

# Crossing the Redemption Threshold:

## Estimating the rate of 'out of the blue' sexual offenses



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# Sexual offenses in the public eye

- Evocation of emotional responses
- Amplification due to main stream media (*Ditton & Duffy, 1983*)

DEPRAVED SEX KILLER ADMITS HORRIFYING STRANGER RAPE

23 MAY 2016

WANSTEAD

## Stranger rape on the rise in Savannah

*Published: Tuesday, June 23rd 2015, 3:18 pm CDT*

*Updated: Thursday, July 23rd 2015, 4:14 pm CDT*

By Elizabeth Rawlins, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

# Giving rise to fear

- ⌘ Perpetuating a greater sense of fear compared to other crimes (*Dowler, 2006*)

**‘Just like a kid for ice cream, I will happily scream for rape’: Twisted Ont. couple planned sex murder of random stranger**

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

FIRST POSTED: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2016 08:27 PM EST | UPDATED: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2016 07:13 AM EST

- ⌘ Public perception is formed based on media stereotypes (*Fusilier, Durham, & Wurtele, 1998*)

**Sex offender dubbed 'the pants puller' now in Halifax area**

**Gavin Sean Griffiths, 29, of Ottawa is a high risk to reoffend, police say**

By Rachel Ward, CBC News | Posted: May 12, 2016 5:14 PM AT | Last Updated: May 12, 2016 5:14 PM AT

# Media sensationalization

## Colleen Ritzer Murder: Chilling CCTV Footage Shows Murderer Philip Chism Following Her



2 months ago / By [Susmita Pathak Mishra](#) / In [Australia](#), [Crime/Justice](#), [Trending Now](#)



# Madison County Sheriff's Office currently tracking 500+ sex offenders

*Published: Monday, May 9th 2016, 8:48 pm CDT*

*Updated: Monday, May 9th 2016, 9:16 pm CDT*

By Franklin White, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

In the past week, there have been multiple cases of repeat sex offenders.

Authorities said before you buy your home, change daycares, or pick a school, you need to check their sex offender website and see if any are lurking in the area.

They said if you see one is near, keep a close eye on them and always report anything suspicious.

# Stereotypes

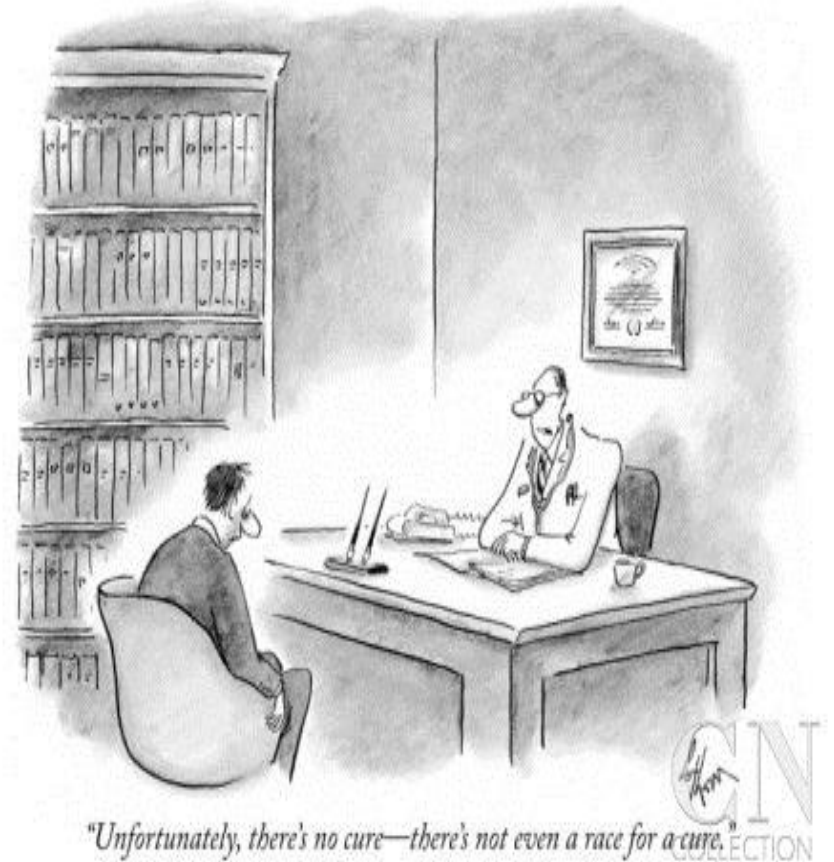


„Hier, Kleiner, halt du etwas ganz Süßes! Aber dafür müßt ihr beide mit mir gehen...“

# Public perception and myths

- ⌘ Homogeneous group of offenders
- ⌘ High recidivism rates
- ⌘ Impervious to treatment or interventions

(e.g., Katz-Schiavonne et al., 2008;  
Levenson et al., 2007)






# Development of Public Policies

## ☞ Last two decades

- Sex offender registration and notification systems (SORN), civil commitment laws, GPS monitoring, and residential restrictions.



