

The Social and Psychological Impact of Sex Offender Community Notification on the
Residents of Phoenix, Arizona

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the mid-1990s Congress enacted legislation designed to protect the public from sex offenders who were released from corrections into the community. The depraved nature of the crimes committed by these types of offenders, and the subsequent public demand that something be done, evoked a legislative response. The new laws required sex offenders to register with law enforcement, and mandated that law enforcement, in turn, notify communities when sex offenders were being released into their neighborhoods. It was believed that awareness that a sex offender was living in their midst would allow residents to take precautions necessary to protect themselves and their families.

To assess whether notification enhanced residents' perceptions of their safety, or influenced their decisions concerning how they would protect themselves, a survey of citizens residing in Phoenix, Arizona was conducted (Katz and Webb, 2006). Five designated geographical areas were categorized based upon the number of sex offenders living within area boundaries. Study areas were characterized as: low, which contained no sex offenders; medium, which contained one to three sex offenders; high, which contained four or more sex offenders; and "transitional" and Tampico, each of which contained a concentration of sex offenders that exceeded that found in the high area. The present study examines the social and psychological impact that notification had on citizens living in these five areas. Survey respondents were asked whether notification had affected their safety consciousness, their likelihood of going out alone, and their level of community involvement.

Results indicate that community notification increased the overall safety

consciousness of neighborhood residents and decreased their likelihood of going out alone. Statistical analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between the number of sex offenders living in the respondents' neighborhoods and their level of participation in community activities that "focused on improving neighborhood safety" (Katz and Webb, 2006, p.19).

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990's, public outcry demanded a criminal justice response to the cruel, heinous and depraved nature of several high profile sex offenses in which children were victimized (Chaiken, 1998; Levenson and Cotter, 2005). In 1994, to address the public's concern, federal legislation was enacted requiring convicted sex offenders to register with local law enforcement. The intent of this legislation was to prevent additional sex offending, and to assist law enforcement by providing a ready list of possible suspects in the investigation of other sex offenses. While registration laws had existed in many states as early as 1947 (Matson and Lieb, 1997; Lockyer, 2002; Beck and Travis, 2004), this was the federal government's first attempt to ensure that all states address what many deemed a sex crimes epidemic. In 1996, Congress enacted additional legislation aimed at sex offenders, mandating that law enforcement implement a program to notify the public when sex offenders at risk of re-offending were released into the community. The legislation was based on the belief that increased public awareness of the residential location of sex offenders would enable nearby residents and their families to engage in self-protective measures against known sex offenders (Zimring, 2004).

The purpose of this policy paper is to examine the social and psychological impact of sex offender notification on neighborhood residents. Specifically, it will examine the effect of community notification on residents' safety consciousness, on their decision to go out alone, and on their involvement in community activities. Data for the present study come from a recently completed telephone survey of Phoenix, Arizona residents (Katz and Webb, 2006). The next section reviews the relevant literature regarding sex offender notification in the United States, beginning with a brief discussion

of the development of legislation enacted to address the sex offender problem. The literature review is followed by a description of the present study, including the methods and data used for this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SEX OFFENDER LEGISLATION

The need for a Congressional response to the sex offender problem was evidenced by an increase of 330% in the number of sex offenders held in state prisons between 1980 and 1994 (BJS, 1997), compared to a 14.4 % increase in the general U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The following quote from the 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistics report entitled "Sex Offenses and Offenders" is further evidence of the magnitude of the problem: "On a given day there are approximately 234,000 offenders convicted of rape or sexual assault under the care, custody, or control of corrections agencies; nearly 60% of these sex offenders are under conditional supervision in the community" (p.15). In Arizona, between 1988 and 1998, there was an average of 244 sex offenders released per year from the Department of Corrections (AZ Department of Corrections, 1998). In 2005, 808 registered sex offenders were released into Arizona communities (N. M. Studer, personal communication, August 14, 2006). Over the past twelve years, federal legislation has been enacted to address the perceived danger that occurs when sex offenders are placed in the community.

