

A Meta-Analysis of Public Attitudes toward Ex-Offenders

Candelyn B. Rade, Sarah L. Desmarais,
& Roger Mitchell

North Carolina State University

Barriers to Reentry

- Adults reentering the community face barriers to successful reintegration
 - Examples: housing, employment
- Negative public attitudes partially contribute to reentry barriers (e.g., Wakefield & Uggen, 2010)
- Sex offenders among most discriminated against ex-offender subgroup (Viki et al., 2012)

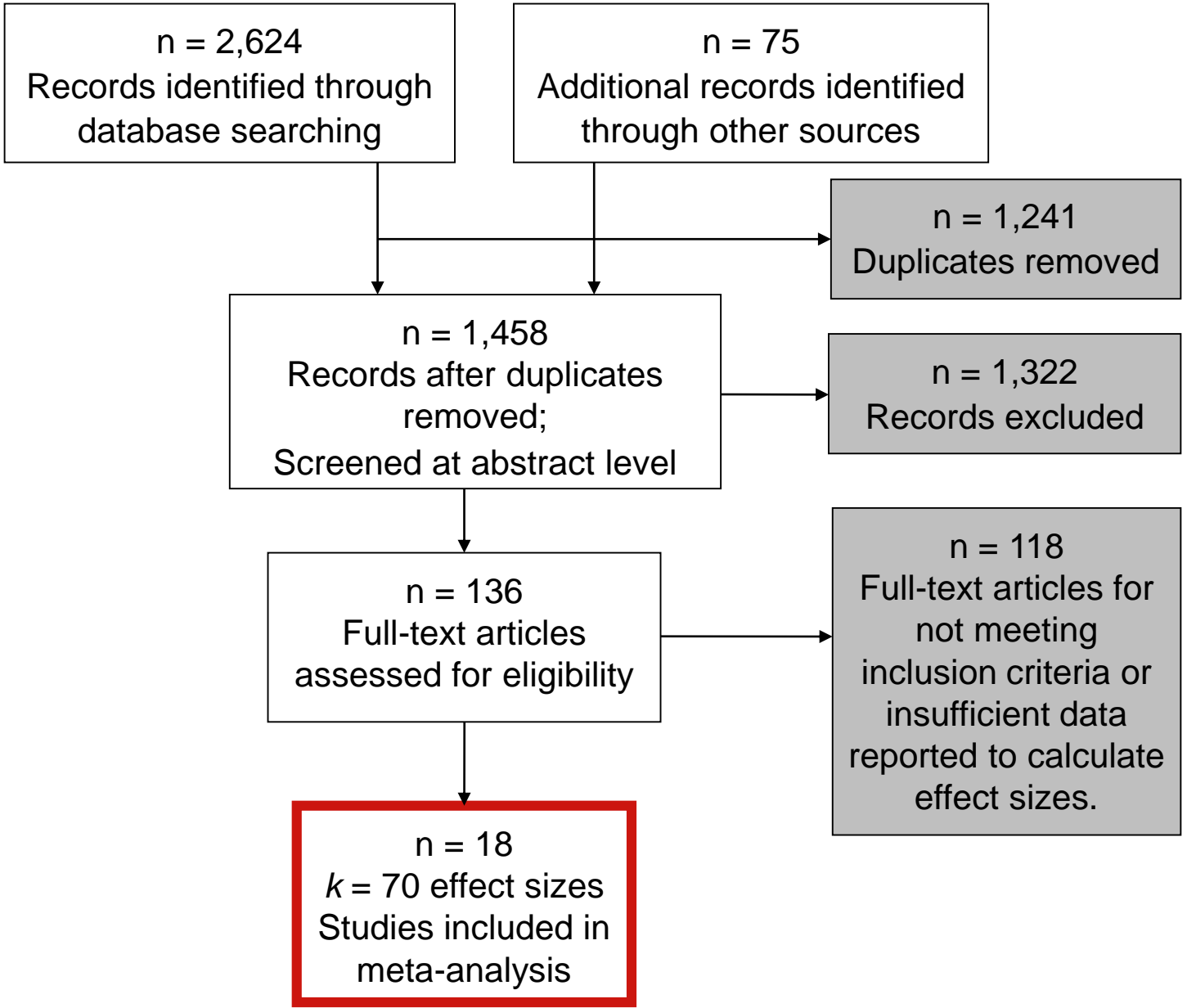
Research on Public Attitudes

- Prior research often assesses attitudes:
 - toward other groups (e.g., current offenders)
 - held by other populations (e.g., prison staff)
- Correlates:
 - Public characteristics
 - Ex-offender characteristics
 - Community characteristics
- Potential moderators:
 - Sexual offense history
 - Study characteristics

