Improving State Criminal History Records:
Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released in 2001
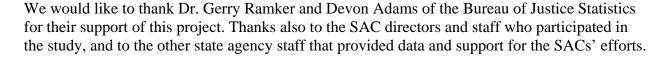
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Background

The National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP) was initiated in 1995 to support state activities for the establishment of records systems and the collection and use of criminal history and related records. Since 1995, all states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories have received more than $530 million under the program, which is administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

The goal of the NCHIP program is to "improve safety and security by enhancing the quality, completeness, and accessibility of criminal history record information and by insuring the nationwide implementation of criminal justice and noncriminal justice background check systems." In order to accomplish this goal, the program provides financial and technical assistance to the states to improve their criminal records systems and other related systems to support background checks.

BJS and the states have a vested interest in ensuring accurate, timely, and complete criminal history records. Such records are useful for a number of purposes, including prohibiting ineligible individuals from purchasing firearms or holding positions of responsibility involving certain groups, such as children; enabling criminal justice agencies to make decisions on pretrial release, sentencing, and correctional assignments; and assisting law enforcement agencies in criminal investigations and decision making.

BJS has carried out a variety of statistical efforts designed to assess criminal history records improvement and utilization. For example, on a biannual basis SEARCH Group, Inc., on behalf of BJS, conducts a survey of state criminal record systems that examines these issues. Also, BJS developed a Records Quality Index, a statistical index documenting the progress made by states utilizing NCHIP funding to improve criminal record systems. BJS has also closely

tracked firearm-related criminal record checks in part to assess the utilization and efficacy of criminal records in decisions of firearms purchase eligibility. The current project is an effort by JRSA and the state Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) to supplement BJS' ongoing assessment efforts.

In November 2005, BJS gave JRSA an award to coordinate SAC projects using criminal history records to study sex offender recidivism. A total of 11 states participated in the project. The goals of the project were to facilitate the ability of SACs that are not currently able to analyze their states' criminal history records to do so; to coordinate analyses conducted by SACs that currently have the capacity to examine criminal history records in order to address the same key criminal justice issue across a number of different states; and to identify critical data quality issues in states' criminal history records. A key component of each of the SAC projects was establishing a feedback mechanism so that SACs can provide information to their state repositories regarding data that are missing, incomplete, or inaccurate so that the quality of records can be improved.

JRSA produced a solicitation for SACs interested in participating in the project. JRSA ultimately made a total of 11 awards to SACs in one of two categories: capacity building/enhancing (Alaska, Iowa, New Mexico, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin) and coordinated analysis (Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, South Carolina, and Utah). Capacity building projects were designed to provide funds to SACs that currently do not have the capacity to analyze their state's criminal history records, or that have limited capacity that they would like to enhance. For SACs that already have the capacity to analyze their state's criminal history records, funding was provided to participate in a coordinated analysis examining recidivism of sex offenders. SACs in the capacity building category were encouraged, but not required, to

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participate in the sex offender recidivism analysis. The six SACs in the capacity building category all attempted to participate in the analysis, but only four were ultimately able to collect and analyze the required data.

JRSA hosted a meeting of representatives of the SACs and BJS in May of 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the methodology of the sex offender recidivism study, which was to be modeled after a study completed by BJS in 2003. A summary of the methods agreed upon may be found in the Methodology section below. In the end, 9 of the 11 SACs successfully obtained criminal history data and participated in the analysis of sex offender recidivism.[1] Each SAC wrote a final report summarizing the findings of the recidivism analysis as well as the lessons learned from working with the criminal history records. The current report summarizes the findings of the individual SAC reports. More detailed information about each individual state's study and findings is available from the individual SAC reports.

This report is divided into several major sections. The Methodology section describes the basic procedures and definitions used by BJS in its 2003 study and by the SACs in the current effort. The next section, Analysis of State Criminal History Records, examines how SACs obtained and worked with their state's criminal history records. This section summarizes the problems and issues identified by the SACs and describes how these were addressed. The section entitled Sex Offender Recidivism Analysis reports the results of the SACs' analysis of sex offender recidivism, and includes a discussion of variations in the basic methodology and analyses carried out by specific SACs. Finally, the report summarizes the issues and draws conclusions regarding the use of criminal history records to address issues of concern to the states and localities.