In 1994 Congress approved the "Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Act." Jacob Wetterling was an eleven-year-old Minnesota boy who was abducted in 1989 and has not since been seen. Only after the abduction did law enforcement officials learn that half-way houses near the scene of the abduction

housed sex offenders who had been released from prison. The Jacob Wetterling Act mandated the following: 1) released sex offenders must register with law enforcement; 2) offenders convicted of crimes against children must provide their current address to law enforcement on an annual basis; and 3) those predators deemed sexually violent must register for life and verify their address quarterly (Washington State Institute of Public Policy, 1996).

In 1996, in a continuing effort to combat sex offenders, Congress passed the federal version of Megan's Law which required states to establish a community notification process when sex offenders were released from prison or placed on probation. Megan's Law was the state of New Jersey's legislative mandate for community notification in response to the brutal rape and murder of seven-year-old Megan Kanka, victimized by a twice-convicted pedophile that lived across the street. In his remarks upon signing the bill, President Clinton affirmed that "we respect people's rights, but today America proclaims there is no greater right than a parent's right to raise a child in safety and love. Today America warns: If you dare to prey on our children, the law will follow you wherever you go, State to State, town to town" (Clinton, 1996, p.878).

Also in 1996, the "Pam Lyncher Sexual Offender Tracking and Identification Act" was signed into law. Pam Lyncher, a Houston real estate agent, was assaulted by a twice-convicted felon who was waiting for her at a house she was about to show. The Lyncher Act directed the Attorney General to establish a national sex offender database at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and required the FBI to handle registration and notification in states that could not establish a minimally-sufficient program. The

law mandated that states require lifetime registration for offenders convicted of specific sex crimes, and required that states provide the FBI with updated information related to sex offenders living within their jurisdictions (Sorkin, 1998).

The impact of the above legislation is still unknown; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that it has not significantly mitigated the problem. It is reported that there are currently more than 550,000 registered sex offenders in the United States, with the whereabouts of at least 100,000 unknown (Associated Press, 2006). On July 27, 2006, the 25th anniversary of the abduction and death of six-year-old Adam Walsh, President Bush signed into law the “Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006” (GovTrack, 2006). It is the most recent legislation designed to register, track, and control sex offenders in the community, and is intended to further protect children from sexual exploitation and violent crime. Among the initiatives contained in the legislation are: 1) creation of a comprehensive national system for registration of sex offenders; 2) establishment of a three-tiered, risk-based sex offender classification system; 3) a requirement that all jurisdictions enact criminal penalties for sex offenders who fail to comply with registration guidelines; 4) a mandate to sex offenders that they must appear in person to register, and to update their information in the jurisdiction where they live, work, and attend school; 5) imposition of a fine and/or up to a ten-year term of imprisonment for sex offenders who knowingly fail to register; 6) a requirement that registration as a sex offender be a mandatory condition of probation and supervised release; 7) elimination of the statute of limitations for prosecutions of child abduction and felony sex offenses against children; and 8) direction to the Attorney General to provide

technical assistance to jurisdictions to help identify and locate sex offenders who are relocated due to a major disaster (H.R. 4472, 2006).

In Arizona, a sex offender registration statute was first enacted in 1951 (AZ Code Annotated 1939, 1952), repealed in 1978 (AZ Revised Statutes Annotated 1956, 1978) and placed back on the books in 1983 (AZ Revised Statutes Annotated 1985, 1985). In compliance with federal requirements, Arizona enacted a community notification statute that became effective June 1, 1996. Prior to passage of the statute, arguments for and against sex offender notification were heard before the Arizona Senate's Committee on the Judiciary. Speaking in favor of the law, a representative of the Arizona Department of Corrections argued that Megan's Law should pass so that "individuals and families can best determine how to protect themselves from becoming potential victims," while also suggesting that the law would "strengthen the ability of law enforcement to identify, monitor, and track the movement of convicted sex offenders throughout Arizona communities" (Hughes, 1996, p.4). A private citizen opposing the legislation stated that notification was a violation of the offender's civil rights, noting that murderers, drug traffickers and those convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs were not subject to community notification (AZ Senate Committee on Judiciary, 1996).

