Department of Management
Division of Data, Planning, and Improvement
Iowa Statistical Analysis Center

Analysis of Iowa's Sex Offender Registry

October 2024

Cheryl Yates, M.S.
Melinda Mattingly, Ph.D.

This report was made possible in part through funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and its program for State Statistical Analysis Centers (15PBJS-22-GK-00698-BJSB). Points of view or opinions expressed in this report are those of the Division of Data, Planning, and Improvment, and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Literature Review and Current Study 3

History of the Sex Offender Registry 3

Effectiveness of the Sex Offender Registry 4

Current Study 4

Methodology 4

Residency Map 6

Figure 1: Iowa's County Map of Sex Offender Registrants 6

Sex Offender Demographics 7

Figure 2: Age at First Sex Conviction 7

Figure 3: Race of Registered Sex Offenders 7

Figure 4: Gender of Registered Sex Offenders 8

Rates of Recidivism 8

Figure 5: Registered Sex Offenders Convicted of a Subsequent Sex Offense 8

Figure 6: Registered Sex Offenders Convicted of a Monitoring Violation 9

Factors for Recidivism 10

Age Factors 10

Figure 7: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Age at First Sex Conviction 10

Figure 8: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Age(s) of Victim(s) 11

Registry Requirements Factors 12

Figure 9: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Tier-level 12

Figure 10: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Exclusion Zone 13

Figure 11: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Residency Restrictions 14

Victim Demographics 15

Figure 12: Gender of Victims 15

Figure 13: Age of Victims 15

Gender and Age of Victims by Sex Offender Age at First Conviction 16

Figure 14: Gender of Victims by Age of Registered Sex Offender at First Sex Conviction 16

Figure 15: Age of Victims by Age of Registered Sex Offender at First Sex Conviction 16

Overview of Findings 17
Limitations and Future Directions 17
Conclusions 18
References 19

Executive Summary

- Iowa Code §692A establishes Iowa's Sex Offender Registry. This registry was enacted in 1995 and significantly modified in 2005. The purpose of the registry is to deter sex offenders from committing sex crimes, serve as a law enforcement investigative tool, and notify the public about where sex offenders reside.
- The current study will:
    - Focus on the sex offender registry and if the registration and notification policies have deterred new sexual offenses
    - Assess rates of monitoring convictions and in what ways (if any) offenders who have violated the registry requirements differed from offenders who did not violate the registry requirements
    - Assess demographics and other factors of the victims
- All registrant information from the inception of the registry in 1995 through July 31, 2023 was included in analyses
- The final total was 6,345 registered sex offenders whose data was analyzed. This data included:
    - Address
    - Age
    - Race
    - Gender
    - Tier level
        - The tier level is how often sex offenders must report in person to the county sheriff for registration
            - Tier I: annually
            - Tier II: bi-annually
            - Tier III: quarterly
    - Exclusion zones
        - Generally defined as school grounds, childcare facilities, public libraries, or other places intended primarily for children and/or restrictions on employment
    - Residency restrictions
        - A sex crime involving a minor(s) results in a residency restriction meaning offenders must reside more than 2,000 feet from a school or childcare facility
    - Measures of recidivism
        - Sex Conviction: any subsequent conviction for a sex offense. A subsequent sex conviction was defined as occurring more than one month after the original (i.e., earliest) sex conviction.
        - Monitoring Conviction: any registry monitoring conviction under Iowa Code §692A
    - Victim's age and gender
- Results
    - Registered sex offenders are likely to be:
        - 18 to 29 years old

        - White
        - Male
    - Comparatively, those who have a subsequent sex conviction are likely:
        - Under age 18
        - Have victimized both a minor(s) and an adult(s)
        - Classified at Tier II or Tier III
        - Have a residency restriction
    - Comparatively, those who have a monitoring conviction are likely to be:
        - Under age 18
    - Regardless of age of the registered sex offender at the time of their first conviction, victims are likely:
        - A minor
        - Female
- Limitations with the data
    - There is no way to ascertain if someone was victimized once or more than once. It is possible that a victim was counted more than once when analyzing the data of the 9,479 victims.
    - There is no way to ascertain if the victim(s) of the sex offender is a stranger or someone who is known to the offender.
- Future Research
    - Differentiate overall rates, rates of recidivism, and factors of recidivism as it relates to:
        - Sex offenses where there is physical contact with the victim (e.g., rape)
        - Sex offenses where there is no physical contact with the victim (e.g., unsolicited use of a person's image in a sexual manner).
    - An analysis of the cost of the registry to inform fiscal allocation decisions and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Conclusions
    - Rate of recidivism for monitoring convictions does not have much variation as it relates to:
        - Age of the victim(s)
        - Tier-level of the registrant
        - Exclusion zone requirement
        - Residency restrictions
    - Rates for subsequent sex convictions are comparatively likely among those who
        - Are under 18
        - Have both adult and minor victims
        - Classified as Tier II or Tier III
        - Have residency restrictions.
    - These findings suggest that it may be beneficial to direct efforts towards these groups to reduce the number of subsequent sex offenses.

Literature Review and Current Study

History of the Sex Offender Registry

The Jacob Wetterling Act in 1994 established a federal mandate that requires states to keep a sex offender registry. In 1995, Megan's Law was passed and required states to release relevant information about sex offenders to the public. In 2006, the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) was passed and stipulates a set of minimum requirements for the sex offender registry, however, individual states can go beyond these minimum requirements.

