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Accuracy of Actuarial Procedures for Assessment of Sexual Offender Recidivism Risk May Vary Across Ethnicity

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Little is known about whether the accuracy of tools for assessment of sexual offender recidivism risk holds across ethnic minority offenders. I investigated the predictive validity across ethnicity for the RRASOR and the Static-99 actuarial risk assessment procedures in a national cohort of all adult male sex offenders released from prison in Sweden 1993–1997. Subjects ordered out of Sweden upon release from prison were excluded and remaining subjects ($N = 1303$) divided into three subgroups based on citizenship. Eighty-three percent of the subjects were of Nordic ethnicity, and non-Nordic citizens were either of non-Nordic European ($n = 49$, hereafter called European) or African Asian descent ($n = 128$). The two tools were equally accurate among Nordic and European sexual offenders for the prediction of any sexual and any violent nonsexual recidivism. In contrast, neither measure could differentiate African Asian sexual or violent recidivists from nonrecidivists. Compared to European offenders, African Asian offenders had more often sexually victimized a nonrelative or stranger, had higher Static-99 scores, were younger, more often single, and more often homeless. The results require replication, but suggest that the promising predictive validity seen with some risk assessment tools may not generalize across offender ethnicity or migration status. More speculatively, different risk factors or causal chains might be involved in the development or persistence of offending among minority or immigrant sexual abusers.

KEY WORDS: ethnicity; sexual offenders; risk assessment; criminal recidivism.

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INTRODUCTION

Actuarial procedures for assessment of sexual offender recidivism risk have proven to be moderately able to identify offenders that recidivate from those who do not (e.g., Barbaree, Seto, Langton, & Peacock, 2001; Hanson & Thornton, 2000, 2003; Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1998; Sjöstedt & Långström, 2001). Particularly when the aim is a simple probability statement of risk for criminal reoffending, available data suggest that the actuarial assessment format is the most accurate procedure available today (e.g., Dvoskin & Heilbrun, 2001; Litwack, 2001).

Ethnicity and Criminal Offending

Minority ethnicity has been considered in studies of the development of juvenile delinquency and adult offending in general. For example, using data from a national longitudinal survey of youth in the general U.S. population, McLeod, Kruttschnitt, and Dornfeld (1994) found that parenting practices predicted antisocial behavior for Caucasian but not African American children. Junger and Marshall (1997) tested the interethnic generalizability of Gottfredson and Hirschi's social control theory for criminal behavior. They modeled self-reported delinquency in a sample of Dutch and immigrant adolescents in the Netherlands. Social bonding showed similar relationships to general delinquent involvement and types of delinquency among male youths of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Dutch origin. Donnellan, Ge, and Wenk (2000) tested Moffitt's hypothesis that adolescence-limited criminal offenders have better cognitive ability than life-course-persistent offenders. The authors found support for the hypothesis in subjects of Caucasian and Hispanic descent but not among African Americans. They interpreted this finding as a function of differences in developmental contexts for different ethnic groups.

To examine possible differences in psychosocial functioning, substance use, and criminality patterns across ethnicity in juvenile delinquents, Dembo, Williams, and Schmeidler (1994) studied urban male youth entering a juvenile detention center in the United States. Caucasian adolescents exhibited greater substance use problems and their delinquency seemed related to a higher degree of psychological dysfunction and a troubled family background. In contrast, African Americans' problem behavior appeared more related to social factors. In an extension of the former study, including more than 3000 male juvenile delinquents, differences concerning psychosocial, substance use, and delinquent behaviors were studied (Dembo et al., 1998). African American male youths tended to live under more economically stressful conditions and had higher official rates of neglect than other youths had. Caucasian males experienced more behavior problems whereas Hispanic youths had more difficulties in school. Wierson and Forehand (1995) explored the relationship between criminological factors, psychiatric morbidity,

and recidivism among 75 incarcerated male adolescents. Disruptive behavior disorders played a role in the prediction of criminal recidivism in subjects of both African American and Caucasian ethnicity. However, early onset of criminal activity and crime severity contributed to recidivism risk only among African American subjects. They concluded that psychiatric disorders were less important for African American as compared to Caucasian youth. Hicks, Rogers, and Cashel (2000) studied risk factors for violent and total infractions among institutionalized male juvenile offenders. Psychopathic personality disorder assessed with the PCL:SV (Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995) appeared less valid when used with Caucasian and Hispanic offenders as compared to offenders of African descent.