SEX OFFENDERS AND RECIDIVISM

Contributing to the belief that registration and notification legislation might be effective is "the common perception that sex offenders pose a higher risk of reoffending than other types of criminals" (Walker, Madden, Vasquez, VanHouten & Ervin-McLarty, 2001, p.1). Various studies that have examined sex offender recidivism provide inconsistent results regarding the frequency with which sexual offenders reoffend.

Quinsey (1984) has commented that “the differences in recidivism across these studies is truly remarkable; clearly by selectively contemplating the various studies, one can conclude anything one wants” (p.27). Furby et al. (1989) and Berliner et al. (1995) concur, the latter noting that there is a broad range of recidivism rates for sex offenders regardless of whether the new crimes are of a sexual or nonsexual nature.

Differences in recidivism rates for sex offenders have in part been attributed to the types of sex offenses researchers have examined. Marshall and Barbaree (1990), in their review of studies of untreated sex offenders, reported that rapists reoffended at a rate between 7% and 35%, while child molesters recidivated at rates between 10% and 40%. Prentky et al. (1997) examined a sample of like offenders in Massachusetts and found that over a twenty-five year period, 39% of the rapists and 52% of the child molesters committed another sex offense. Doren (1998) compared the Prentky et al. findings to several other studies regarding sex offender recidivism and concluded that the failure rates reported in the Massachusetts study were a “conservative approximation” (p.101).

In their meta-analysis of sixty-one different studies of sex offender recidivism, Hanson and Bussiere (1998) found that the average rate of reoffending for rapists and child molesters was 18.9% and 12.7%, respectively. The authors conclude that their “findings contradict the popular view that sexual offenders inevitably reoffend,” but caution that even low recidivism rates are of concern “given the serious effects of sexual victimization” (p.357). More recent studies reflect rates of re-arrest and/or reconviction that are consistent with the meta-analysis average rates reported by Hanson and Bussiere (Sturgeon and Taylor, 1980; Sample, 2001; Zgoba and Simon, 2005).

Researchers have also examined the extent to which sex offenders recidivate by comparing them to non-sex crime offenders. Two studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics examined recidivism rates of offenders released from prison in 1983 and 1994, respectively. The 1983 cohort was composed of prisoners who were released from prison in 11 states. Results showed that sex offenders were rearrested and reconvicted at rates of 50% and 35%, respectively, compared to rearrest and reconviction rates of 63% and 47% for all types of offenders (Beck and Shipley, 1989). In a 15-state study of prisoners who were released in 1994, researchers found an even greater difference between rearrest and reconviction rates for sex offenders and other released offenders. Sex offenders were rearrested and reconvicted at rates of 43% and 24%, while rearrest and reconviction rates for non-sex offenders were 68% and 48% (Langan, et al., 2003).

Statistics released by corrections officials from individual states show that sex offenders recidivate at a lower rate than most other types of offenders (Kentucky, 2001; Florida, 2003; California, 2003; Washington, 2004, 2006). Of 2,444 sex offenders released from Arizona prisons between 1988 and 1998, 14.2% were re-incarcerated after an average 54.5 month follow-up period (Arizona Department of Corrections, 1998). This is in contrast to a 24.5% re-incarceration rate across all offender types released between 1990 and 1999 (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2005).

Lower base recidivism rates for sex offenders as compared to other offenders are not unique to the United States. In a study of Canadian prisoners who had been released from a maximum-security correctional institution between 1966 and 1975, Hanson et al. (1995) found a significant difference between the recidivism rates of child molesters and nonsexual offenders. After a 15-year follow-up period, 61.8% of the child molesters

were convicted of a new offense, while 83.2 % of the nonsexual offenders were reconvicted. A two-year follow up of reconvictions reported to Scotland Yard showed a 28% recidivism rate for sex offenses and over a 50% rate for other types of crime (Sapsford, 1978).