SORNA requirements include:

- a sex offender must register in each jurisdiction where they live, work, and/or go to school
- appear in person to update their registration information (the frequency of this requirement is based on the seriousness of the offense, the victim's age, and previous sex offense convictions)
- immediately report any changes to their registration information
- report international travel at least 21 days before departure date

Failure of an offender to adhere to the SORNA requirements could lead to being charged with a federal crime.

Iowa Code §692A establishes Iowa's Sex Offender Registry. This registry was enacted in 1995, significantly modified in 2005, and is maintained and updated by the Department of Public Safety (DPS). The purpose of the registry is to deter sex offenders from committing sex crimes, serve as a law enforcement investigative tool, and notify the public about where sex offenders reside.

Offenders are placed on the registry while on probation or once they reenter the community after serving their sentence. Iowa Code §903B.1 establishes the Special Sentence which requires sex offenders to be registered for at least 10 years after reentry, with some being on the registry for life. The registry operates on a tier system which determines how often offenders must report in person to the county sheriff for registration and is based on the severity of the sex offense conviction. Tier I offenders must report to their county sheriff on an annual basis, Tier II bi-annually, and Tier III quarterly. If a registrant changes residence, employment, or school attendance, at any time of the year, they must report to the sheriff within five days.

Violation of registration requirements carries an aggravated misdemeanor penalty for a first offense and a class D felony for a second, or otherwise subsequent, offense. There are increased penalties for those who commit a sex crime while in violation of the registry requirements.

These restrictions and penalties are based exclusively on the fact that it is a sex offense rather than any other specifics of the crime or characteristics of the offender. Nevertheless, the public generally supports these policies, believes in their effectiveness, and feels safer because of these policies (Sanchez de Ribera, Christensen, Trajtenberg, & Hudson, 2024).

Effectiveness of the Sex Offender Registry

Some research has shown that while *overall* recidivism rates may be lower among sex offenders compared to the general offender population, rates of *sexual* recidivism are higher. The Bureau of Justice Statistics recently investigated recidivism rates in 30 states among those who were released from state prisons after being convicted of rape or sexual assault. It was found that these released sex offenders were more than three times as likely to be arrested again for rape or sexual assault than the general released offender population (Alper & Durose, 2019). Other studies have echoed this. In Illinois, released sex offenders were three times as likely to sexually recidivate than the general released offender population (Sample & Bray, 2003) and Langan, Schmitt, and Durose (2003) found that across 15 states, released sex offenders were four times as likely to sexually recidivate. Lastly, a meta-analysis with a 5-, 10-, and 15-year follow up found sexual recidivism at 14%, 20%, and 24%, respectively (Harris & Hanson, 2004).

Research on the effectiveness of the sex offender registry to combat this higher risk of sexual recidivism has been mixed. For example, Agan (2011) compared rates of arrests for sex crimes in each state both before and after the sex offender registry went into effect. It was found that there were no changes in sex offense arrest rates after compared to before implementation of the sex offender registry. Prescott and Rockoff (2011) found a *decrease* in reported sex offenses when sex offenders were required to register with their local police department. Importantly, however, this finding is when a sex offender registers with local police, but the registry information is not public. In Iowa, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning (CJJP) conducted a 9-year longitudinal study comparing 345 sex offenders on Iowa's Special Sentence to 332 sex offenders convicted before implementation of the Special Sentence. Of those subject to the Special Sentence, 4.1% were convicted of a new sex crime compared to 5.7% of sex offenders not subject to the Special Sentence (Yates & TenNapel, 2021). The Statistical Analysis Center Grant 2019 from the Bureau of Justice Statistics provided funding for this longitudinal study.

Current Study

The Statistical Analysis Center Grant 2022 from the Bureau of Justice Statistics provided funding for the current study. The current study will focus on the sex offender registry and if the registration and notification policies of the registry have deterred new sexual offenses. Also, the current study will assess rates of monitoring convictions and in what ways (if any) offenders who have violated the registry requirements differed from offenders who did not violate the registry requirements. Lastly, the current study will assess demographics and other factors of the victims.

Methodology

Data was collected from the public Iowa Sex Offender Registry (SOR). All registrant information from the inception of the registry in 1995 through July 31, 2023 was included in analyses for an initial total of 6,528 registered sex offenders. From this group, 183 were excluded due to currently residing outside of the state of Iowa resulting in a final total of 6,345 registered sex offenders.

Information obtained and/or analyzed regarding the registered sex offenders included:

- Name

- Date of birth
- Gender
- Race
- Address (as of 7/31/2023)
- Tier level
- Exclusion zones and residency restrictions
- Complete history of sex offense convictions in any state
- Victim's age and gender

Additionally, research staff collected all registry monitoring convictions under Iowa Code §692A through July 31, 2023 using the Justice Data Warehouse (JDW). The JDW is a central repository of criminal and juvenile justice data from various entities in the state of Iowa. These records were matched to registered sex offenders in the study group using first name, last name, and date of birth combinations.