Possible differences across ethnic groups should be explored and meaningfully interpreted when they occur (cf., Barrera, Castro, & Biglan, 1999). For example, results reported by Peeples and Loeber (1994) indicated that it is important to study covariates to ethnicity that may better explain different rates of offending. They investigated the relationships of individual factors and neighborhood context to juvenile delinquency in urban boys. When subjects with varying ethnicity were compared without regard to neighborhood context, African Americans were more frequently and more seriously delinquent. However, when African Americans did not live in underprivileged neighborhoods, their delinquent behavior was similar to that of Caucasian subjects. Once individual factors were accounted for, residence in poor neighborhoods was significantly related to delinquency whereas ethnicity was not.

Among others, Bridges and Steen (1998) found differences in how probation officers attribute causes of crime committed by Caucasian adolescents as compared to adolescents of minority ethnicity. Such variability contributed significantly to differential assessments of risk for reoffending, even after adjusting for case and offender characteristics. Consequently, when ethnicity is considered, investigators and clinicians alike need to be sensitive to the risk of boosting prejudice towards individuals of minority ethnicity.

Ethnicity and Research on Sexual Behavior

In contrast to empirical work related to nonsexual criminal offending, ethnicity has not often been taken into account often in previous sexuality-related research (cf. Wiederman, Maynard, & Fretz, 1996). Naturally, this increases the risk for overgeneralization of results from empirical research conducted with majority ethnicity samples to minority groups. It may also lead to particularly negative consequences, such as compromising equality before the law, when the research concerns the development of and interventions against deviant behavior. Actuarial procedures for the assessment of recidivism risk among criminal offenders have lately become popular in criminal justice, correctional services, and forensic psychiatric settings in many Western countries. Two of the most well-known actuarial

tools for assessment of recidivism risk in sexual offenders are the Rapid Risk Assessment of Sexual Offense Recidivism (RRASOR; Hanson, 1997) and the Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 1999, 2000). In this study, I examined the potential variability across ethnicity for the predictive validity of the RRASOR and Static-99 among adult male sex offenders in a national cohort released from prison in Sweden 1993–1997.

METHOD

Subjects

This is a retrospective follow-up study of all adult men (age ≥18 years) released from prison in Sweden 1993–1997 after having served a sentence related to a sexual offence ($N = 1400$). The Research Ethics Committee at Huddinge University Hospital, Sweden, approved of the study design (#299-99). Sexual offences were defined as all sexual crimes listed in the Swedish Penal Code, ranging from rape and child molestation to exhibitionistic acts or indecent exposure as well as sexual harassment. In Sweden, almost 70% of all individuals convicted for contact sex offences (basically rape and child molestation) are sentenced to prison, but very few noncontact sex offenders are given prison sentences. Therefore, approximately 95% of convicted sex offenders in prison have committed contact sexual abuse. Consequently, the subjects in this study were quite representative of convicted rapists and child molesters.

Foreign citizens can be ordered out of the country upon having served a sentence for a criminal offence in Sweden. This measure can be taken provided that the individual has committed a serious offence and that there is a limited personal connection to Sweden in terms of family relationships. There should also be a low risk of threats to the individual safety of the former offender in the receiving country. Because having been ordered out of the country would selectively affect the non-Nordic offender subgroups, I excluded all subjects that had been ordered out of Sweden to minimize loss to follow-up ($n = 97$). No subjects with Nordic ethnicity, but 33 non-Nordic Europeans (hereafter called *European* for reasons of simplicity) and 52 African Asian subjects were excluded for this reason. The remaining cohort consisted of 1303 subjects.