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SEX OFFENDER NOTIFICATION

Implementation of sex offender registration and community notification statutes affects all stakeholders. Previous research has examined the impact of registration and notification as reported by law enforcement and corrections (Matson and Lieb, 1996b; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000a), and by sex offenders who were subject to notification (Finn, 1997; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000b; Levenson and Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2005). Additional studies have focused on various aspects of notification in order to assess its efficacy (Phillips, 1998; Zevitz, 2003; Caputo and Brodsky, 2003; Beck and Travis, 2004). The following is a brief review of the literature which focuses on the impact that sex offender community notification has had on various stakeholders.

Impact on Law Enforcement and Corrections

Matson and Lieb (1996b) surveyed sheriffs' offices and police departments in Washington State in order to assess law enforcements' six-year experience with community notification. Respondents cited community surveillance, increased public awareness, deterrence and promotion of child safety as positive aspects of notification. Disadvantages reported included extra workload, public overreaction, non-uniformity in applying notification requirements among jurisdictions, and harassment of released offenders. Zevitz and Farkas (2000a) reported that notification served the goal of

community protection, but as noted in the Washington study, it did so at an expense to both law enforcement and corrections. Notification required additional criminal justice resources in the form of personnel, time, and money.

If the cost of implementing community notification is to be justified then public and community safety must be achieved. In a study of incarcerated sex offenders, however, Petrosino and Petrosino (1999) concluded that the public safety potential of notification was limited. A study designed to determine the efficacy of notification in preventing child abuse found that existing prevention measures, such as teaching children the difference between "good touches" and "bad touches," were more effective than notification (Redlich 2001). As a result of a pre- and post-Megan's Law study of reported rapes in ten states, Walker et al. (2001) concluded that there was no clear indication that community notification prevented rapes. Given these studies the public safety potential of community notification seems nebulous.

Another measure of success against which notification can be tested is its impact on sex offender recidivism. If recidivism rates were to decline following implementation of community notification the initiative would be deemed a success. While there has been little research that has examined this relationship, two studies were conducted by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (Schram and Milloy, 1995; Barnoski, 2005). The earlier study examined the impact of notification four years after implementation. It compared recidivism rates for sex offenders who were subjects of notification to a similar group of sex offenders who had been released prior to implementation of the notification statute. After a fifty-four month follow-up period the notification group had a 19% sexual offense recidivism rate, while sex offenders who had not been the subjects of

notification recidivated at a rate of 22%. The authors opined that “the findings suggest that community notification has little effect on recidivism” (p.3). The Barnoski study also examined the effect of notification on recidivism, specifically as it related to improved methods of both risk assessment and community notification that were enacted in 1997. Barnoski noted that while there was a decrease in “violent and sexual felony recidivism by sex offenders” following the statute modification, a “causal link to notification laws is not proven” (p.3).

Impact on Sex Offenders

Harassment of sex offenders and their families has been identified as one of the negative effects of notification (Matson and Lieb, 1996b; Finn, 1997; Zevitz and Farkas, 2000b). Steinbock (1995) suggests that community notification may result in both sex offenders and innocent bystanders becoming victims of vigilantism. Sex offenders report that community notification laws have caused them to experience difficulty in both finding, and keeping, housing and employment (Zevitz and Farkas, 2000d; Levenson and Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2005; Loftus, 2005).

Reintegration difficulty affects more than just the offender’s living conditions. Several commentators have posited theories regarding how notification may impact a sex offender’s propensity toward future offending. Tewksbury (2005) suggests that notification could actually lead to additional criminality due to the offender’s loss of support from family and friends and the feelings of isolation that might follow. He opines that “the use of sex offender registries may lead to social withdrawal and heightened anxiety and stress for sex offenders, common precursors to reoffending” (p.78). Loftus (2005) surveyed a group of sex offenders in Phoenix, Arizona and

reported that respondents did not believe community notification helped them control their behavior, nor did they view notification as a reliable means of monitoring sex offenders in the community. As one Seattle sex offender noted: "No external factor is going to keep me from reoffending – not the program, not my wife, not God. Only me." (Shenk, 1998, p.27) Other studies, however, found that while most sex offenders did not believe that Megan's Law made communities safer, some did indicate that notification motivated them to avoid reoffending (Zevitz and Farkas, 2000d; Levenson and Cotter, 2005).