***This violent predator lives in your community***

	NAME:	<del>XXXXXXXXXXXX</del>
	AGE:	57
	RACE:	W
	SEX:	M
	HEIGHT:	5 06
	WEIGHT:	180
<b>Details:</b>		
This Level III sex offender abducted two children, sexually assaulted them and threatened to kill them if they told anyone.  He has admitted to assaulting countless other children over the course of more than twenty years.		

**Representative Deb Wallace** refused to impose *life sentences* for violent sex predators. Call **Deb Wallace** at 360.786.7976 and tell her to *protect children and not violent sex offenders.*



# Impact of sex offender management policies

☞ Unintended consequences (e.g., Levenson & Cotter, 2005)



# Unintended consequences





- ∞ Low levels of general recidivism (*Soothill, 2010*)
- ∞ Least likely to be re-arrested compared to other offender groups (*Harrison & Beck, 2004; Greenfield, 1987; Sample & Bray, 2006*)
- ∞ Sexual recidivism ranges between 10-15% across 5 year follow periods (*Helmus, Hanson, & Babchishin, 2016*)

# The truth...

- ∞ Risk for sexual recidivism is variable
- ∞ Risk for reoffending will decrease with age (*Hanson, 2006*)
- ∞ Time spent in the community (*Hanson et al., 2014*)
- ∞ Empirically supported treatments are effective in reducing recidivism among sexual offenders (*Walton & Chou, 2015*)





# At odds

- ⌘ Policies often based on pervasive myths and inaccurate public perception



# What if?

- ⌘ Policies reflected the scientific literature
- ⌘ Elimination of a one-size fits all approach
- ⌘ Where to start?
  - Redemption threshold



# Redemption



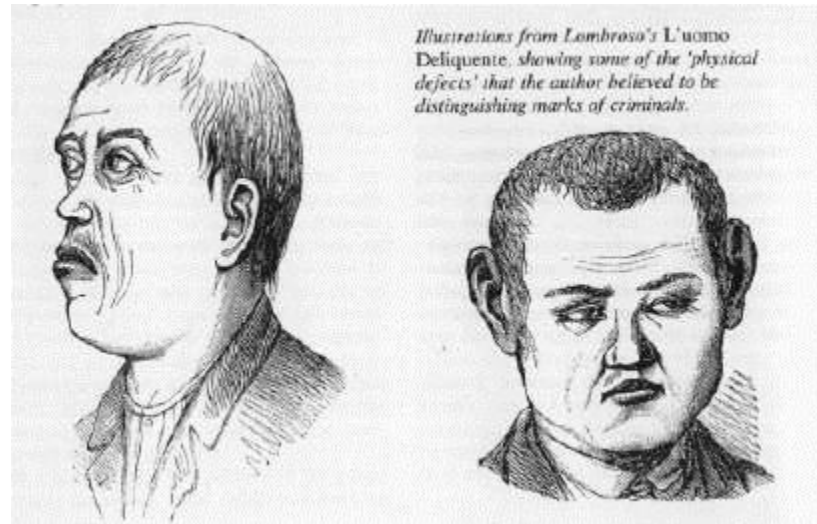
# Redemption

- ⌘ “the action of regaining or gaining possession of something”
- ⌘ “the act of redeeming for a fault or mistake”
- ⌘ “the act of making something better or more acceptable”



# Redemption for Criminal Offenders

∞ Lombroso (1897)



# Redemption: Modern Approaches

- ∞ Criminal background checks
- ∞ Ease of accessibility

## REDEMPTION IN THE PRESENCE OF WIDESPREAD CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS\*

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN  
KIMINORI NAKAMURA

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CRIMINOLOGY VOLUME 47 NUMBER 2 2009 327

# Redemption: Modern Approaches

- ⌘ When should your criminal history be irrelevant?
- ⌘ Level equivalent to the risk posed by someone with no history of criminal offenses



# A Redemption Threshold for Sex Offenders?





# Defining a Redemption Threshold

- ✎ Justice Center of the U.S. Council of State Governments
  - Standardized risk levels for risk assessment tools
- ✎ Lowest risk category (Level 1)
  - Recidivism rate equivalent to rate of spontaneous offending among non-offender populations

**A Common Language For Risk Assessments:  
Experts Convene in Washington**

September 2, 2014

# Defining a Redemption Threshold

- ∞ Principle theme of a lowest risk category
- ∞ Identify 'out of the blue' sexual offenses by general criminal offenders or those with no history of sexual offending.



