

CoSA in Vermont: Quantitative Outcomes and Qualitative Understandings

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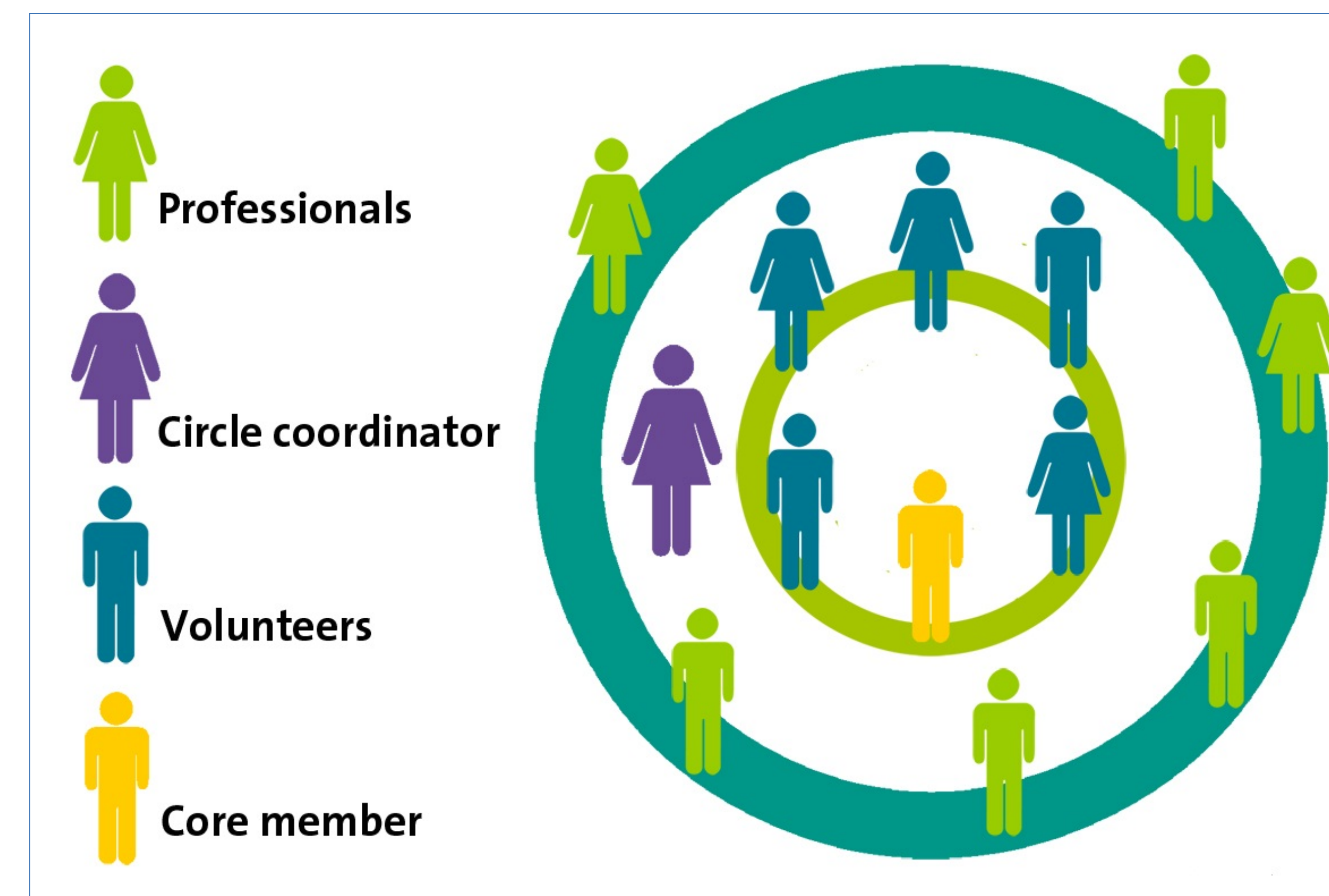
ABSTRACT