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[1] Virginia and Wisconsin were unable to obtain and analyze their state's criminal history records.

Methodology

As noted above, the present study was modeled after one completed by BJS in 2003.[2] In its study, BJS obtained data on 9,691 men who had been sentenced for sex offenses and were released from prison in 1994. The sample was part of a larger study of recidivism among 272,111 prisoners released from prisons in 15 states in 1994.[3] The study defined recidivism as any rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment that occurred within three years from the day of release. BJS obtained criminal history records on these offenders to determine their rates of rearrest, reconviction, and re-incarceration.

For purposes of their study, BJS studied only violent sex offenders (as opposed to those arrested for nonviolent offenses, such as indecent exposure, and commercialized sexual offenses, such as prostitution and pornography). The report classified sex offenders into one of two primary types: those imprisoned for rape vs. those imprisoned for sexual assault. Inmates were also broken down into the categories of child molesters and statutory rapists, but these latter categories were in addition to classification as a rapist or sexual assaulter.

The current study focused on sex offenders released from prison in 2001. Recidivism was measured for three years, as in the BJS study. Inmates who were released to any status other than community release (for example, to another state) were excluded from the study. An attempt was made to identify technical violators and analyze these offenders separately, where possible. Each SAC defined a sex offender in a way consistent with its own state's laws and reporting practices. Generally speaking, any offender incarcerated for an offense for which he would be required to register as a sex offender with the state was classified as a sex offender. When multiple charges

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[2] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2003). *Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released from Prison in 1994.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

[3] Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2002). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

were present, the sex offense determination was based on any offense qualifying as a sex offense, regardless of whether or not it was the most serious offense.

As noted previously, BJS' sex offender study was part of a larger recidivism study, and they were therefore able to make some comparisons between sex offenders and non-sex offenders. For the current study, it was left to each SAC to determine whether it would be feasible to identify a comparison group of non-sex offender releasees and compare them to the sex offenders. In the end, four SACs included a comparison group in their analyses. In general, these SACs removed the sex offenders from the release cohort, then selected a random sample of other releasees to form the comparison group.

The SACs began by contacting their state Departments of Correction (DOC) to obtain a list of sex offenders released from DOC custody in 2001. They then used a variety of methods, which are discussed in detail in the Analysis of State Criminal History Records section of this report, for obtaining criminal history records for each of these offenders. Once the criminal history records were matched to the DOC information, the SACs proceeded with the analyses, modeling them after the ones conducted by BJS. Variations in this basic methodology and analyses are noted in the section entitled Sex Offender Recidivism Analyses.

Analysis of State Criminal History Records

Obtaining Criminal History Records

The SACs that participated in this project varied in terms of how they obtained criminal history records. Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, South Carolina, and Utah already had access to their state criminal history records.

Criminal history records for the state of Arizona are maintained by the Arizona Computerized Criminal History (ACCH) system housed at the Arizona Department of Public Safety. Since 2001, the Arizona SAC has received annual extracts from the Arizona Criminal History Records database that are subsequently converted into an SPSS flat file to be used for analysis purposes.

The Delaware Criminal Justice Information System (DELJIS) agency acts as the state criminal history records repository in conjunction with the State Bureau of Identification. By law, the SAC has full access to all information and data in any form, including computerized files and official records, to accomplish its research and analysis. The SAC has written tailored download extraction queries from the criminal history repository and related criminal justice system databases that are housed on the state computer mainframes. These downloads then reside on the SAC's secure server and are analyzed by the SAC using FoxPro, Access, SPSS, Paradox, and spreadsheet software.

The Illinois SAC obtains the state criminal history information from the Illinois Computerized Criminal History (CCH) system, the official state repository for criminal history record information. Through a cooperative partnership with the Illinois State Police (ISP), the SAC has built the capacity to access this system via a permanent electronic connection and to obtain downloads of off-line data for research purposes. These data mirror actual production data on the main ISP CCH system because of daily updating by ISP.