# Review

- ⌘ Examine studies with rates of sex offenses by non sex offenders
- ⌘ Establish a benchmark or estimate for ‘out of the blue’ sexual offending
- ⌘ Variety of resources (e.g., scholarly journals, state and federal reports, international sources)

# Inclusion Criteria

- ☞ Routine samples
- ☞ Large sample sizes ( $N \geq 1000$ )
- ☞ Follow up period  $\geq 3$  years



# Sample Studies

- ✎ K = 11 studies
- ✎ N = 543, 204 (Mean = 49,382; Range 1, 780 – 262, 420)
- ✎ K = 8 Adult offenders
- ✎ K = 9 Prison/secure institutions
- ✎ K = 9 recidivism defined as reconviction/re-incarceration
- ✎ Broad definition of sexual offense

Study	N	Sample	Country	Follow-up	Recidivism
Maine SAC, 2010	2,698	Adult offenders	United States	3	Re-incarceration
Howard, 2011	170,709	Adult offenders	United Kingdom	3	Re-incarceration
Lussier & Blockland, 2014	7,339	1984 Birth Cohort	Netherlands	11	Reconviction
Christiansen & Vincent, 2013	38,718	Juvenile offenders	United States	4.73	Reconviction
Kuzyk, 2012	13,652	Adult offenders	United States	5	Reconviction
Bonta, et al., 2008	9,852	Federal inmates	Canada	4.73	Reconviction
Duwe, 2012	9,064	Adult offenders	United States	4	Reconviction
Langan et al., 2003	262,240	Adult offenders	United States	3	Arrest
Wormith, et al., 2012	24,545	Adult offender	Canada	4.54	Reconviction
Bonta & Hanson, 1995	2,427	Federal inmates	Canada	10	Reconviction
Caldwell, 2007	1,780	Juvenile offenders	United States	5.03	Charges/Arrest

# Results

- ∞ Raw recidivism rates ranged from 0.15% to 5.67%
  - Median = 0.90%
  - Range of 3 to 11 years of follow-up
- ∞ Standardize to follow-up time to 5 years
  - Observed rate = sum of the proportion of individuals who sexual offended in each previous year
  - Did not assume yearly rate was constant, but followed a pattern.

