



Housing Barriers for Sex Offenders

At a Glance

Individuals with a criminal record often find it difficult to secure suitable housing. That is especially so when a sex offense is part of that record. Some of the barriers to finding housing are due to property managers and landlords having rules against renting to anyone who has a past sex offense adjudication or is on the sex offender registry. Social stigma due to genuine concerns, misconceptions, and negative feelings towards people who have offended also plays a part. As a consequence, there is a serious lack of appropriate housing options for individuals with a sex offense conviction or adjudication in their history.

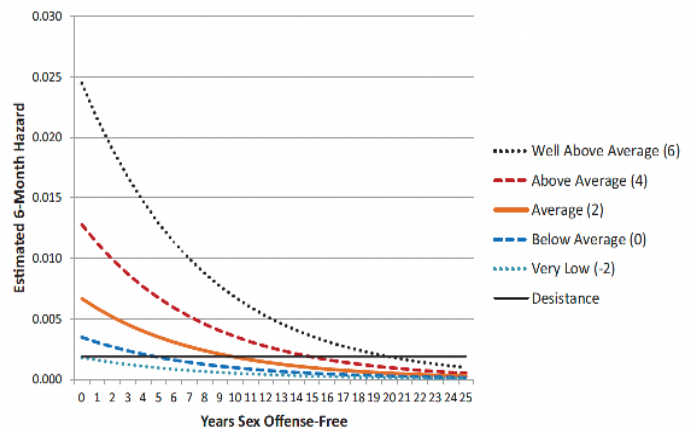
Housing instability is a public safety concern as it creates barriers to employment, community stability, and developing positive social networks and support systems. Research indicates these factors are all important influences in building a positive and safe life. Housing instability also makes it harder for Parole and Probation Officers to provide supervision and monitoring, and often times makes it harder for individuals to consistently attend their treatment programs. When someone with a sex offense history is unsuccessful in their reintegration into society, the whole community pays the cost.

5 Facts

01 The term “sex offender” is a catch-all label for any individual who has been convicted or adjudicated of one or more crimes of a sexual nature. It includes individuals who have contact and non-contact sex crimes, in-person or online offending, and who have offended one or multiple times. It applies to people whose offense involved a child or teenager, or an adult, or in some instances no identifiable victim. In this way, it is a broad term that is applied to a wide range of offenses. It tends to characterize all individuals who have committed a sex offense as the same when research shows there are important differences between individuals.

02 The likelihood an individual with a sex offense conviction or adjudication will commit another sex crime varies widely. Many years of research have consistently shown that the large majority of persons convicted or adjudicated are never arrested or convicted of another sex crime. In fact, almost all females and juveniles, and many adult males are low risk. Indeed it is more likely that an individual with a sex offense will be convicted of a future non-sexual offense than another sex crime. Research also shows that over half are never reconvicted of anything again. In general, as a group, people with a sex crime conviction or adjudication pose a lower risk of reoffending than others in the criminal justice system.

Risk levels group individuals by their *relative* likelihood of reoffending. Risk can be lowered with treatment, supervision, and time living in the community successfully. Housing stability is an important ingredient in this process.



Hanson et al. (2018). Reductions in risk based on time offense-free in the community: Once a sexual offender, not always a sexual offender. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(1), 48-63.

The curved lines show how reoffending varies by risk level and decreases the longer an individual lives successfully in the community. The hazard rate is the proportion of adult males at that level who reoffend in each 6-month period. The desistance line shows very low risk. One purpose of using risk labels is so resources can be assigned to reduce and manage risk where there is relatively more need.

Produced by the
Sex Offender Management Board
Division of Criminal Justice
CO Department of Public Safety



Research found taking part in treatment reduced sex reoffending by a third over the next 5 years.

Gannon et al. (2019). Does specialized psychological treatment for offending reduce recidivism? A meta-analysis examining staff and program variables as predictors of treatment effectiveness. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 73, Article 101752.