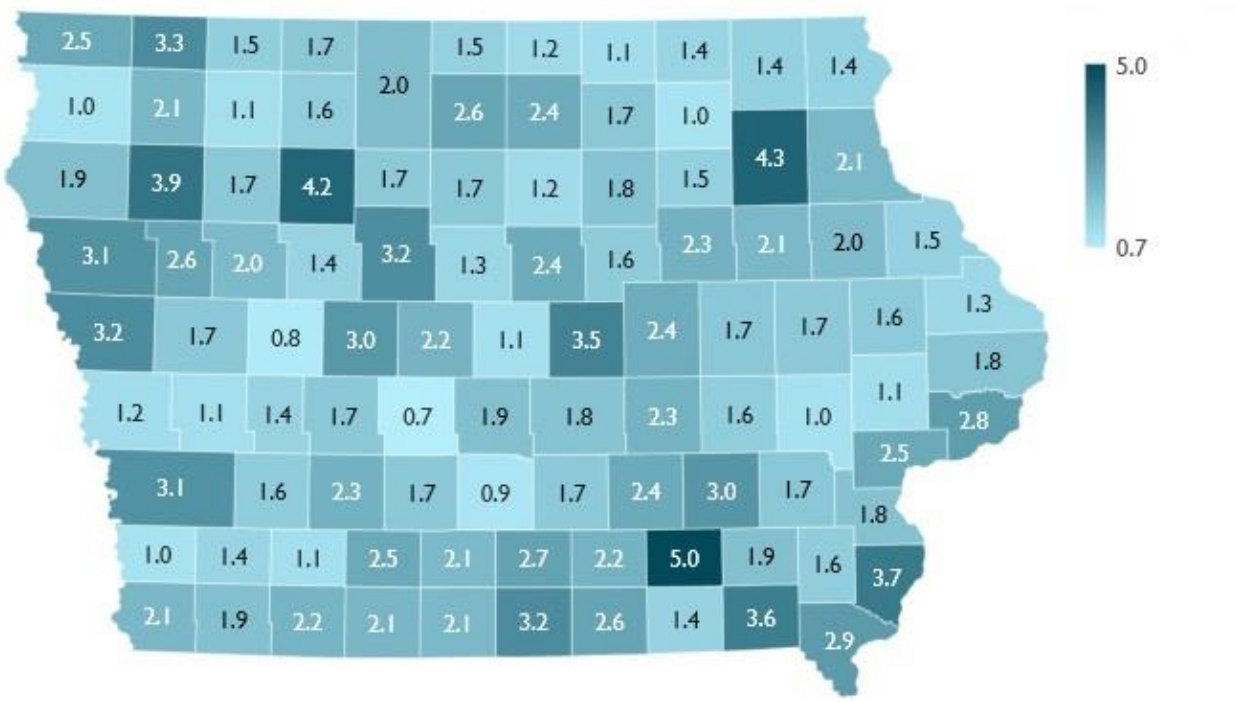
Two indicators of recidivism were examined:

- Subsequent Sex Conviction: any sex conviction occurring more than one month after the original (i.e., earliest) sex conviction.
- Monitoring Conviction: any registry monitoring conviction under Iowa Code §692A.

Residency Map

Rates of registered sex offender per 1,000 residents were calculated for each county in the state. Figure 1 shows county-level rates using 2022 population figures to calculate rates for the counties.

Figure 1: Iowa's County Map of Sex Offender Registrants (rates per 1,000 persons in county)



The counties with the highest rates of sex offender residents per 1,000 county residents are:

- Wapello (Rate: 5.0)
- Fayette (Rate: 4.3)
- Pocahontas (Rate: 4.2)

Sex Offender Demographics

Age at first sex conviction, race (ethnicity data was not available), and gender of registered sex offenders are shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Figure 2: Age at First Sex Conviction

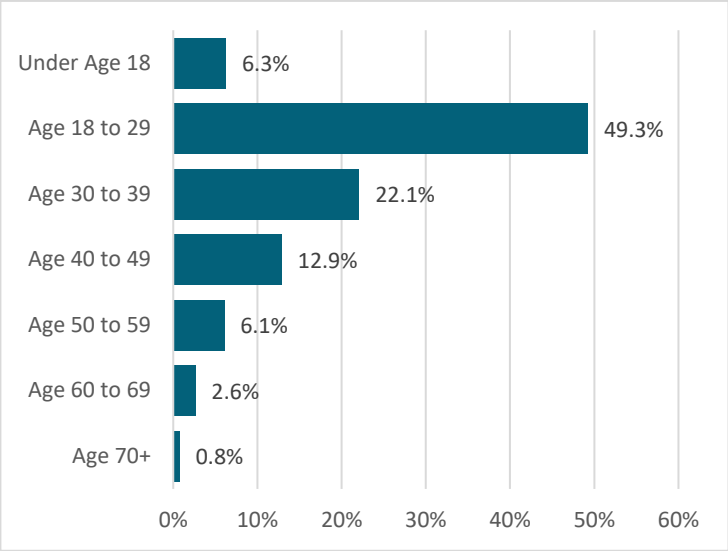


Figure 3: Race of Registered Sex Offenders

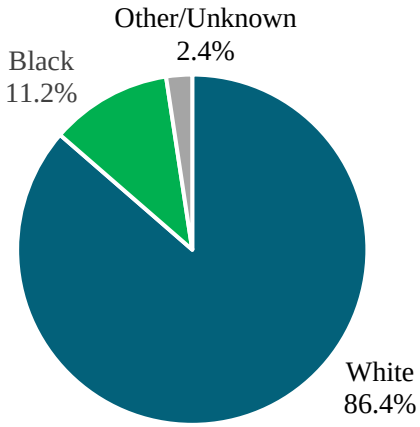
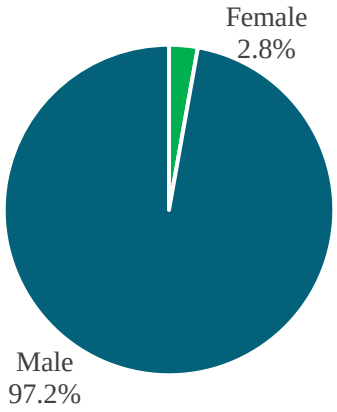