South Carolina's State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) maintains the state's computerized criminal history records. SLED has entered into an agreement with the State Data Warehouse, which is maintained by the Office of Research and Statistics (ORS), an office of the South Carolina Budget and Control Board. The entire CCH data file is sent to ORS, which runs a

program to remove duplicate records. The SAC works with ORS to obtain the criminal history data for analysis.

Utah's criminal history record repository is housed within the Utah Department of Public Safety's Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI). BCI has provided SAC research staff with an SQL (Structured Query Language) tool that allows for unlimited extraction of data files from the repository. Each variable extracted is comma delimited and surrounded in quotation marks. The Utah SAC uses a generic text software utility to remove the quotation marks, and the text file is then imported into Microsoft Access. Each table in the repository uses the offender's state identification number (SID) to uniquely identify individuals. Once the SAC determines which variables are needed from which repository table, they use SQL queries in Access to combine the information needed for a particular study, joining records using offender SIDs. In order to run statistical analyses, the SAC imports the data file from Microsoft Access into SPSS.

Of the six SACs that were funded to develop the capacity to obtain and analyze their state criminal history records, four (Alaska, Iowa, New Mexico and Tennessee) succeeded in doing so. A description of the manner in which each SAC obtained their state criminal history records is provided below.

Alaska. The Alaska Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) worked with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to secure an open ended Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the sharing of criminal history repository (CHR) data. The MOA is non-specific in terms of data usage in that no particular study or questions are linked to data analysis. This open ended MOA will allow the SAC to use the CHR data on a continuous basis, as opposed to the past practice of having to request information, through formal proposals, on a study by study basis.

DPS personnel and the SAC worked together to define an appropriate subset of the CHR, essentially the rap sheet data, and established a method of directly exporting the data from the DPS SQL database into a Microsoft Access version. The Access database was then transferred to the SAC and placed on a secure database server for in-house use. DPS and the SAC will continue with the transfer of data on a regular basis to ensure that the SAC stays current with its copy of the CHR. Procedures are in place for modifying the transfer protocol from Access to XML.

The CHR data dates back to the early 1970s and extends through August 2007. The data exist in five relational tables that include offender identifiers and characteristics, aliases, alternate dates of birth, arrest events and associated dates and characteristics, and sentencing information for conviction cases. There are 1.2 million arrest records, 250,000 person records, and 2.5 million sentencing records.

Iowa. In 2000, the Iowa SAC inaugurated the Justice Data Warehouse (JDW). This database was designed to provide the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of State Government, and other entities, with improved statistical and decision support information pertaining to justice system activities. The Iowa SAC has added data from multiple criminal justice databases and linked the various databases when required, and is able to run automated inquiries on either the stand-alone or linked data. The first data to be imported into the JDW were from the Iowa Court Information System (ICIS). This system, the primary information system of the Iowa Judicial Branch, contains data regarding court cases initiated within the state since 1998, including criminal cases. After the ICIS data were imported, data from the Iowa Corrections Offender Network (ICON), the primary information system of the Iowa Department of Corrections (DOC), were imported into the JDW, and regular updates established. These data were linked to the ICIS data to allow the examination of all ICIS and ICON data relating to the

same subject. The linking was based on matching four variables found in both databases: the subject's last name, the subject's first name, the subject's date of birth, and the subject's social security number. Analysis of the linked data indicated that if data for three or four of the variables were matched, the match was reliable. Matches based on one or two of the variables were found to not be reliable.

For this effort, the Iowa SAC imported the state's computerized criminal history (CCH) records, maintained by the state's Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), into the JDW. DCI was able to transfer the selected CCH data via secure File Transfer Protocol (FTP) to the SAC. The SAC received a file with 18 fixed-length tables containing the data. The SAC then utilized an open source extraction, transformation and loading tool, *Talend*, to parse the fixed-length records and move the data into the JDW using *Teradata Fastload* scripted loads, where the linking algorithms were utilized.

New Mexico. New Mexico's Department of Public Safety (DPS) maintains the State Central Repository, which houses the New Mexico Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) for the state. This system includes all electronic criminal history records for the state of New Mexico beginning in 1994. The SAC discussed data needs with DPS and, after receiving approval from both the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Mexico (where the SAC is located) and the legal staff at DPS, SAC personnel worked with DPS staff to identify the data elements required for this project as well as future research projects using these data.