Housing stability is a protective factor that is associated with lower rates of sex reoffending.

Nolan et al. (2022). Attending to the positive: A retrospective validation of the Structured Assessment of Protective Factors-Sex Offense Version. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment*, 0, 1-20.

The vast majority of sex crimes happen in social-relationship contexts. Research with large groups shows place of residence is not a big factor.

Locations	%
Shared residence	17%
Victim's home	15%
Have always been acquainted	15%
Offender's home	10%
Acquaintance or relative's home	10%
Neighborhood	6%
Street	6%
Workplace	3%
School	2%
Apartment building	2%

Colombina et al. (2011). Preventing sexual violence: Can examination of offense location inform sex crime policy? *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry*, 34, 160-167.

03 A small proportion of individuals with a history of sex offending do pose a higher risk and go on to be repeat offenders. Many years of research have led to reliable ways to assess risk and use categories that show a person's relative risk level. In this way, those with more risk factors are identified as higher risk than those with less risk factors. In Colorado, the Sexually Violent Predator (SVP) classification is applied to the group of individuals who have more risk factors. Risk assessment is a core part of the work that happens when any individual with a sex offense conviction or adjudication is on parole or probation. The level of supervision and services a person gets is matched to the level of risk they present.

04 Treatment programs for sexual offending and related problems like substance abuse have been evolving for decades. In Colorado, programs are required by law to be evidence-based. Research has shown that comprehensive programs that target risk factors are effective and lower risk, especially when treatment is completed. Safety planning is an important part of treatment, as is developing positive activities like work and hobbies. Having stable and appropriate housing makes treatment easier and more effective. It allows the person to focus on the areas of their life that were problematic.

05 As part of community safety, researchers have studied the relationship between place of residence and sexual reoffending. Overwhelmingly, this research has shown that residential proximity to places such as playgrounds or schools is not a big factor in repeat sex offending. Instead, the vast majority of repeat sex crimes happen in social-relationship contexts where the perpetrator knows the victim. Having appropriate housing is one way of helping individuals with a sex offense history establish a positive lifestyle that reduces risky situations.

Ways Forward

When a person with a past sex offense conviction or adjudication seeks housing, there are several ways to make this a safe option for that person and those living nearby. Parole and Probation Officers are routinely involved in checking the suitability of housing choices and know how well an individual is doing in treatment. Parole and Probation work with the person to support living successfully in the community. When someone is a registered sex offender not currently under direct supervision by Parole or Probation, law enforcement has a role in address verification and compliance. Together, this network works to identify appropriate options and address potential concerns. Ask the person who is seeking accommodation about their involvement in treatment (present or past) and their safety plan to ensure you are satisfied. Ask to follow up with the individual's professional network to be satisfied or inquire further about suitability.

Being willing to give a suitable housing option, is part of the solution to creating safer communities.

Bibliography of Relevant Research

Hanson, R. K., Harris, A. J. R., Letourneau, E., Helmus, L. M., & Thornton, D. (2018). Reductions in risk based on time offense-free in the community: Once a sexual offender, not always a sexual offender. *Psychology, Public Policy, & Law*, 24, 48-63.

This research examined sexual reoffending in a large group of men (>7,000). The overall recidivism rate was 9% at 5 years, 13% at 10 years, 16% at 15 years, 18% at 20 years, and 18% at 25 years. **However, the rate varied by risk level.** At 5 years in the community, the rate was <2% for very low, <4% for below average, <8% for average, 15% for above average, and 28% for well above average risk. Each year lived successfully in the community, the likelihood of sexually reoffending decreased.

Gannon, T. A., Olver, M. A., Mallion, J. S., & James, M. (2019). Does specialized psychological treatment for offending reduce recidivism? A meta-analysis examining staff and program variables as predictors of treatment effectiveness. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 73, 101752.