Figure 4: Gender of Registered Sex Offenders



Of all registered sex offenders (N = 6,345), nearly half (N = 3,125) had their first sex conviction between the ages of 18 to 29. They are also overwhelmingly white (N = 5,481) and overwhelmingly male (N = 6,167).

Rates of Recidivism

Rates of subsequent sex convictions and monitoring convictions are shown in Figures 5 and 6. A subsequent sex conviction is defined as occurring more than one month after the original (i.e., earliest) sex conviction and a monitoring conviction is defined as any registry monitoring conviction under Iowa Code §692A.

Figure 5: Registered Sex Offenders Convicted of a Subsequent Sex Offense

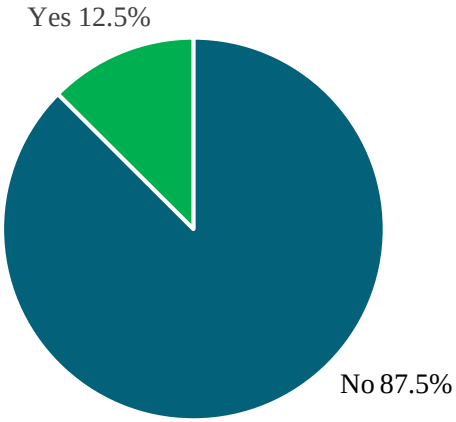
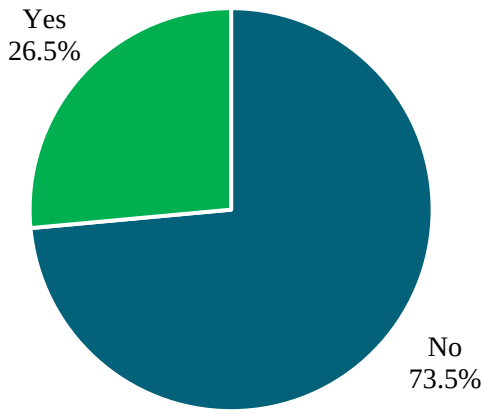


Figure 6: Registered Sex Offenders Convicted of a Monitoring Violation



Among the 6,345 registered sex offenders, rates of monitoring convictions (N = 1,679) were more than double rates of subsequent sex offense convictions (N = 795).

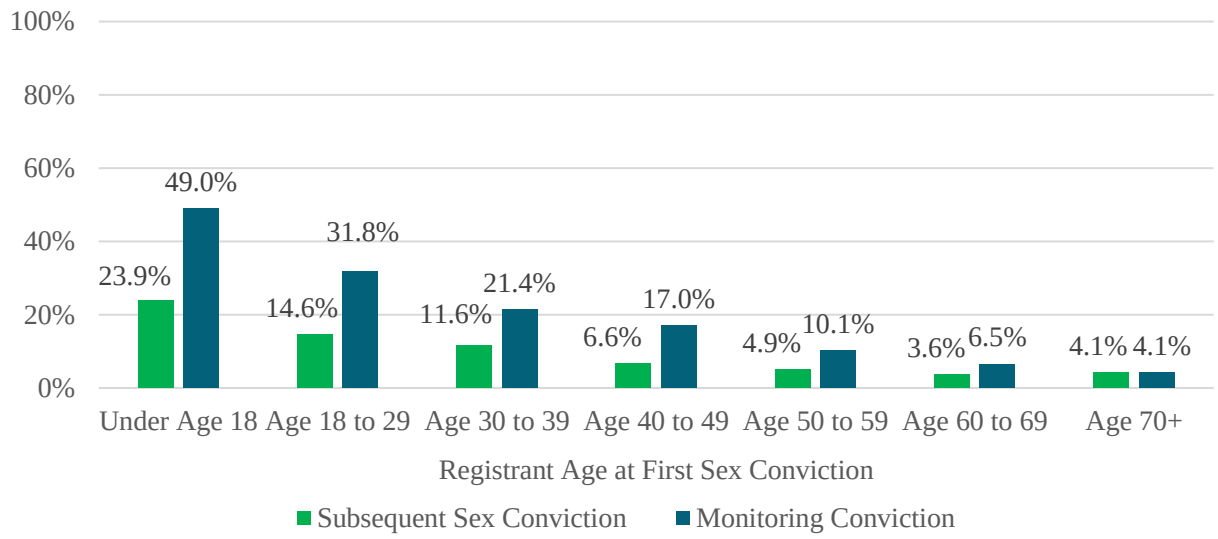
Additionally, among the 6,345 registered sex offenders, 2,002 offenders had *either* a monitoring conviction or a subsequent sex offense conviction while 236 offenders had *both* a monitoring conviction and a subsequent sex offense conviction. Taken together, 2,238 offenders had at least one conviction. Therefore, the 236 offenders who had both types of convictions represent 10.5% (236 out of 2,238) of this group.

