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Washington State Sex Offenders: Overview of Recidivism Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Some convicted offenders reoffend after they return to the community—this reoffense behavior is known as recidivism. The percentage of offenders who reoffend within a specified time period is described as the recidivism rate.

State policymakers have expressed interest in knowing the recidivism rates of Washington State sex offenders. Information on these rates can guide policy decisions on issues such as sentence length, terms of supervision, and treatment options.

In 1990, the legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to study the effectiveness of the *Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative (SSOSA)*. Legislators wanted to know if this treatment option—which allows judges to order community treatment for eligible sex offenders—compromised public safety.

In 1991, the Institute reported on sex offenders who received or were statutorily eligible for SSOSA from January 1985 through June 1986. The report concluded that SSOSA is an effective sentencing alternative for eligible sex offenders because:

- The community is at no greater risk,
- Criminal justice professionals and treatment providers support the alternative, and
- Costs to state government are presumed to be lower.

Following this research, legislators inquired about the recidivism patterns of sex offenders who are *not* eligible for SSOSA—rapists and repeat child molesters—and requested more information on the effectiveness of treatment.

This publication reports on **three** studies regarding sex offenders that are designed to answer policymakers' questions. Each study addresses a particular aspect of recidivism.

- I. The Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative: A Follow-Up Study of Recidivism
- II. Recidivism Patterns of Adult Sex Offenders
- III. The Twin Rivers Sex Offender Treatment Program: Recidivism Rates