from which we drew the current sample, data necessary for inclusion was available for only 82 of 95 sexual recidivists.

The present findings, along with those of other researchers, indicate that several, but not all, victim characteristics and offender behaviors show stability over time. Among those individuals who go on to commit a new sexual offense, those who offend against adults, male children, or familial children are likely to show similar victim preferences. Similarly, those who engage in non-contact offenses, fondling offenses, or offenses involving penile penetration are likely to engage in similar behaviors if they do reoffend. However, offenders who use excessive force or injure a victim are more likely to commit less injurious offenses if they reoffend.

These findings have practical implications for professionals who manage this population and offer the long-term potential of conserving resources. As Meloy (2005) has noted, when supervision conditions placed on offenders are directly related to their risk to reoffend, such as MO-related factors, offenders are more successful remaining stable and offense free in the community than if they are given broad blanket conditions. The findings of this study support past research (e.g., Vess & Skelton, 2010) that shows stability in many victim type characteristics, such as adult-victim offenders not typically crossing over to child victims. Routinely restricting adult-only offenders from familial contact on the grounds they may offend against their children would not be supported by these findings and may not be in the best interest of rehabilitating offenders or maintaining families.

Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that repeat offenses may be less injurious than index offenses, and the conceptualization of offender "danger" should be so informed. However, the findings of this study suggest that stranger offenders may show greater variability in victim choice and

potentially should receive broader supervision conditions and more intensive treatment interventions. Also, based on these findings we cannot advise that female child offenders are likely to continue offending only female children, as there were notable incidents of reoffenses against adults in this group.

The extent to which static risk impacts the stability of sex offenders' MO should be further examined. Understanding the repeating patterns for an offender based on risk group can further assist in improving sex offender management policies. The use of a more robust sample may facilitate a better understanding of the differences between lower risk and higher risk offenders. This could potentially result in the better allocation of offender management resources as higher risk offenders typically make up smaller proportions of sex offender populations, but represented the majority of reoffenders here. Hopefully, future research will provide further information about sex offenders' MO that will lead to more effective prevention, management, and treatment services.

Author's Note

The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Vermont Department of Corrections.

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