Factors for Recidivism

Age Factors

Figure 7 shows rates of recidivism (i.e., new sex offense convictions and monitoring convictions) as it relates to the sex offender's age at their original (i.e., earliest) conviction and Figure 8 shows rates of recidivism as it relates to the age of their victim(s).

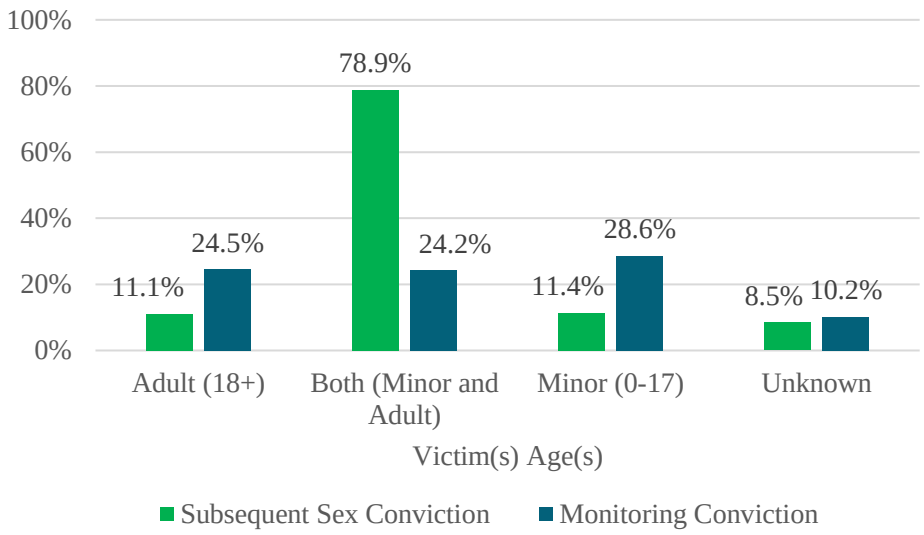
Figure 7: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Age at First Sex Conviction



Among those who were under 18 at the time of their first sex conviction (N = 398), nearly a quarter (N = 95) had a subsequent sex conviction and nearly half (N = 195) had a monitoring conviction.

This is followed by those who were 18 to 29 years old at the time of their first sex conviction. Of these sex offenders (N = 3,125), 457 had a subsequent sex offense and 993 had a monitoring conviction. Overall, as sex offenders increase in age there are lower rates of both subsequent sex convictions and monitoring convictions compared to younger age groups.

Figure 8: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Age(s) of Victim(s)



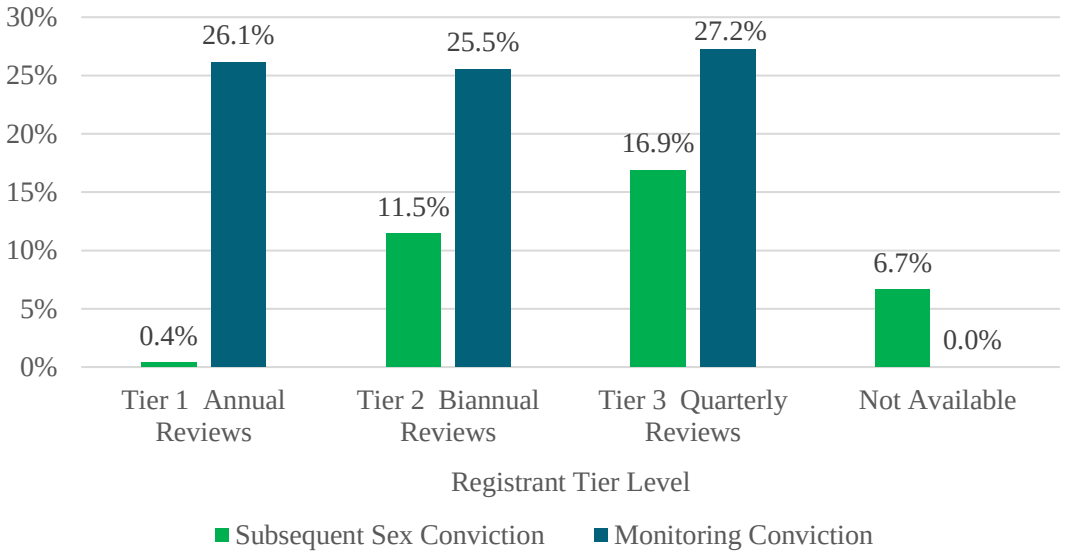
Among those who victimized both a minor(s) and an adult(s) (N = 128), 101 (nearly 80%) had a subsequent sex conviction. Rates of subsequent sex convictions were relatively equal among those who had victimized an adult(s) (N = 114 out of 1,029), a minor(s) (N = 540 out of 4,718), or the age of the victim(s) is unknown (N = 40 out of 470).

Rates of a monitoring convictions are relatively equal among those who victimized an adult(s) (N = 252 out of 1,029), both a minor(s) and an adult(s) (N = 31 out of 128), and a minor(s) (N = 1,348 out of 4,718). There is a lower rate of a monitoring conviction when the victim's/victims' age is unknown (N = 48 out of 470), however, this should be interpreted with caution given the missing information.

