

# Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN), and Residence Restrictions

## Introduction

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# Scope of the Problem

- Perpetrators of sex crimes are viewed as a unique group of offenders in need of special management practices
  - Sex offenders in state prisons increased in number from about 113,000 in 2001 to more than 165,000 in 2011
  - 859,500 registered sex offenders in the U.S. in 2016
- Growing recognition that crime control strategies – including those targeting sexual offenders – are more likely to be effective when they are based on scientific evidence

# U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Role in Combatting Sexual Offending and Victimization

- Since 1996, OJP has sponsored more than 100 research projects, publications, and training curricula related to sexual assault and sex offender management
- Grant programs have provided funds to approximately 200 state, local, and tribal jurisdictions to enhance sex offender management
- Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART) Office established in 2006
  - Provides assistance to criminal justice professionals around the entire spectrum of sex offender management activities

# SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

- Goal is to identify research supported programs for replication across the U.S.
  - Inform OJP funding decisions concerning sex offender programming and research
- Assess the state of research and practice in sex offender management
  - Work conducted by subject-matter experts through NCJA
- Review of the literature on sexual offending and sex offender management
- National inventory of sex offender management professionals
- 2012 Discussion Forum involving national experts

# SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

- Literature reviews on 8 adult and 5 juvenile topics
  - Important to distinguish between adults and juveniles

## Juvenile Topics

Etiology/typologies  
Risk assessment  
Recidivism  
Treatment effectiveness  
Registration and notification

## Adult Topics

Incidence and prevalence  
Etiology  
Typologies  
Risk assessment  
Recidivism  
Internet offending  
Treatment effectiveness  
Management strategies

# SMART Office Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative

- Key products
  - Summaries of the research available on-line:  
<http://www.smart.gov/SOMAPI/index.html>
  - Findings, policy implications, future research needs
  - Research briefs
  - Targeted conference presentations
  - Webinars

# Literature Review Methods

- Source materials identified using abstract databases, internet searches, outreach to relevant organizations and subject matter experts
- Primarily studies conducted within the past 15 years
- Emphasis on individual studies that employed scientifically rigorous methods, as well as on synthesis studies – such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses

# SORN for Adults Convicted for Sexual Offenses

Summary of Research  
Findings

# Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN)

- 1930s - repeat criminal offenders including sex offenders
- 1947 – California – first state registry
- 1990 – Washington – first state notification
- Federal laws (Wetterling, Megan's Law, Adam Walsh Act)

# SORN

- Goals – reoffense deterrence, investigative tool, and public protection<sup>26</sup>
- No research prior to implementation
- Has been studied since that time

# Adult SORN Research

- Research to date mixed on SORN effectiveness
- Some studies demonstrate no reduction in sex crime rate based on SORN<sup>27</sup>
- Others show reductions<sup>28</sup>

# Adult SORN Research

- Most studies demonstrate no reduction in sex reoffense based on SORN<sup>29</sup>
- A few show reductions<sup>30</sup>
- Failure to register doesn't impact reoffense<sup>31</sup>

# Adult SORN Surveys

- Public believes SORN beneficial<sup>32</sup>
- Impact on sex offenders (physical assault or injury, property damage, threatened or harassed, job loss, loss of housing, a family member or roommate being harassed or assaulted, negative psychological consequences)<sup>33</sup>

## Adult SORN Notes

<sup>26</sup> Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) (1999).

<sup>27</sup> Holmes (Didwania) (2009; revised 2012); Walker, Maddan, Vasquez, VanHouten, & Ervin-McLarty (2006).

<sup>28</sup> Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Armstrong, & Sinha (2010); Prescott & Rockoff (2008).

<sup>29</sup> Adkins, Huff, & Stageberg (2000); Freeman (2012); Letourneau, Bandyopadhyay, Sinha, & Armstrong (2010); Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Sinha, & Armstrong (2010); Sandler, Freeman, & Socia (2008); Schram & Milloy (1995); Zgoba & Bachar (2009); Zevitz (2006).

## Adult SORN Notes

<sup>30</sup> Duwe & Donnay (2008); Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2005)

<sup>31</sup> Duwe & Donnay (2010); Levenson, Letourneau, Armstrong, & Zgoba (2009); Zgoba & Levenson (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Anderson & Sample (2008); Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker (2007); Lieb & Nunlist (2008); Phillips (1998); Zevitz & Farkas (2000).

<sup>33</sup> Lasher & McGrath (2012)

# Residence Restrictions

Summary of Research  
Findings

# Residence Restrictions

- Limit where sex offenders can live (schools, daycare centers, parks, etc.)
- 1995 – Delaware and Florida adopt
- 30 states; multiple municipalities<sup>34</sup>
- No research prior to implementation
- Has been studied since that time

# Residence Restriction Research

- No reduction in sexual reoffense<sup>35</sup>
- No reduction in sex crime rate<sup>36</sup>
- No deterrence for sexual reoffenses<sup>37</sup>
- Most offenders meet victims (not strangers) in private residence<sup>38</sup>

# Residence Restriction Surveys

- Offenders report having to move, limited housing options, increased homelessness, loss of family support, & family hardship<sup>39</sup>

## Residence Restrictions Notes

<sup>34</sup> Meloy, Miller, & Curtis (2008).

<sup>35</sup> Colorado Department of Public Safety (2004); Nobles, Levenson, & Youstin (2012); Socia (2012); Zandbergen, P.A., Levenson, J.S., & Hart, T. (2010).

<sup>36</sup> Blood, Watson, & Stageberg (2008); Socia (2012).

<sup>37</sup> Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury (2008).

<sup>38</sup> Colombino, Mercado, & Jeglic (2009).

<sup>39</sup> Barnes, Dukes, Tewksbury, & De Troye (2009); Chajewski & Mercado (2008); Levenson (2008); Levenson & Cotter (2005b); Tewksbury & Zgoba (2010).

# SORN, and Residence Restrictions

Research Limitations and  
Future Needs

# Research Limitations

- Small # of studies
- Small sample sizes
- Under-reporting of sex crimes
- Low base rate for recidivism
- Lack of generalizability
- Short timeframes
- Retrospective rather than prospective

# Survey Limitations

- Small response rates and sample sizes
- Self-selection bias
- Lack of corroboration of offender self-report

# Research Needs

- Research using rigorous scientific methods be encouraged & supported
- Comparison studies with longer follow up periods
- Larger sample sizes to overcome low base rate issue
- Identify program components leading to positive results

# SORN, and Residence Restrictions

Conclusions and Policy  
Implications

# Conclusions

- More research is needed on SORN
  - Has broad community support
- Residence restrictions don't appear to be effective; not recommended for use
- Positive impact of strategies reliant upon RNR approach (not 1 size fits all)
- Policies should be evidence-based; allow for innovation and study