

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 protection²⁶
- 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 SORN²⁷
- Others show reductions²⁸

Adult SORN Research

- Most studies demonstrate no reduction in sex reoffense based on SORN²⁹
- A few show reductions³⁰
- Failure to register doesn't impact reoffense³¹

Adult SORN Surveys

- Public believes SORN beneficial³²
- 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)³³

Adult SORN Notes

²⁶ Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) (1999).

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

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

²⁹ 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

³⁰ Duwe & Donnay (2008); Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2005)

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

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

³³ 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 municipalities³⁴
- No research prior to implementation
- Has been studied since that time

Residence Restriction Research

- No reduction in sexual reoffense³⁵
- No reduction in sex crime rate³⁶
- No deterrence for sexual reoffenses³⁷
- Most offenders meet victims (not strangers) in private residence³⁸

Residence Restriction Surveys

- Offenders report having to move, limited housing options, increased homelessness, loss of family support, & family hardship³⁹

Residence Restrictions Notes

³⁴ Meloy, Miller, & Curtis (2008).

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

³⁶ Blood, Watson, & Stageberg (2008); Socia (2012).

³⁷ Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury (2008).

³⁸ Colombino, Mercado, & Jeglic (2009).

³⁹ 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