This research examined the effectiveness of sex offense-specific treatment by analyzing the findings of a large number of treatment studies. **The results showed sex offense treatment had a positive effect** and reduced sexual reoffending by 5% over 5 years in the community (which translated to a third less sexual reoffending overall by those who went to treatment). Sex offense-specific treatment also had a positive effect on other types of reoffending.

Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS), Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB). (2004). *Report on safety issues raised by living arrangements for and location of sex offenders in the community.* Author.

This research examined the living arrangements of individuals with a history of sex offending in the Denver metropolitan area. The results showed multiple types of living arrangements were associated with an absence of further offending and that **shared living arrangements were suitable for individuals with higher-risk classification.** There was **no association between proximity to child centers and reoffending rates.** Overall, the results indicated that a positive support system was associated with significantly fewer criminal and technical violations.

Zanderbergen, P. A., Levenson, J. S., & Hart, T. C. (2010). Residential proximity to schools and daycare: An empirical analysis of sex offense recidivism. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 35(5), 482-502.

This research examined the relationship between sex crime reoffending and residential proximity to places where children congregate. The results showed **no relationship between distance living from daycares or schools and reoffending.**

Evans, D. N. & Porter, J. R. (2015). Criminal history and landlord rental decisions: A New York quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 11, 21-42.

This study tested whether having a criminal conviction affected landlords' decisions to consider prospective tenants. The results showed that **landlords were substantially less willing to consider prospective tenants with a criminal conviction than without a criminal conviction. This was especially so when the conviction involved a child sex offense.**

Colombino, N., Mercado, C. C., Levenson, J., & Jeglic, E. (2011). Preventing sexual violence: Can examination of offense location inform sex crime policy? *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry*, 34, 160-167.

This research examined where individuals convicted of sex offending first came into contact with their victims. The results showed that **2/3rds met their victims in a residence and < 5% first encountered their victim in a public location where children congregate.** Broken down by offense types, those who offended against children were more likely to meet victims within a residence (75%), while those who offended against adults were more likely to first meet their victims in a public setting (such as a bar, hotel, house party, parking lot, store etc.).

Socia, K. M., Levenson, J. S., Ackerman, A. R., & Harris, A. J. (2015). "Brothers under the bridge": Factors influencing the transience of registered sex offenders in Florida. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 27(6), 559-586.

This research examined factors that influenced the extent individuals on the sex offender registry were transient. The research showed that residential restriction laws, high population density, and **low housing affordability contributed to transience.** In addition, those who were younger, minority ethnicity, offended against adults, not under supervision, and who failed to register were more likely to be transient.

Socia, K. M. (2013) "Too close for comfort? Registered sex offender spatial clustering and recidivistic sex crime arrest rates." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 25(6), 531-556.

This research examined whether living in closer proximity to others on the sex offender registry led to greater sexual reoffending. **Higher residential proximity (clustering) was not associated with sexual reoffending against children but there was a possible influence on reoffending against adults.** Possible reasons were that clustering occurs in at-risk communities, overwhelms social controls against further offending, or leads to greater negative peer associations that reinforce offending.

Willis, G. M., Kelley, S. M., & Thornton, D. (2020). Are protective factors valid constructs? Interrater reliability and construct validity of proposed protective factors against sexual reoffending. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 47(11), 1448-1467.

This research examined the reliability and relevance of a protective factors assessment tool (Structured Assessment of PROtective Factors for violence risk: Sexual Offense version; SARPOF-SO). **One of the domains is STABILITY which includes items that assess housing stability and financial management.** Analyses supported this being a reliable and valid instrument relevant to understanding successful reintegration.

McCarten, K. F. & Richards, K. (2021). The integration of people convicted of a sexual offense into the community and their (risk) management. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 23 (52).

This article reviewed the community reintegration of men convicted of a sexual offense and concluded **community reintegration should be viewed from a multi-disciplinary, life-course, approach that focuses on harm reduction and building a life that supports lawful and positive choices.**