Registry Requirements Factors

The figures below show rates of recidivism (i.e., subsequent sex offense convictions and monitoring convictions) as it relates to the sex offender's registry requirements. Specifically, their tier-level (Figure 9), exclusion zones (Figure 10), and residency restrictions (Figure 11).

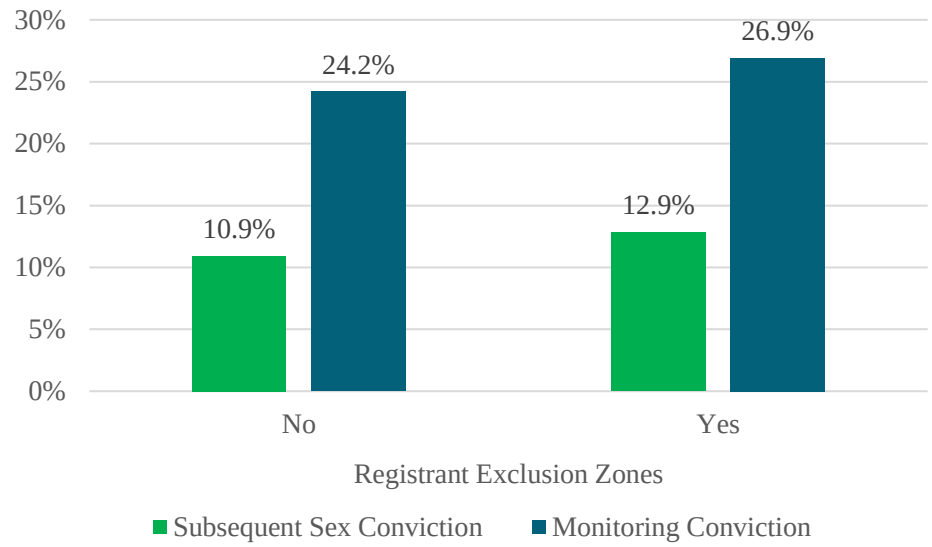
Figure 9: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Tier-level



Rates of a subsequent sex conviction were markedly higher among those who are Tier II (N = 196 out of 1,711) and Tier III (N = 593 out of 3,514) compared to Tier I (N = 4 out of 1,090). Thus, those who are required to provide updates more frequently (i.e., their sex offense was more severe) have higher rates of subsequent sex convictions. Rates of a monitoring conviction were relatively equal among Tier I (N = 285 out of 1,090), Tier II (N = 437 out of 1,711) and Tier III (N = 957 out of 3,514).

There were 30 registered sex offenders whose tier level was unknown. Out of these, 2 had a subsequent sex conviction and none had a monitoring conviction. However, this should be interpreted with caution given the missing information.

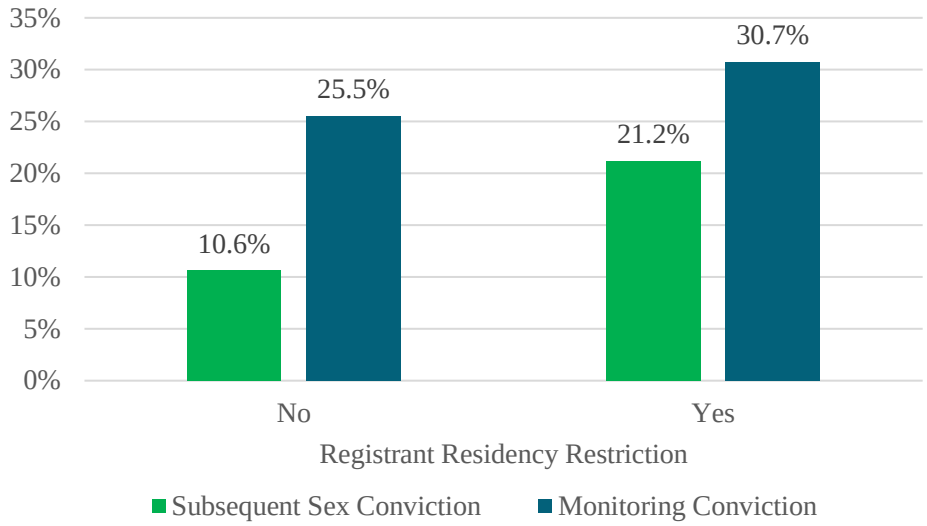
Figure 10: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Exclusion Zone



Offenders who committed certain offenses are subject to exclusion zones. Generally speaking, exclusion zones are defined as school grounds, childcare facilities, public libraries, or other places intended primarily for children (e.g., public parks and playgrounds). Exclusion zones also include restrictions on employment. Sex offenders who are subject to exclusion zones cannot be employed at fairs, carnivals, arcades, amusement parks, pools, libraries, playgrounds, or food vendors who serve minors. They also cannot be employed at a facility providing services to dependent adults.

Rates of subsequent sex convictions are relatively equal for those who have an exclusion zone requirement (N = 678 out of 5,275) compared to those who do not have such a requirement (N = 117 out of 1,070). The same is found for a monitoring conviction – it is relatively equal for those who have an exclusion zone requirement (N = 1,420 out of 5,275) compared to those who don't have such a requirement (N = 259 out of 1,070).

Figure 11: Registered Sex Offenders Recidivism by Residency Restrictions



Registered sex offenders who committed a sex crime involving a minor(s) have a residency restriction and are subject to the 2,000-foot rule. They must reside more than 2,000 feet from a school or childcare facility.