SAC personnel reviewed a copy of the CJIS data dictionary and used it to generate the data request. DPS maintains the data in an Oracle database. DPS staff pulled the data from this system to generate six text files, one for each year of data. The data were transferred to the SAC and then placed on its secure server.

Tennessee. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) is the state repository for the

criminal history database known as the Tennessee Criminal History Repository (TCHR). A

process for obtaining data extracts from the TCHR was established, with the resulting data

placed into a database in Microsoft Sequel Server 2005. This format enabled the use of MS

Reporting Services to generate the statistical information concerning the criminal history records.

The queries were constructed using XML, which significantly decreased development time.

Standardized reports continue to be developed which will allow TBI to track the level of

disposition reporting as well as to quickly answer information requests and generate aggregate

information for requests, such as how many offenders have been arrested for multiple DUIs.

Matching Criminal History Records to DOC Data

SACs requested records on prison releases for 2001 from their state corrections

departments. Once this information was obtained, the SACs matched the records with their state

criminal history files to develop a dataset on releasees that included criminal history information.

SACs used one of two approaches to match the data between the two files. Most SACs were able

to use a state identification number, a unique number assigned to each individual, to match

corrections and criminal history files. In states where the number was not available, or where

entries were unreliable or too often missing, states used a combination of name, date of birth, and

social security number to perform the match. In a few instances states used a combination of

both a state identification number and the other identifiers to carry out the match.

Some SACs included additional datasets in their analyses. This was done either to

provide supplemental information or to clarify criminal history record information. The Alaska

SAC combined the CHR data with data from the Alaska court system to obtain additional

information on arrest dispositions. The New Mexico SAC, which did extensive analysis of the

quality of the CHR data, obtained data from the Albuquerque Police Department and the

Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office. Iowa examined information from the state's Court

Information System, which includes arrest records of individuals who are not convicted, unlike

the state's CHR data.

Not surprisingly, the attempt to merge multiple large databases resulted in difficulties in

matching records from one database to another. One common problem was non-matches; that is,

offenders in the prison data could not be found in the criminal history records data, or vice versa.

Often this was the result of missing identification numbers in one or the other of the datasets. At

least some of the time it appeared that this problem occurred with releasees who had served

particularly long sentences. The Illinois SAC, for example, noted that some of these offenders

had been sentenced prior to 1978, and perhaps had not been fingerprinted. In some cases further

research of an initial non-match revealed a corresponding record in the other database. Another

common problem was the failure to find an appropriate arrest or conviction for a releasee

identified by the corrections department as a sex offender. In Arizona, for example, 538 releasees

were identified as being sex offenders. However, when the SAC examined the data from the

corrections department and the CHR data more closely, only 306 of these 538 offenders could be

confirmed as being sex offenders. In other words, no sex offense could be identified in the

criminal history records database for individuals identified by DOC as being sex offenders (see

discussion regarding missing arrest records below).

Problems with Criminal History Records

The SACs encountered several problems in using their state's criminal history records to

address the question of sex offender recidivism. Each of these is discussed below.

Arrest Records With No Dispositions. This is a relatively common occurrence, and there are two usual reasons for why an arrest record might be missing a disposition: the disposition was never received, or the disposition was misrecorded – that is, recorded under a different offense tracking number. In some cases, the SAC was able to find (or have the repository find) the disposition by review of court records and have the repository manually update the arrest record.

It is sometimes the case that when a disposition is eventually received, a second complete record (arrest and disposition) is created rather than the disposition being added to the original arrest record. This results in what appears to the analyst to be an arrest record with no disposition, but is in fact a duplicate record (i.e., the same arrest for the same individual).

Finally, there are certain circumstances for which missing dispositions are to be expected. In Illinois, for example, all charges submitted on fingerprint cards are entered into the system, even traffic violations and minor arrests. However, since dispositions are not required for such offenses, it is possible for the analyst to observe minor offenses for which dispositions are missing.