The Present Study

- Variability in methods and findings regarding
 - Inconsistent operationalization & measurement
 - Contradictory results
- Meta-analysis to synthesize extant literature on correlates and moderators of public attitudes toward ex-offenders

Identification
Screening
Eligibility
Included



Correlates

- Public Characteristics
 - Sex
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Education
 - Religious Beliefs
 - Political Affiliation
 - Age
 - Income
- Ex-offender Characteristics
 - Violent/Non-violent Offense
 - Sexual/Nonsexual Offense
 - Felony/Misdemeanor
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Rehabilitation Participation
 - Mental Illness Diagnosis
- Community Characteristics
 - Community Size
 - Crime Prevalence

Moderator Variables

- Sexual offense history (Sexual offense history = 1)
- Potentially biasing study characteristics
 - Publication type (peer-reviewed = 1)
 - Study methodology (representative sampling = 1)
 - Year of publication (before enactment of the US Federal Prisoner Reentry Initiative of 2009 = 1)

Outcome Variables

- Public attitudes toward ex-offenders in the community
 - Includes: stigma, punitiveness, social distance, general attitudes
 - Excludes: attitudes toward currently incarcerated offenders, capital punishment, sentencing, jury decisions, etc.

Data Analysis

- Inter-rater reliability
- Random-effects model (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015)
- Sample weighted effect sizes (r_w)
- Artifact corrections
 - Public Education ($k = 6$)
 - Public Age ($k = 2$)
 - Public Income ($k = 5$)
- Subset moderation approach

Study Characteristics

- Total sample size = 9,225
 - *Median* = 359, *Range* = 42 – 2,282
- Studies were conducted between 1996–2012
- Majority of studies:
 - Conducted in the U.S. ($n = 15$, 83.3%)
 - Representative sampling methods ($n = 11$, 61.1%)
 - Produced after 2009 ($n=12$, 66.7%)
 - Attitudes toward sex offenders ($n = 15$, 83.3%)

Correlates

- Public characteristics
 - Politically ideology ($\bar{r}_w = -0.12$, 95%CI = -0.18, -0.04)
 - Interpersonal contact ($\bar{r}_w = -0.18$, 95%CI = -0.22, -0.13)
- Ex-offender characteristics
 - Sexual offense history ($\bar{r}_w = -0.19$, 95%CI = -0.26, -0.12)

Moderators

- Sexual offense history*
 - More similar attitudes toward ex-offenders with sexual offense histories
- Potentially biasing study characteristics
 - Publication bias*
 - Methodology*
 - Year of Publication
 - More similar attitudes after enactment of the Federal Prisoner Reentry Initiative of 2009

* Indicates that moderation analyses did not reach significance.

Limitations

- Few studies met inclusion criteria
- Studies included regardless of methodological rigor
- Operationalization and measurement of negative attitudes varied across studies
- Insufficient data to assess many characteristics

Conclusions

- Research of infrequently studied correlates
 - Examples: rehabilitation participation, attitudes of peers, local legislation
- Policy changes have the potential to influence public opinion
- Translation of findings into practice
 - Tailor strategies by offender history
 - Interventions based on contact theory

Acknowledgments

- Funding
 - NC State University Psychology Emeritus Fund
- Research Assistants
 - Jordan Gregory, Mirela Scott, and Brittanie Moore
- Methodological Advisor
 - Dr. Mark Wilson
- Provision of additional data by
 - Drs. Sarah Brown, Keri Burchfield, Erin Comartin, Paul Hirschfield, Jill Levenson, Christina Mancini, Devah Pager, David Perkins, Alex Piquero, Joshua Raines, and Gwenda Willis

Thank you!

Contact information:

Candelyn B. Rade, MS

Email: cbrade@ncsu.edu

Lab Website: ncsuforensicpsychology.com

Lab Facebook: facebook.com/fopsypi