



Research Summary



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RISK ASSESSMENT FOR ABORIGINAL SEX OFFENDERS

Question: Do the same risk factors apply to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sex offenders?

Background: Although there is ample empirical support for risk factors and risk assessment scales for sex offenders, this research has been conducted with samples of primarily Caucasian offenders. Given the large number of Aboriginal offenders in the Canadian correctional system, it is important to know whether risk scales developed and validated on non-Aboriginal offenders also work with Aboriginal offenders.

Previous research has suggested that there are key differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sex offenders in the criminogenic factors associated with general and sexual reoffending. Compared to non-Aboriginal sex offenders, Aboriginal sex offenders possess more risk factors related to general antisociality, such as long criminal records and substance abuse problems. Aboriginal sex offenders also possess fewer risk factors related to sexual criminality, such as deviant sexual interests and sexual preoccupations.

For evaluators involved in the risk assessment of Aboriginal sex offenders, an important issue to consider is whether the available risk tools (and their items) are equally predictive for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sex offenders. Differences between these groups on key characteristics related to criminal behaviour

(e.g., deviant sexual interest, substance abuse) do not mean that available risk scales are invalid for Aboriginal sex offenders. These findings certainly should, however, motivate researchers to examine possible differences in the accuracy of these risk tools in predicting reoffending.

Method: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal male sex offenders were compared on items and total scores of the original and revised Static-99 and Static-2002 scales (Research Summary, 1999, Vol. 4, No. 5). These Static risk scales are the most widely used sexual offender risk scales in the world. Drawing upon five independent Canadian samples (319 Aboriginals and 1,269 non-Aboriginals) the study examined the extent to which Aboriginals differed from non-Aboriginals on the items and total scores of the Static sexual offender risk scales. The study also examined the extent to which there were differences in the accuracy of the items and total scores for predicting sexual reoffending.

Answer: Aboriginal sex offenders scored significantly higher than non-Aboriginal sex offenders on the total scores and items indicative of general criminality, and scored lower on items indicative of sexual criminality.

Despite these differences, Static-99 total score and items predicted sexual recidivism with similar accuracy for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sex offenders. In contrast,

differences were found for Static-2002 total score and several of their items (e.g., stranger victim, community supervision, years free prior to index, and victim subscales), with lower predictive accuracy for Aboriginals.

Policy Implications:

1. Compared to non-Aboriginal offenders, Aboriginal sex offenders would be expected to have more problems with general criminality and fewer problems with sexual deviancy. Consequently, programming for Aboriginal sex offenders should place more emphasis on general criminality than programming for non-Aboriginal sexual offenders.
2. Sexual criminality (sexual deviance) predicts sexual recidivism among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sexual offenders equally. Consequently, this factor needs to be considered in sex offender risk assessment and programming, regardless of ethnicity.

3. For Aboriginal offenders, markers of sexual criminality are more consistently related to sexual recidivism than are markers of general criminality. Further research is needed on the validity of markers of general criminality for Aboriginal sex offenders.

Source: Babchishin, K. M., Blais, J. & Helmus, L. (2012). Do static risk factors predict differently for Aboriginal sex offenders? A Multi-Site Comparison using the Original and Revised Static-99 and Static-2002 Scales. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 54, 1-43.

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