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) have been used to increase post-release reintegration potential for high-risk/need sexual offenders returning to the community for more than 20 years. In spite of methodological difficulties associated with evaluating citizen-led interventions, available evidence (Canada, UK, USA) has consistently demonstrated that offenders in a CoSA are less likely to experience post-release difficulties than matched comparison subjects who do not participate. Qualitative investigations (the Netherlands, New Zealand, USA) have recently started to unpack the sociology and psychology of CoSA, to the extent that we now have a better understanding of the social and clinical aspects of participation in the model. This poster will outline new findings from Vermont demonstrating the utility of the CoSA model, both in terms of reductions in recidivism for sexual, violent, and general offenders and the development of a unique community based network of services seeking to promote restoration.

Background Information

Vermont represents a very interesting criminal justice environment; especially in the community. Vermont is one of the only international jurisdictions with restorative justice written into its Statutes. The result has been a wonderful partnership between a government and its citizens, in which a network of Community Justice Centers (CJCs) has been established to assist in the post-release management of persons involved in the criminal justice system. This partnership was a natural breeding ground for endeavors like CoSA, and Circles have been in existence in VT for more than a dozen years. As in other CoSA applications, it has been clear that the human relationships have been the active ingredient.

Interestingly, VT has not confined its CoSA work to high-risk/need sexual offenders, but has also used the approach with drug offenders, persons engaging in general violence, and other serious offenders. To our knowledge, this is the first broad application of the CoSA model. At this point, our evaluation of CoSA in VT is preliminary; particularly because of short follow-up times (e.g., < 3years).



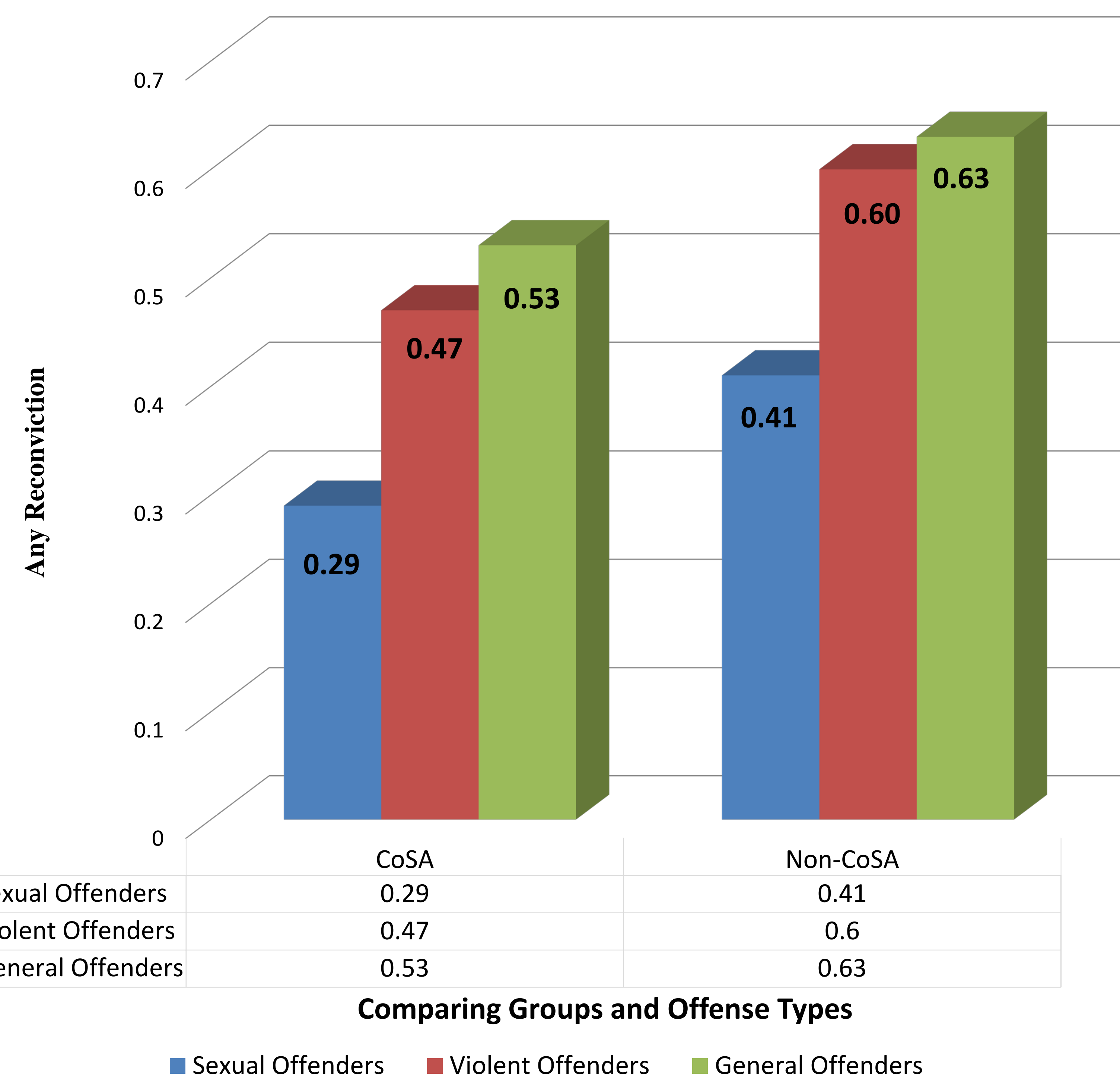
N=260 (130 each group)	CoSA	No CoSA
% Reconvicted*	.45	.56
% Misdemeanors	.39	.44
% Felonies**	.18	.35
Mean # (SD) of reconvictions**	1.41 (2.37)	2.47 (3.60)
Mean # (SD) of Misdemeanor Convictions*	1.10 (2.01)	1.73 (2.93)
Mean # (SD) of felony reconvictions**	.31 (.77)	.73 (1.32)