For the purpose of this study, I grouped the subjects into three ethnic subgroups according to country of citizenship at the time of their prison sentence for the index sexual offence. Three percent of the offenders had American or unknown citizenship and were not included in the comparisons because of the small subsample sizes. The resulting ethnic subgroups were Nordic ($n = 1085$, 83%), European ($n = 49$, 4%), and African Asian ($n = 128$, 10%). More specifically, all Nordic countries except for Iceland (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) contributed ≥5 subjects each to the Nordic ethnic subgroup. Subjects

with citizenship in (non-Nordic) European countries were mainly from Bosnia and former Yugoslavia, Great Britain, Poland, and Spain (each nation contributing ≥5 subjects). Finally, for the African Asian offender subgroup, Ethiopia, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia, Syria, Turkey, and Tunisia were the main countries of citizenship, each contributing ≥5 subjects.

For 88% of the offenders, the index offence that led to inclusion in this study constituted their first registered sexual offence. The most severe sexual index offence involved child molestation in 46% ($n = 597$) and rape in 42% ($n = 548$) of the cases. Consequently, 14% of the offenders ($n = 158$) were convicted for offences neither involving explicit violence nor directed specifically against victims under age 15. During incarceration, the offenders were offered sparse or no specialized treatment, almost exclusively individual psychodynamic therapy. The average time served in prison was 11.8 months ($SD = 18.3$, range 1–71) and the mean offender age at release 41.0 years ($SD = 12.0$, range 18–77).

Follow-up with respect to criminal recidivism started at release from prison and ended on December 31st, 2000, yielding an average follow-up time of 5.7 years ($SD = 1.4$, range 3.0–8.0). Data on reconvictions during follow-up were retrieved from the National Council for Crime Prevention through computer-based record-linkage.

Risk Assessment Measures

The Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offence Recidivism (RRASOR; Hanson, 1997) is an actuarial tool constructed to yield estimates of risk for sexual recidivism in sexual offenders based on file-based information. It includes four risk items: prior sexual offences, any unrelated victim, any male victim, and young offender age. All items except prior sexual offences (scored 0–3 points) have been given unit weights (i.e., 1 point each). The total summary score can therefore range from 0 to 6 points with a higher score indicating higher sexual recidivism risk. Independent studies support that the RRASOR distinguishes between sexual recidivists and nonrecidivists (e.g., Barbaree et al., 2001; Hudson, Wales, Bakker, & Ward, 2002; Sjöstedt & Långström, 2001, 2002).

The *Static-99* (Hanson & Thornton, 1999, 2000) actuarial assessment procedure was developed to capture *both* sexual and violent recidivism risk among sexual offenders. The 10 included risk factors reflect broad categories reflective of sexual deviance (noncontact sexual offence(s), sexual offence with male victim, single marital status), range of potential sexual abuse victims (unrelated victim, stranger victim), persistence (prior sexual offences), antisociality (prior nonsexual violence, prior sentencing occasions, index nonsexual violence), and young offender age (age less than 25 years). Prior sexual offences is scored 0–3 and the remaining 9 items have been given equal weights (1 point each). The total score ranges from 0–12 points with a higher score indicating increased likelihood

for sexual or violent recidivism. Independent studies have found Static-99 scores to be associated with sexual recidivism (Barbaree et al., 2001; Nunes, Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, & Broom, 2002; Sjöstedt & Långström, 2001, 2002; Thornton, 2002) and any violent (including sexual; Barbaree et al., 2001; Nunes et al., 2002; Sjöstedt & Långström, 2001) recidivism.

RRASOR and Static-99 ratings were based on reviews of subjects' correctional services files and data from computerized registers on prior sexual and nonsexual criminal convictions. The scoring was conducted by a trained PhD student who was blind to all information concerning criminal recidivism after release from prison. In a previous study exploring the accuracy of the RRASOR and the Static-99 in the full sample (Sjöstedt & Långström, 2001), we found excellent interrater reliability for items scored from subject files (mean Cohen's $\kappa = .90$, with no κ below .83). Information for items related to previous criminality was obtained directly and accurately with computerized record-linkage, and therefore not tested for interrater reliability. Data needed to complete RRASOR or Static-99 ratings were incomplete for 32 subjects, who were excluded from analyses of instrument performance.