Impact on Communities

Prior research concerning how sex offender notification affects communities is somewhat limited, and typically focuses on community attitudes and behaviors. Zevitz and Farkas (2000c) surveyed neighborhood meeting attendees to determine the effectiveness of this method of notification. They caution that if such meetings are not properly conducted, residents may become frightened and leave, feeling powerless to address the perceived dangers posed by resident sex offenders. They suggest that "such an emotional state may lead to offenders being threatened, harassed, or assaulted" (p.405).

Zevitz (2003, 2004) conducted a study of residents living in an area of Racine, Wisconsin following notification that a convicted sex offender was being released into their neighborhood. A questionnaire was provided to residents in order to assess their reaction to the placement, including their perceptions of safety and quality of life. Results of the survey, interviews and field observations provided only limited support for the premise that placement of a known sex offender in the community would negatively

impact neighborhood life. In his 2004 report, however, Zevitz concludes that the findings generally support the hypothesis that social integration “declines in relation to the enhanced fear generated by the public disclosure that a convicted sex offender of children lives nearby.” (p.217).

While the intent of notification is to inform the public of a possible danger so they can protect themselves and their families, empirical studies have found that the community sometimes seems disinterested in achieving that goal. Phillips (1998) conducted a telephone survey of residents of Washington State and found that while “the vast majority of respondents indicated that they were more safety conscious” (p.3), approximately half of the respondents reported that notification had no effect on their decisions to either go out alone, or to leave their children unsupervised or with a babysitter. Caputo and Brodsky (2003) investigated whether community notification prompted residents to use protective measures against sex offenders. Residents of Tuscaloosa, Alabama who had been notified that a sex offender had been placed in their community were surveyed telephonically. Only marginal support was found “for the contention that community notification laws are associated with protective actions against sex offenses” (p.250).

Beck and Travis (2004) examined the relationship between notification and fear of victimization by comparing responses to a mailed survey from a group of “notified” and a group of “not-notified” community members. They were interested in determining the effect of notification on both personal and altruistic fear of victimization. Altruistic fear is “the emotional reaction to the perceived danger that a household member would be a crime victim” (p.458). Respondents were asked to assess fear of victimization for five

specific types of crime. Results of multivariate analysis indicated that notification influenced personal fear, but not altruistic fear, yet a bivariate assessment showed that there was a significant relationship between notification and altruistic fear of sexual victimization.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study comes from a recently completed telephone survey of residents of Phoenix, Arizona (Katz and Webb, 2006). Table 1 on the following page provides the demographic characteristics of survey respondents.

A stratified sampling strategy was employed for this study. Five designated geographical areas were categorized based upon the number of sex offenders living within area boundaries. Study areas were characterized as: low, which contained no sex offenders; medium, which contained one to three sex offenders; high, which contained four or more sex offenders; and “transitional” and Tampico, each of which contained a concentration of sex offenders that exceeded the high category. Initially, sampling was to be conducted of eight different randomly selected areas: two each for the low, medium and high categories; one “transitional” area; and the Tampico area. The two areas selected for both the medium and high categories, however, did not provide an adequate sample. Therefore, the sizes of one of the medium and one of the high category areas were enlarged in order to encompass a sufficient sample. Further, because the “transitional” area contained a large amount of non-residential property, thus limiting the number of citizens residing in this area, it was necessary to increase the number of “transitional” areas from one to five in order to obtain a sufficient sample size. Once the areas were set, randomly selected home phone numbers belonging to residents in each

locale were called. As a result, approximately eight hundred interviews (N=793) of residents over the age of 17 were completed. There was a significant difference between areas and the socio-demographic characteristics of participants (Table 1).