Rates of a subsequent sex conviction were more than double for those who have a residency restriction (N = 242 out of 1,142) compared to those without such a requirement (N = 553 out of 5,203). Rates of a monitoring conviction among those who have a residency restriction (N = 352 out of 1,142) compared to those without such a requirement (N = 1,328 out of 5,203) are higher, but this difference is not to the same degree as subsequent sex convictions.

Victim Demographics

Gender and age of victims of registered sex offenders are shown in Figures 12 and 13.

Figure 12: Gender of Victims

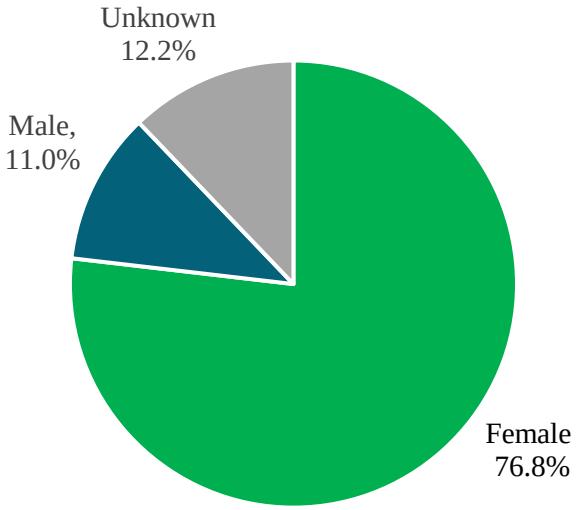
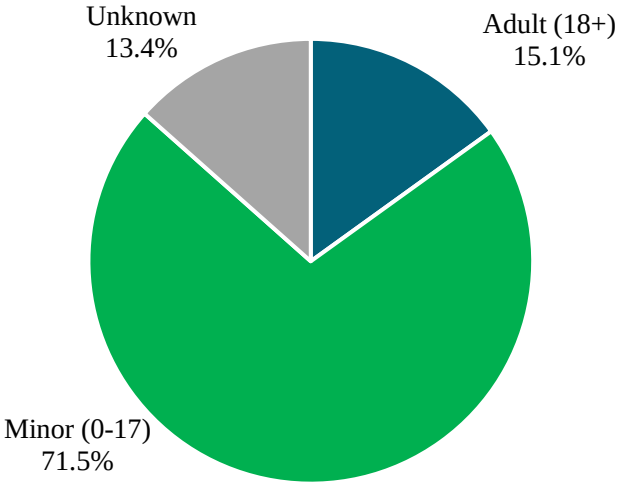


Figure 13: Age of Victims



Victims of registered sex offenders (N = 9,479) are overwhelmingly female (N = 7,284) and are overwhelmingly a minor(s) (N = 6,777).

Gender and Age of Victims by Sex Offender Age at First Conviction

Gender and age of victims as it relates to the age of the registered sex offender at first sex conviction are shown in Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 14: Gender of Victims by Age of Registered Sex Offender at First Sex Conviction

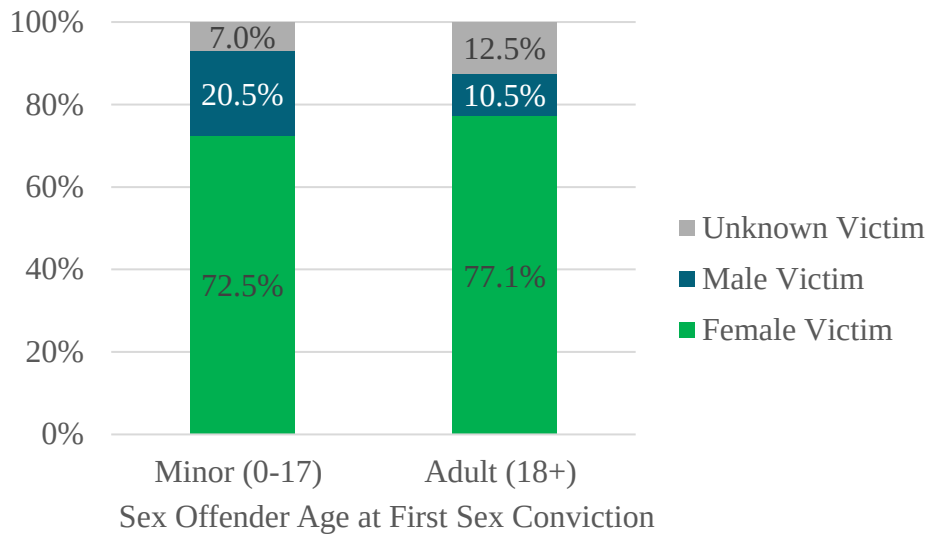
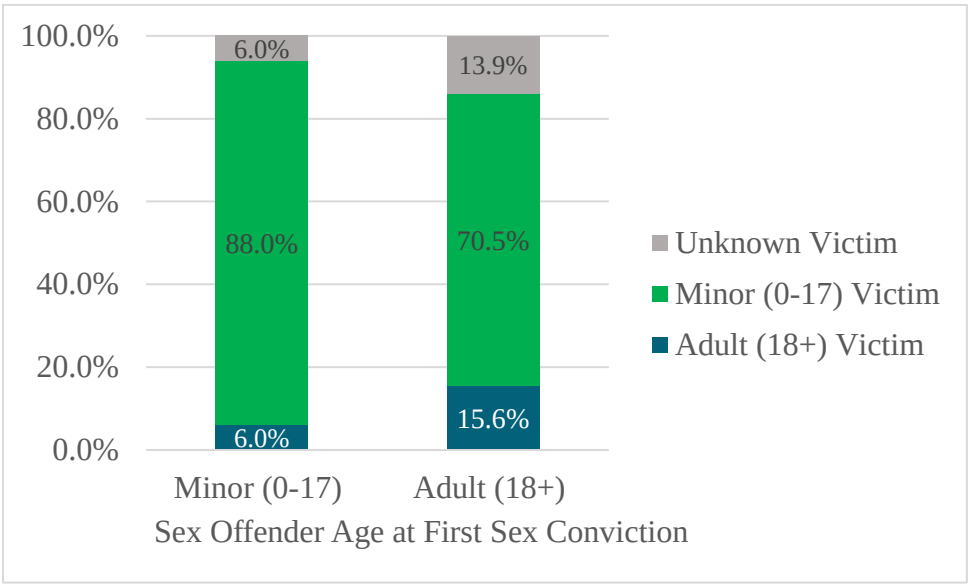