Psychiatric Morbidity Requiring Inpatient Care

The relative importance of psychiatric morbidity for sexually abusive behavior may vary across ethnicity. This may be reflected in differences in offender psychiatric morbidity and be a source to variability in the predictive validity of actuarial instruments for offenders of different ethnicity. Since 1987, all units that provide inpatient health care in Sweden are required by law to report to the nationwide Hospital Discharge Register hosted by the National Board of Health and Welfare. It has been estimated that nonreporting to the register occurs in 2% or less of all inpatient treatment episodes. All registered hospital admissions for the subjects in the study cohort were identified using computer-based record-linkage. Psychiatric disorders, diagnosed during inpatient care according to the International Classification of Diseases-9, and -10 (only for 1997), were combined into diagnostic categories: *alcohol abuse or dependence* (ICD-9: 303, 305A; ICD-10: F10), *drug abuse or dependence* (ICD-9: 304, 305X; ICD-10: F10-F14, F16, F18-19), *personality disorder* (ICD-9: 301; ICD-10: F60-62), and *psychosis* (ICD-9: 291-299; ICD-10: F20-25 + F28-29, F84). *Any psychiatric disorder* was defined as inpatient care associated with any of these diagnostic categories and *any inpatient care* as any health care associated with a hospital admission. All inpatient care occurring up to release from prison was considered.

Statistical Analysis

Associations between RRASOR and Static-99 scores and sexual and violent nonsexual criminal reconvictions were analyzed with Pearson correlation

coefficients (r), and areas under the curve of the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC of the ROC; Mossman, 1994). AUCs of the ROC are presented with 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). ANOVA and χ^2-tests were used to explore possible differences across ethnic subgroups for sociodemographic and criminological characteristics and psychiatric morbidity requiring inpatient care.

RESULTS

Base rates for sexual and violent nonsexual recidivism across the three ethnic subgroups are presented in Table I. During follow-up, the sexual recidivism rates for the three subgroups were not significantly different ($\chi^2 = 3.45$, $N = 1262$, $df = 2$, $p = .178$). However, offenders of African Asian descent were more often reconvicted for violent nonsexual offences than were European and Nordic offenders ($\chi^2 = 20.26$, $N = 1262$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Both the RRASOR and the Static-99 exhibited moderate predictive accuracy for sexual reconvictions during follow-up among Nordic and European sexual offenders. In contrast, there was no association between these scores and sexual recidivism among African Asian offenders. Similarly, the Static-99 showed a moderate association with violent non sexual recidivism in Nordic and European sexual offenders. As expected, the RRASOR—not originally constructed to predict violent nonsexual recidivism—exhibited a weaker association with this outcome than the Static-99. Again, no relation was found between either RRASOR or the Static-99 and violent nonsexual recidivism in African Asian offenders.

To explore possible confounds concerning the relation between risk instrument scores and recidivism in offenders of African Asian descent, I performed comparisons of sociodemographic, criminological, and psychiatric characteristics across ethnic subgroups (see Table II). Statistically significant differences in RRASOR and Static-99 scores emerged across ethnic subgroups, with the highest ratings found for African Asian offenders. Non-Nordic offenders were younger than were Nordic offenders. In addition, African Asian subjects were on average 4 years younger than Europeans. Further, as compared to Europeans, African Asian offenders were more often homeless upon release from prison and had more seldom been married or cohabiting. Expectedly, because only 12% of offenders had previously been convicted of a sexual offence, the age at first conviction for a sexual offence varied across ethnicity in a very similar manner to offender age.