# Standardizing rates

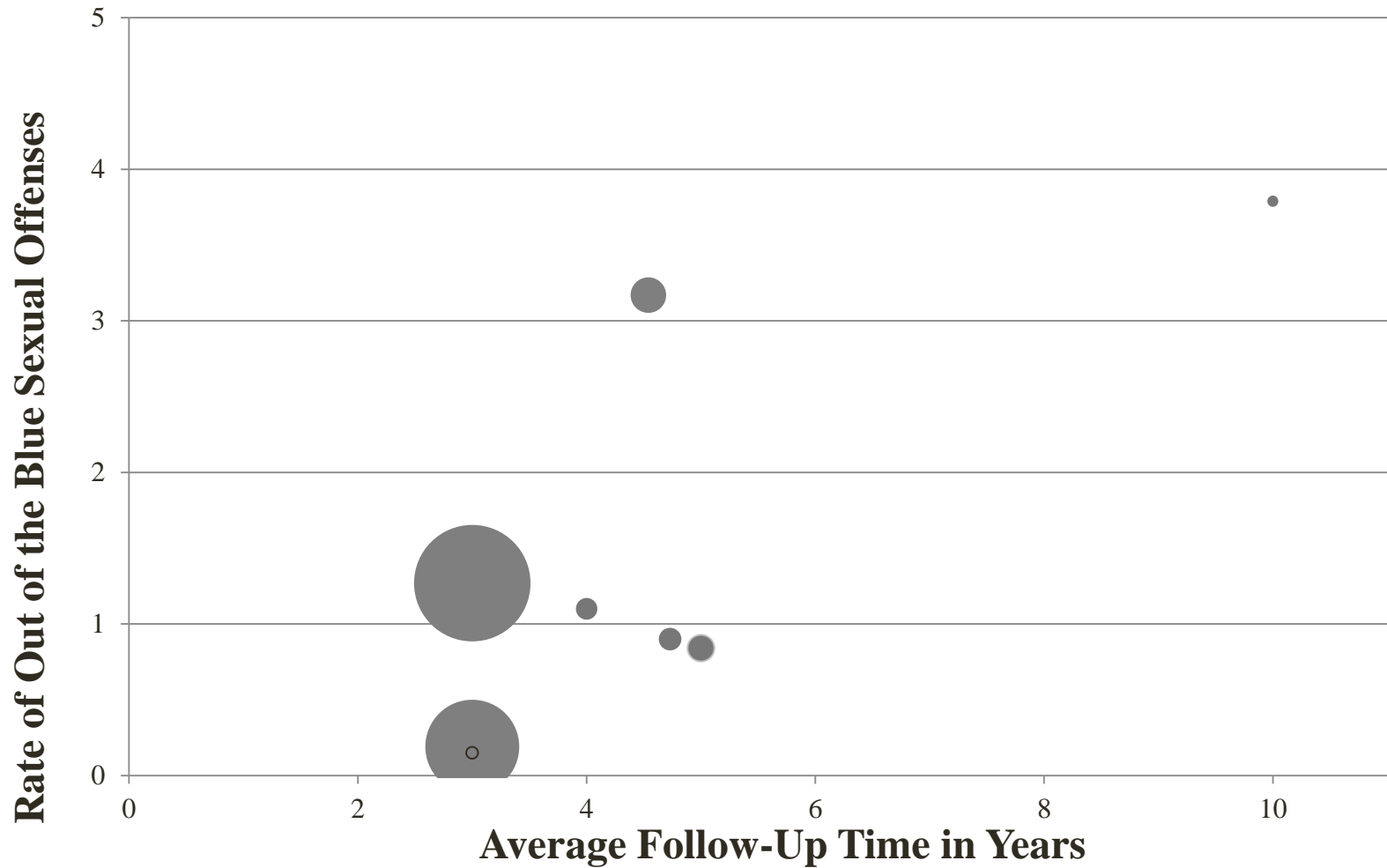
- ∞ Discrete time hazard function (*Singer & Willett, 1993*)
  - Modeled by a logistic function of  $\pi = \beta_0 - .131 (\text{years})$
  - Where  $\pi$  is the predicted recidivism rate in logit units (*Harris & Hanson, 2012*)
  - $\beta_0$  is the hazard rate at the time of release



# 5 year Recidivism Rates

- ∞ Rates ranged from 0.22% to 5.67%
  - Median = 0.90%
- ∞ Restriction to more homogeneous groups
  - Median range = 0.84% - 1.10%

# Adult Offender ( $k = 8$ )



# Redemption Threshold

## ∞ Adult offender studies

- Range = 0.22% to 3.16%
- median rate = 1.10%

## ∞ Identified sexual offenders

- Static-99R (-3, -2) or Static-2002R (-2, -1)
- 6% of the Static-99R normative sample