Figure 15: Age of Victims by Age of Registered Sex Offender at First Sex Conviction



Regardless of the age of the registered sex offender at the time of their first conviction, victims are overwhelmingly female and a minor(s).

There are 516 victims of registered sex offenders who were under age 18 at the time of their first sex conviction. Of these victims, 374 are female and 454 were a minor(s) at the time of the offense. There are 8,963 victims of registered sex offenders who were 18 or older at the time of their first sex conviction. Of these victims, 6,910 are female and 6,323 were a minor(s) at the time of the sex offense.

Overview of Findings

- The counties with the highest rates of sex offender residents per capita are (in order): Wapello County, Fayette County, and Pocahontas County.
- Registered sex offenders are likely to be:
    - 18 to 29 years old
    - White
    - Male
- Most (87.5%) registered sex offenders do not recidivate.
    - Comparatively, those who have a subsequent sex conviction are likely:
        - Under age 18
        - Have victimized both a minor(s) and an adult(s)
        - Classified as Tier II or Tier III
        - Have a residency restriction
    - Comparatively, those who have a monitoring conviction are likely:
        - Under age 18
- Regardless of age of the registered sex offender at the time of their first conviction, victims are likely:
    - A minor
    - Female

Limitations and Future Directions

- From our data, there was no way to ascertain if someone was victimized once or more than once. It is possible that a victim was counted more than once when analyzing the data of the 9,479 victims.
- Additionally, our data does not indicate if the victim(s) of the sex offender is a stranger or someone who is known to the offender. This would be an avenue for future research.
- Further analysis could differentiate overall rates, rates of recidivism, and factors of recidivism as it relates to sex offenses where there is physical contact with the victim (e.g., rape) and when there is no physical contact with the victim (e.g., unsolicited use of a person's image in a sexual manner).
- An analysis of the cost of the registry could inform fiscal allocation decisions and identify opportunities for improvement.

Conclusions

While most registered sex offenders do not recidivate, the rate of recidivism for monitoring convictions is higher than the rate of subsequent sex convictions. However, rate of recidivism for monitoring conviction does not have much variation as it relates to the age of the victim(s), tier-level of the registrant, exclusion zone requirement, or a residency restriction. The only exception to this pattern is that those who are under age 18 are, comparatively, more likely to have a monitoring conviction. This rate lowers as sex offenders increase in age. Thus, overall, registered sex offenders are all approximately equal in the likelihood of having a monitoring conviction.

Rates for subsequent sex convictions showed more variation. Registered sex offenders with a subsequent sex conviction were, comparatively, more likely to be under 18, have both adult and minor victim(s), classified as Tier II or Tier III, or have a residency restriction. These findings suggest that it may be beneficial to direct efforts towards these groups to reduce the number of subsequent sex offenses.

References

Agan, A. Y. (2011). Sex offender registries: Fear without function? *The Journal of Law and Economics, 54,* 207-239. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/658483?seq=13

Alpert, M. & Durose, M. R. (2019). *Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released from State Prison: A 9-Year Follow-Up (2005-14).* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsorsp9yfu0514.pdf

Harris, A. J. R. & Hanson, R. K. (2004). *Sex Offender Recidivism: A Simple Question 2004-03.* Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/sex-offender-recidivism-simple-question

Langan, P. A., Schmitt, E. L., & Durose, M. R. (2003). *Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released From Prison in 1994.* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/recidivism-sex-offenders-released-prison-1994

Prescott, J. J. & Rockoff, J. E. (2011). Do sex offender registration and notification laws affect criminal behavior? *The Journal of Law and Economics, 54,* 161-206. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/658485

Sample, L. L. & Bray, T. M. (2006). Are sex offenders dangerous? *Criminology and Public Policy, 3,* 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2003.tb00024.x

Sanchez de Ribera, O., Christensen, L. S., Trajtenberg, N., & Hudson, K. (2024). Public perceptions toward community management policies for individuals convicted of sexual offenses: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 25,* 1248–1264. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231174695

Yates, C. & TenNapel, M. (2021). *A Longitudinal Analysis of Iowa's Sex Offender Special Sentence Supervision.* Iowa Department of Human Rights, Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justic Planning.