Comparisons of inpatient care before release from prison between Nordic subjects and both non-Nordic offender groups should be done with caution, because non-Nordic offenders could have immigrated to Sweden after 1987, when the inpatient registry was established. True morbidity requiring inpatient care could therefore have been missed. For example, any inpatient care up to release from prison was equally common in both groups of non-Nordic offenders but significantly less

Table I. Predictive Accuracy of the RRASOR and the Static-99 for Criminal Recidivism Among Adult Sex Offenders From Different Ethnic Backgrounds, Released From Swedish Prisons 1993–1997

					Ethnicity[a]											
		Total sample (N = 1303)			Nordic (n = 1085, 83%)				(Non-Nordic) European (n = 49, 4%)				African Asian (n = 128, 10%)			
Recidivism type	Instrument	Baserate	AUC of ROC	95% CI	Baserate	r	AUC of ROC	95% CI	Baserate	r	AUC of ROC	95% CI	Baserate	r	AUC of ROC	95% CI
Sexual	Static-99	5.8%	.75	0.68–0.81	5.8%	.27**	.76	0.70–0.84	10.2%	.42**	.79	0.55–1.03	3.1%	−.01 *ns*	.50	0.25–0.74
	RRASOR		.73	0.66–0.79		.30**	.76	0.69–0.83		.52**	.77	0.48–1.05		−.02 *ns*	.48	0.20–0.77
Violent nonsexual	Static-99	9.7%	.72	0.67–0.76	8.1%	.23**	.74	0.69–0.79	12.2%	.37**	.79	0.59–0.99	20.3%	.02 *ns*	.52	0.38–0.65
	RRASOR		.59	0.54–0.65		.07*	.58	0.52–0.65		.20 *ns*	.76	0.60–0.90		.04 *ns*	.53	0.41–0.66

Note. AUC of ROC = areas under the curve of the receiver operating characteristic curve.

[a] The definition of ethnicity was based on country of citizenship at the time of the prison sentence for the index sex offence. Numbers of subjects in each ethnic subgroup were adjusted to exclude those that were ordered out of Sweden upon release from prison.

* $p < .05$. two-tailed. ** $p < .01$. two-tailed. *** $p < .001$. two-tailed.

Table II. Characteristics of 1303 Sexual Offenders Sentenced to Prison in Sweden and Released 1993–1997 Divided by Ethnic Subgroup

	Nordic ($n = 1085$)	(Non-Nordic) European ($n = 49$)	African Asian ($n = 128$)	ANOVA or χ^2 test ($df = 2$)
Risk instrument scores and release characteristics				
Mean RRASOR score (*SD*)	0.81 (0.96)	0.94 (1.09)	1.06 (0.77)	4.32*
Mean Static-99 score (*SD*)	2.36 (2.00)	2.49 (2.21)	3.05 (1.68)	6.93***
Mean offender age in years (*SD*)	42.4 (12.0)	36.6 (10.5)	32.3 (8.7)	46.85***
Homeless (%)	15	20	27	11.73**
Put on probation (%)	75	78	71	1.49
Criminological characteristics				
Any prior conviction nonsex violent offending (%)	30	16	29	4.56
Any prior conviction sex offending (%)	13	12	7	3.86
Mean age at first sex conviction in years (*SD*)	40.2 (12.4)	34.6 (10.2)	30.9 (8.1)	37.13***
Never married or cohabiting (%)	22	31	46	37.85***
Morbidity requiring inpatient care				
Any inpatient care (%)	52.4	36.7	35.9	15.97***
Any psychiatric inpatient care (%)	19.7	8.2	14.1	6.14*
Psychosis (%)	2.7	2.0	3.9	.75
Personality disorder (%)	3.6	2.0	2.3	.83
Alcohol abuse (%)	11.2	2.0	3.1	11.96**
Drug abuse (%)	4.1	0.0	2.3	3.03
Offence and victim characteristics				
Any victim under age 12 (%)	41	23	13	42.56***
Any male victim (%)	8	8	8	0.05
Any unrelated victim (%)	47	55	71	26.75***
Any stranger victim (%)	18	31	43	45.90***
Any noncontact sexual offence (%)	7	8	2	4.08
Use of weapons or death threats (%)	21	26	31	7.48*