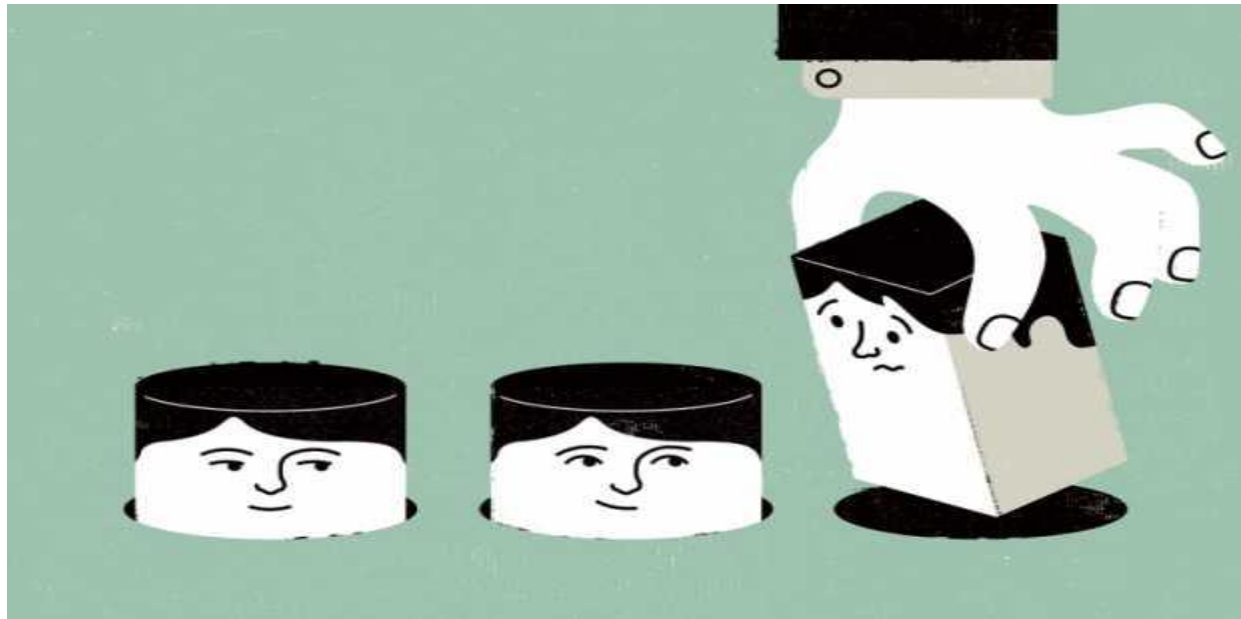
# Sexual offenses are not confined to one group

- ☞ The perpetration of sexual offenses is not confined to 'sexual offenders'
- ☞ Is it legitimate to impose the same restrictions across all sexual offenders?



# Risk-based policies and practices

- Provisions for sex offenders should be defined based on the level of risk.





# Risk based policies and practices

- Restrictions and sanctions should not be static



# Evidence based social policy and treatment

## ∞ Evidence based social policy *(Levenson, 2006)*

- Protects against homogeneous grouping
- Eliminates barriers in the use of limited resources

## ∞ Risk, Need, Responsivity *(RNR; Andrew, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990)*

- Intensity of treatment should match risk for recidivism
- Address problems related to reoffending

# Limitations and Strengths

- ⌘ Official records of recidivism
- ⌘ Small number of available studies
- ⌘ Yet, samples were large in size and were drawn from various geographic regions (U.S. states, portions of Canada, the Netherlands, and the UK).
- ⌘ Median rates were similar across different permutations and remained stable after follow up rate was standardized.

# Future directions: Focus on lowest risk

∞ Prior focus on high risk sexual offenders



∞ The other end of the spectrum --- lowest risk

- Community adjustment
- Prosocial peers
- Stable residence and employment



# The Challenge

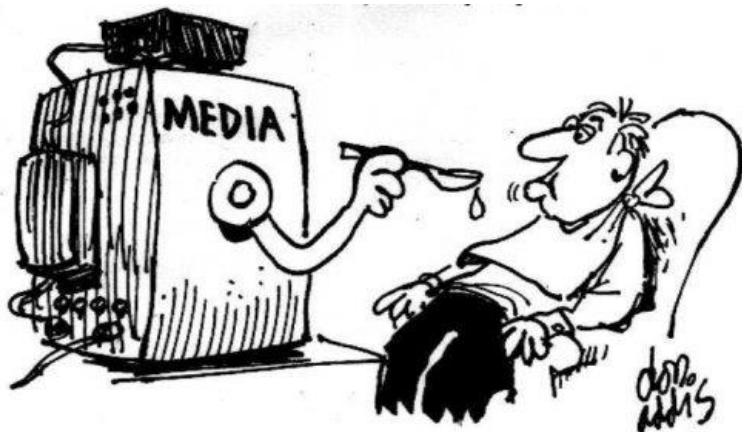
- Changes in allocation of resources represents a serious challenge





# Battling myths and misinformation

- ☞ Widespread public support of sex offender management policies
  - Regardless of scientific support (*Levenson, Brannon, Forney, & Baker, 2007*)
- ☞ Attempt to debunk myths
  - More accessible to the greater public
  - Can even begin at a lingual level



# Conclusions

- Severely of offenses and small probabilities are not to be minimized.
- Tolerance level may be low for even a 'lowest' level



"Well done, Mr Playfoot, but the committee sees Neighbourhood Watch rather as a monitoring role."

# Conclusions

∞ Redirection of resources to balance risk with need

\*Greater contribution to public safety

- Primary prevention
- More intensive treatment of higher risk sexual offenders