Disposition/Custody Records With No Corresponding Arrest. In the same way that the database may contain arrests with no dispositions, it may also contain dispositions with no arrests. Although obviously a rarer event, this may occur any time an arrest record fails to get transmitted or gets transmitted with an incorrect identification number. The South Carolina SAC, for example, found that when the DOC submits a fingerprint card and there is no matching arrest record, a dummy arrest record is created. This dummy record appears with a custody status and no corresponding arrest. When the "real" arrest card is subsequently received, the dummy record is not deleted, resulting in what appears to the analyst as duplicate records in the database. The

South Carolina SAC notes in its report that there were few enough sex offenders that they could manually review arrest and conviction records to make appropriate determinations regarding duplicate records, but for larger data sets this approach would not be feasible.

Changes in Criminal Codes. One of the issues related to using the criminal history records is that the states' criminal codes change over the years. In the current study, trying to accurately capture offense history can be a challenge when state statutes, and the way those statutes are coded in the database, have changed.

Restrictions on Record Retention. Depending upon the state, there may be statutes that govern how records may be retained in the state criminal history repository. In Iowa, for example, arrests that do not result in a conviction must be removed from the CCH system. Thus any study that measures recidivism or prior criminal history in terms of arrest only will undercount these events in states with this restriction.

Sex Offender Recidivism

A total of nine SACs participated in the analysis of sex offender recidivism. As noted previously, each state studied a cohort of sex offenders released from prison in 2001. Table 1 shows the number of sex offenders studied by each SAC, along with the number of offenders included in the comparison group for the four SACs that included these offenders.

Table 1. Number of Sex Offenders and Comparison Offenders by State

State	No. of Sex Offenders	No. in Comparison Group
Alaska	232	232
Arizona	303	1,700
Delaware	82	--
Illinois	499	--
Iowa	205	--
New Mexico	112	--
South Carolina	300	--
Tennessee	557	523
Utah	203	216

Table 2 shows selected demographic characteristics of the sex offenders included in the study. For purposes of comparison, the corresponding characteristics from the BJS study are shown in the first column of the table.[4]

Table 2. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Offenders

	BJS*	AK	AZ	DE	IL	IA	NM	SC	TN	UT
White	67%	32%	54%	51%	55%	90%	79%	51%	63%	93%
Black	32	4	11	49	31	8	5	46	37	4
Hispanic	20	1	28	6	13	2	44	2	--	11
Average Age at Release	36.8	34.6	41.0	35.5	36.6	38.0	39.4	36.4	38.0	39.6
Total Number of Cases	9,691	232	303	82	499	205	112	300	506	203

 *Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.

As the table shows, there is considerable, but predictable, variation across the states in the racial breakdown of inmates included in the study. Higher proportions of African-American sex offenders are seen in Delaware, South Carolina and Tennessee, while Arizona and New Mexico

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[4] Three states that participated in the current study were also included in the 2003 BJS study: Arizona, Delaware, and Illinois.

have high proportions of Hispanic releasees (in Alaska, 49% of releasees are classified as "Native Alaskan"). Average age ranged from 34.6 in Alaska to 41.0 in Arizona.

Table 3 shows the sentence length and time served for the cohort of sex offenders released in 2001. Blanks in the table indicate that the state did not provide the information in its final report. Sentence lengths varied from a low of 4.6 years in Iowa to a high of 9.1 years in South Carolina. Average time served was lower in New Mexico and Illinois, and higher in Tennessee and Arizona. It is worth noting that the eight states that provided information on time served all reported longer average sentences than those observed in the BJS study. This may be due to the different states included in the BJS study, or may indicate that sex offenders released in 2001 served longer than they did in 1994. The table also shows that the percent of sex offenders that served more than five years varied from over half in Arizona to 20% in Iowa.

Table 3. Sentence Length and Time Served (in years)

	BJS*	AK	AZ	DE	IL	IA	NM**	SC	TN	UT
Sentence Length	8.1	--	7.6	6.6	8.5	4.7	9.0	9.1	--	--
Time Served	3.5	--	5.7	4.6	3.9	4.0	3.7	4.7	6.2	5.0
Percent Serving More Than 5 years	20%	--	52%	29%	23%	20%	29%	40%	--	36%

*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.
**Data were available for only 50 of 112 offenders.