Note. Ethnicity was based on country of citizenship at the time of imprisonment for the index sexual offence. Figures represent means with standard deviations (in brackets) for continuous variables and percent (%) of ethnic subgroup for categorical variables.
*$p < .05$, two-tailed. **$p < .01$, two-tailed. ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.

so than in Nordic citizens. There were also significant differences concerning any psychiatric care across all three subgroups, with Nordic offenders having been registered for hospital treatment most often. However, no significant differences in inpatient treatment related to severe psychiatric morbidity such as psychosis, personality disorder, or drug abuse or dependence were found across ethnic groups. Alcohol abuse or dependence related to inpatient care was equally common among European and African Asian subjects, but significantly less prevalent than among Nordic citizens.

Significant differences across ethnic subgroups were identified with respect to offender choice of child victims (under age 12). African Asian subjects followed by Europeans had more seldom sexually abused a child victim than had Nordic offenders. Similar significant patterns across offender ethnicity were found for offender–victim relatedness in the index sex offence. African sian abusers had sexually offended an unrelated victim or a stranger victim more often than had Europeans and Nordic offenders. Finally, I found a matching falling proportion (from African Asian to Nordic ethnicity) of abusers who used weapons or death threats in the index sex offence.

DISCUSSION

Based on data from an unselected national cohort of sex offenders in Sweden, sentenced to prison and released 1993–1997, this study found possible ethnic differences in the predictive validity for the RRASOR and the Static-99, two popular actuarial procedures for the assessment of sexual offender recidivism risk. The instruments proved equally accurate for the prediction of any sexual recidivism in Nordic and European sexual offenders, whereas they were not able to distinguish African Asian recidivists from nonrecidivists. The same pattern across ethnicity was also found for violent nonsexual criminal recidivism. A few sociodemographic, criminological, and psychiatric variables differed across the two ethnic minority subgroups. These differences may point at some possible mechanisms behind the variability in risk instrument performance.

An unpublished study (Nicholaichuk, 2001) addressed RRASOR and Static-99 predictive validity among Canadian native and nonnative sexual offenders. The tools were equally but moderately accurate in the prediction of sexual recidivism across ethnicity. Although developed also for that purpose, the Static-99 failed to predict violent reoffending both for native and nonnative sexual offenders. In a Canadian study of nonsexual offenders, Bonta, LaPrairie, and Wallace-Capretta (1997) compared the predictive validity of the Manitoba Risk-Needs Scale for any criminal recidivism across nonaboriginal and aboriginal subjects on probation. Aboriginal offenders had higher risk scores and recidivism rates. No clear difference in scale predictive validity was found between nonaboriginal and aboriginal subjects. However, a trend toward decreasing predictive validity was

revealed for a subgroup with less socialized aboriginal offenders that had migrated from reserves to cities. The discrepancy between the present results and those of Bonta et al. and Nicholaichuk strongly suggest that further studies of accuracy of risk assessment instruments across immigration status and ethnicity are needed.

It could be that the present finding based on sexual offenders in Sweden with African Asian citizenship is more related to factors reflective of recent immigration from distant cultures rather than to belonging to an ethnic minority per se. For example, such factors may include traumatization and acculturation problems. It is likely that most subjects of non-Nordic ethnicity either had stayed only for a short time in Sweden, or had had trouble becoming Swedish citizens. Having weak legitimate reasons for immigration (e.g., lacking family members that have already been granted permanent residence in Sweden) could be a contributing factor. African Asian sexual offenders were younger, more often single and more often homeless than were European offenders (Table II). These are reliable indicators of low social integration and weak social supports. Therefore, replications should include comparisons between first, second, or third generation minority offenders. For instance, in contrast to the first generation, the latter groups may have become increasingly socialized to the majority culture of their respective society. On the other hand, they may also have been subjected for longer periods than first generation immigrants to the potentially destructive effects of discrimination and adverse psychosocial conditions overrepresented in immigrant or minority population strata.