Table 1: Survey respondent characteristics by area

	Low %	Medium %	High %	Tampico %	Transitional %	Total %
Gender						
Male	41.0	37.8	36.0	37.0	36.0	37.8
Female	59.0	62.2	64.0	63.0	64.0	62.2
Ethnicity*						
Caucasian	91.8	77.0	78.6	94.0	49.0	79.7
African American	0.5	2.1	3.6	0.0	16.0	3.6
Hispanic	5.6	14.1	12.0	4.0	32.0	12.5
Other	2.0	6.8	5.7	2.0	3.0	4.2
Home Ownership*						
Rent	8.6	10.8	29.4	6.1	20.6	15.6
Own	91.4	89.2	70.6	93.9	79.4	84.4
Education*						
Less than HS diploma	1.0	6.2	4.5	0.0	10.1	4.2
HS diploma	45.2	68.4	65.2	37.4	63.6	57.3
Bachelors degree	39.6	20.7	21.7	42.4	19.2	28.2
Graduate degree	14.2	4.7	8.6	20.2	7.1	10.3
Marital Status*						
Married	69.4	53.2	39.9	64.6	49.5	54.9
Single, Never Married	10.2	15.3	35.9	15.2	20.2	19.8
Divorced/Separated	12.8	15.8	15.2	10.1	19.2	14.6
Widowed	7.7	15.8	9.1	10.1	11.1	10.7
Length of time residing in neighborhood*						
Less than 1 year	4.5	4.7	4.0	2.0	2.0	3.8
1 to 3 years	19.0	19.2	24.0	10.0	31.0	20.7
4 or more years	76.5	76.2	72.0	88.0	67.0	75.5
Family income*						
< \$30,000	6.8	25.1	33.2	3.5	26.9	20.3
≥ \$30,000	93.2	74.9	66.8	96.5	73.1	79.7
Age	53.6	52.0	48.8	56.2	47.0	51.5
N	200	193	200	100	100	793

* $p \leq 0.05$

* Significant differences across five areas (Chi-Square)

With the exception of age and gender, significant differences were noted between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and the areas in which they lived.

Residents of areas with medium and high numbers of sex offenders were more likely to be a minority, have less education and earn less money than respondents who lived in the low and Tampico areas. These two areas were very similar to each other and noticeably dissimilar from the medium, high and "transitional" areas across all characteristics that were deemed significant, with the exception of how long those respondents lived in the area.

Respondents who lived in the high areas were more likely to rent, to be single and to earn less than \$30,000 annually than survey respondents who lived in the other four areas. "Transitional" area respondents did not lag far behind in many of these same characteristics, however; they were the second most likely group to rent, to be single and earn less than \$30,000 per year. The "transitional" sample had the largest number of minorities at 51%, and also contained the highest percentage of respondents with less than a high school diploma.

Of the 793 respondents, only 239 (30%) indicated that they had been officially notified that a sex offender was living in their neighborhood. An additional 91 (11%) stated that while they had not received official notification, they were nonetheless aware that a sex offender was a resident of their community. The "notified" and "aware" respondents were combined (N=330) and represent the sample utilized to assess the social and psychological impact that sex offender community notification had on those residing in the five areas. The percentages displayed in Table 2 show how "official notification" and "awareness" responses are distributed for this sample across areas.

Table 2: Survey respondents having knowledge of sex offender living in their community by area

	Low %	Medium %	High %	Tampico %	Transitional %	Total %
Respondents reporting having received official notification*	10.6	25.7	47.2	33.0	42.0	30.3
Respondents not officially notified, but reporting being aware of sex offenders living in the community*	10.1 ¹	9.4	7.5	28.0	10.0	11.5

* $p \leq 0.05$

* Significant differences across five areas (Chi-Square)

¹ The "Low" area was so designated by the absence of sex offender residents. This positive response may be due to the unknown relocation of sex offenders who had previously lived in the area.