Total Sample Original Crime	% reconvicted*	% reconvicted Misdemeanors*	% reconvicted for felonies
Sexual N=68	.35	.28	.22
Violent N=94	.53	.44	.27
General N=98	.58	.49	.31

CoSA Group Original Crime	% reconvicted	% reconvicted misdemeanors	% reconvicted felonies
Sexual N=34	.29	.24	.18
Violent N=47	.47	.40	.17
General N=49	.53	.49	.20

Non-CoSA Group Original Crime	% reconvicted	% reconvicted misdemeanors	% reconvicted felonies
Sexual N=34	.41	.32	.27
Violent N=47	.60	.47	.36
General N=49	.63	.49	.41

Variable	CoSA N=130	Comparison N=130
Male/Female	109/21	109/21
Age (SD)	30.89 (8.87)	30.52 (8.46)
M Difference (SD) = 2.01 (2.41)		
Education (SD)	11.80 (1.81) N=125	11.61 (1.92) N=123
LSI-R (SD)	29.97 (7.59)	29.97 (7.59)
Static-99R (SD)	3.18 (2.02) N=34	3.00 (1.69) N=34
Offense Type (non-overlapping)	Sex = 34 Violent = 47 General = 49	Sex = 34 Violent = 47 General = 49
Time at Risk in Years (SD)***	3.83 (2.42)	2.82 (2.34)
Time Until Failure in Years (SD)***	2.21 (1.49)	1.16 (1.20)



Matching Process and Variables

CoSA is theoretically available to all offenders released by the VT-DOC; however, not all will take advantage of that reality. Identical LSI-R score, crime type, age, education, release date; those whose crime was sexual were also matched by Static-99R.

Discussion

CoSA has been a post-release option in Vermont for more than 10 years. It is now an integral part of the restorative justice landscape that thrives in the state. Discussions with participants highlight the relationship development and reciprocity as being important elements

CoSA evaluations have been conducted in Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Although more results are required to state with certainty that CoSA is achieving its goal, the findings have been consistent that persons in CoSA reoffend less often than comparison subjects not in a CoSA. In this study, we found a consistent tendency for CoSA participants to do better in the community than their matched comparison peers. Further investigations are ongoing regarding this unique application of the CoSA Model.