Table 4 shows prior criminal history record information for the sex offenders included in the study. As the table shows, the percentage of sex offenders with at least one prior arrest for any kind of crime ranged from 65% to 88%, roughly the same as BJS found in their 1994 cohort. The average number of prior arrests for any crime ranged from 3.8 in Utah to 9.3 in Alaska.

Given the extensive prior records of these offenders, it is interesting to note that relatively few had been arrested for a sex crime prior to the immediate incarceration. The BJS study found that fewer than one in three sex offenders had committed a previous sex crime. In the present study, the percentages for the four states that reported on this variable were even lower, with three of the four between 15%-16%. This supports the notion that sex offenders generally do not necessarily "specialize" in sex crimes.

Table 4. Prior Criminal History Record

	BJS*	AK	AZ	DE	IL	IA	SC	TN	UT
Percent with at least 1 prior arrest for:									
Any crime	79%	--	88%	84%	68%	76%	65%	--	75%
Any sex crime	29%	--	--	27%	16%	15%	15%	--	--
Average no. of prior arrests (any crime)	4.5	9.3	8.5	8.2	3.4	4.4	4.8	--	3.8

Note. New Mexico's data was deemed unreliable by the SAC, and are thus not included in the table.
*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.

Table 5 shows the recidivism rates for the sex offenders included in the study. Rearrest rates ranged from 26%-55%, and five of the nine states had rates lower than the average of 43% found in the BJS study. Five of the nine states reported reconviction rates, and these varied widely, from 14%-42%. Three states reported the rate of return to prison on a new sentence; two of these were higher than the 11% reported by BJS. Seven of the states reported return to prison for any reason, including a new sentence or a technical violation. Alaska's rate of return was much higher than that of the other states, five of which were much lower than the 39% reported by BJS. Finally, relatively few of the sex offenders in any of the states were rearrested for a new

sex offense. With the exception of Utah, all of the states' rates fell below the 5.3% reported by

BJS.

Table 5. Recidivism Rates for Sex Offenders Released in 2001

	BJS*	AK	AZ	DE	IL	IA	NM	SC	TN	UT
Rearrest	43%	54%	28%	55%	30%	47%	29%	43%	28%	26%
Reconviction	24	39	--	--	14	42	--	22	--	16
Return to prison (new sentence)	11	--	--	--	--	20	5[**]	--	--	14
Return to prison (any reason)	39	68[***]	--	17[***]	--	22	21[**]	22	28	38
Rearrest for sex offense	5.3%	3.4%	2.3%	3.8%	2.4%	3.9%	1.8%	4.0%	--	9.0%

*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.
**Data came from two sources and accuracy could not be verified, and so should be interpreted with caution.
***Delaware and Alaska are unified corrections states where jail and prisons are combined. Prison sentences are defined as those with aggregate terms greater than one year.

Table 6 shows recidivism rates for different racial, ethnic and age groups. The BJS study

found that white sex offenders had lower recidivism rates than Hispanics, who in turn had lower

recidivism rates than black sex offenders, with over half of the latter group being rearrested for

any type of crime. This precise pattern was not seen in any of the states whose data are reported

in Table 6. White sex offenders' recidivism rates were lower than those of black sex offenders in

all but two states (New Mexico and Tennessee). Hispanics had higher recidivism rates than white

and black sex offenders in Arizona, Iowa and New Mexico, and lower rates in Illinois and South

Carolina.

With regard to age, the BJS study showed that recidivism decreases with increasing age; each subsequent age group had a lower recidivism rate that the preceding one, with the lowest rates seen in sex offenders 45 and older. This general trend was true in the six states that reported these data: recidivism was generally highest in the youngest age group and lowest in the oldest.

