

The Effectiveness of Treatment As Policy for Sex Offenders

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

The public's perception of individuals who commit sexual offenses is much different than for other types of offenders. This can be seen in the passing of legislation targeting interventions specific to this population as a way to protect the public and reduce recidivism. In some states, sex offenders are required to participate in treatment as a condition for early release from prison. The impact of this policy is not well understood, and mandatory treatment is growing in popularity. This dissertation explores the impact of mandatory treatment for individuals incarcerated for sexual offenses on their recidivism over time. Missouri statute establishes that offenders convicted of a sexual assault offense are required to successfully complete treatment prior to being eligible for parole or conditional release. If they refuse or fail, they are required to serve their whole sentence for the offense. Data from the Missouri Department of Corrections were utilized to examine two main research questions: What are the differences among sex offenders that complete treatment the first time, go through treatment multiple times or fail, and those that refuse treatment? What is the overall rate of recidivism between sex offenders who complete treatment to those that do not? The population under study includes incarcerated individuals with access to participate in treatment through the Missouri Sex Offender Program (MOSOP) and released from prison between 1991 and 2010; this encompasses approximately 7,200 individuals. Data on reconviction, return to prison, and technical violation were obtained through fall 2014. The data utilized in this study encompass a longer follow-up period than previous studies so that long-term recidivism can be evaluated. The results show that, overall, treatment is a successful intervention and can reduce recidivism over time. Improving access to treatment may promote change for individuals who have committed sexual offenses. The findings gleaned from understanding treatment impact, as well as how it may influence particular individuals based on their level of participation, can inform criminal justice policies that target this population.