Hypothetically, the present findings may be the result of different risk factors or causal chains being involved in the onset of offending or recidivism risk in identified sex offenders of African or Asian ethnicity. Previous empirical studies suggest a few factors that may be involved in such differences. Murphy, DiLillo, Haynes, and Steere (2001) reported on factors related to phallometrically assessed deviant sexual arousal in juvenile sexual offenders. The most consistent predictors of physiological sexual arousal to audio cues were male gender of victim and Caucasian (as compared to African American) ethnicity. The authors suggested that confounders of the relationship between ethnicity and physiological sexual arousal such as differences in response in laboratory settings or history of sexual or physical abuse across ethnic groups might have influenced the results. However, it could also be that the relative proportions of offenders with sexuality—and aggression-motivated sexually abusive behavior varied with ethnicity.

Last, and more speculatively, sexual deviance may be a less important risk factor for sexual offending in subjects of minority ethnicity. Warheit (1994) found that racial mistrust was strongly related to self-reported willingness to engage in delinquency in three non-Caucasian ethnic groups of adolescent boys. More specifically, Kennedy and Gorzalka (2002) explored self-reported attitudes toward coercive and noncoercive sexual behavior between Asian and non-Asian university

students living in Canada. Asian students were more tolerant of rape myths and more accepting of sexual harassment. However, their tolerance for rape myths and sexual harassment decreased as length of residency in Canada increased. Consequently, lower relative contribution of deviant sexual arousal to sexual offending, more tolerance towards abusive sexual behavior, and higher racial mistrust among African Asian subjects could potentially have contributed to differences found across ethnicity in the present study.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths with the current study included the unselected total, national cohort of sexual offenders released 1993–1997 and that all risk instrument data were scored with excellent reliability by one and the same rater. In addition, offenders that had been ordered out of the country (i.e., non-Nordic citizens) and hereby lost to follow-up were excluded. In terms of weaknesses, the low base-rate of sexual reoffending in this sample would increase the variability in AUC estimates. In other words, the study power was low and some of the extremes in reported AUC estimates may have occurred by chance. There was a consistent pattern, however, across instrument and recidivism type in that AUC estimates and *r*s were indistinguishable from .50 and 0, respectively, for African Asian minority subjects. This was not the case either for individuals belonging to the European minority or for majority Nordic citizens.

Unknown ethnicity-related selection mechanisms might have affected the composition of ethnic subgroups and hence subject characteristics, for example, in terms of motivators for offending behavior. In addition, limited access to collateral informants, files, and registers reflecting adjustment and criminality before arrival to Sweden likely led to less valid data for non-Nordic citizens. However, lower data quality concerning foreign citizens should be expected to affect European and African Asian subjects equally. Nevertheless, the RRASOR and the Static-99 failed to predict recidivism only among African Asian subjects.

Subject data on all reconvictions for sexual or violent offences in Sweden after release from prison were retrieved from a nationwide database. One could assume that recidivism detection problems may have occurred specifically for non-Nordic offenders. For example, offenders with non-Nordic citizenship could voluntarily have left Sweden for other countries. A look at Table I, however, reveals that reconviction rates were essentially the same for sexual recidivism in both non-Nordic offender subgroups as compared to Nordic offenders. Registered nonsexual recidivism was even higher among African Asian subjects as compared to both European and Nordic citizens. Technically, there is no obvious reason why there should be a larger detection problem with African Asian than with European subjects.

CONCLUSION

When contrasted against previous reports, the present findings suggest that the issue of possible differential predictive validity of risk assessment instruments across ethnicity or migration status cannot yet be settled. Consequently, some caution is advisable in the use of actuarial risk assessment instruments with offenders who are recent immigrants or of minority ethnicity relative to majority populations in North American and European nations. If the results can be replicated, mechanisms behind differences in the accuracy of risk factor indices across ethnicity merit systematic study.

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