Table 6. Rearrest Rates (for any crime) by Race, Ethnicity and Age

	BJS*	AZ	DE	IL	IA	NM	SC	TN
White	37%	22%	48%	23%	58%	28%	37%	55%
Black	56	35	63	50	65	17	50	45
Hispanic	42	55	--	18	67	37	14	--
Age at Release								
18-24	60%	68%	57%	51%	85%	50%	64%	--
25-29	54	34	75	43	71	56	67	--
30-34	49	30	63	28	71	20	41	--
35-39	41	30	50	22	63	44	35	--
40-44	35	30	50	18	56	27	32	--
45 and older	24	22	30	19	32	3	25	--

*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.

Table 7 shows rearrests for sex offenders by the type of offense for which the rearrest occurred. About 17% of the sex offenders in the BJS study were rearrested for a violent offense; comparable numbers in the five states that reported these data ranged from 6% in Illinois to 21% in Iowa. Public order offenses (including weapons offenses, traffic offenses, probation and parole violations, disorderly conduct, and similar offenses) were most common in the BJS study and in four of the five states as well.

As noted previously, four SACs included comparison groups of offenders in their studies. Table 8 shows the recidivism rates of sex offenders vs. non-sex offenders in those four states. The table also includes a comparison of the recidivism rates from the BJS sex offender study with those of the larger study of all 1994 prison releases (which included the sex offenders). The BJS study found that sex offenders were less likely than other offenders to be rearrested,

reconvicted, and returned to prison. Generally speaking, the findings of the four SACs shown in Table 8 support the BJS results. In addition, the findings from the BJS study as well as those from Arizona and Utah show that non-sex offenders are almost never rearrested for a sex offense, suggesting that although sex offenders in general may not specialize in sex offenses, there may be a subset that do.

Table 7. Rearrests by New Offense Type

	BJS*	AZ	IL	IA	NM	SC
Violent	17%	9%	6%	21%	18%	17%
Property	13	4	2	18	10	16
Drug	10	5	3	13	5	5
Public order	21	18	10	52	20	26
Other	6	15	7		26	1

*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.

Table 8. Recidivism for Sex Offenders vs. Other (Non-Sex) Offenders

	BJS*		Alaska		Arizona		Tennessee		Utah	
	Sex	Other	Sex	Other	Sex	Other	Sex	Other	Sex	Other
Rearrest	43%	68%	54%	68%	28%	57%	28%	26%	26%	61%
Reconviction	24	47	39	35					16	27
Return to prison	39	52	68	72			28	52	38	57
Rearrest for sex offense	5.3	0.6**	3.4	1.3	2.3	0.4			9.0	0.5

*Characteristics from 2003 BJS study shown for comparison purposes.
** Rape only

Summary and Conclusions

The present study demonstrates the utility of using state criminal history records for analysis. The capacity of SACs to obtain and use criminal history records for analysis was successfully enhanced by the awards provided by JRSA and BJS. Of the six SACs that received capacity-building awards, four were able to obtain their state criminal history records and participate in the recidivism analysis. The analysis, requiring states to match criminal history and Department of Corrections' release files, may have added an additional burden that prevented the other two SACs from successfully completing the project.

Where State Identification Numbers (SIDs) were available, SACs were able to match DOC and criminal history information relatively easily. Some states used other identifiers, such as name and date of birth, to accomplish the match. Having a consistent SID or other such unique identifier across databases would greatly facilitate SACs' abilities to use the criminal history records for research purposes.

The need to match data from more than one dataset resulted in problems that are not necessarily related to the use of criminal history records as a source for analysis. SACs that are beginning the process of using their state criminal history records for analysis would do well to confine their initial efforts to using this database exclusively, learning how to work with the data, before attempting to match these data to those from other sources.

Once issues in the criminal history records are identified, such as duplicate records, it is possible for the SAC to correct the information, provided they have their own working dataset for use in analyses. SACs should seek to obtain records from repositories on an ongoing basis. Once errors are identified, programs to fix these errors can be developed to ensure that each time the dataset is updated, errors of which the SAC is aware can be fixed.

The findings of the sex offender recidivism analysis generally supported those found in BJS' 15-state study. There was considerable variation among the nine states included here, both in terms of the demographics of sex offenders and their recidivism rates. This suggests that comparisons across states should be made with caution, and that any national study that employs state criminal history records should include a large and representative sample from all the states.