Survey questions were designed to elicit "residents' perceptions of sex offenders and their effect on neighborhood life as well as their opinions about various proposals to manage sex offender housing" (Katz and Webb, 2006, p.2). This study will focus on selected data that was collected to assess the social and psychological impact that sex offender notification had on respondents. Likert scale responses to questions concerning safety consciousness, going out alone, and community involvement will be explored.

FINDINGS

For the present study, the assessment of the social and psychological impact of sex offender notification is examined in terms of responses to three survey questions. Respondents were asked if, as a result of being notified that a sex offender was living in their community, they were more or less safety conscious, more or less likely to go out alone and more or less involved in community activities. These findings are presented in Table 3. Of the respondents who knew that a sex offender was living in their neighborhood, 59% indicated that they were more safety conscious. Increased safety consciousness ranged from a low of 48% in the medium area to a high of 75% in

Tampico. Of those having knowledge that a sex offender was living in their midst, 20 % responded that they were less likely to go out alone. "Less likely to go out alone" affirmations ranged from 10% in the "low" area to 27% in the Tampico area. Findings also showed that 13% of the residents who knew that there was a sex offender living among them were more likely to be involved in community activities that promoted safe neighborhoods. The responses to this inquiry ranged from 2% in the "low" area to 25% in the Tampico area.

Table 3: Social and psychological consequences of being notified that a sex offender lives in the community

	Low %	Medium %	High %	Tampico %	Transitional %	Total %
More Safety Conscious	48.8	48.5	56.9	75.4	63.5	58.7
Less Likely to Go Out Alone	9.8	18.2	19.6	26.7	26.0	20.4
More Community Involvement*	2.4	11.9	10.4	24.6	16.0	13.2

* $p \leq 0.05$

* Significant differences across five areas (Chi-Square)

Statistical analysis of the three measures of social and psychological impact was conducted to test the null hypotheses that no relationship existed between safety consciousness, going out alone and community involvement and the five different areas. Results indicated that there was a significant relationship between community involvement and the five areas examined ($p \leq 0.05$). Comparison of safety consciousness and going out alone responses across the five areas, however, failed to show that a significant relationship existed.

DISCUSSION

Supporters of sex offender community notification believe that requiring law

enforcement to notify residents enables those living in the sex offender's midst to take action in order to protect themselves and their children. The efficacy of such an initiative is contingent upon a notification process that is appropriately targeted and executed, and a response by those notified that has safety-ensuring potential. This discussion will address these assumptions within the scope of previous research and the findings and limitations of the present study.

Community notification conducted by the Phoenix Police Department is primarily accomplished by mailing flyers to schools, daycares and like facilities within a one-mile radius of the sex offender's residence, as well as to neighbors living within a two-block radius of the offender (Katz and Webb, 2006). The flyer informs the community that "notification is not intended to increase fear; rather, it is our belief that an informed community is a safer community" (Phoenix Police Department, 2006, p.1). Meaningful program evaluation, however, causes one to question whether notification within a two-block area constitutes an effective means of informing the community. Results of the present study indicate that only 30% of the residents surveyed recalled receiving official notification that a sex offender was living in their community. A thorough assessment of the Phoenix Police Department's sex offender community notification process may therefore be in order. Finding a more effective means of reaching the community, to include expanding the notification area, may be a place to begin looking at ways to improve the program. Results of a recent study conducted in Washington State suggest that notification modifications that established "best practices for community notification" (Revised Code of Washington, 4.24.5501, p.1) contributed to a reduction in felony sex offender recidivism (Barnoski, 2005a).

Policy makers should also be concerned that notification restricted to a specific area may simply displace sex offending to another community. This type of geographical displacement is not an unexpected response to target-hardening crime prevention initiatives (Miethe and Meier, 1994). Reducing the opportunity to offend within the notified area by enhancing community vigilance may prompt sex offenders to look for their next victim beyond the two-block radius. If it is true, as many proponents of Megan's Law believe, that sex offenders are sociopaths who cannot be deterred, displacement becomes an even more likely outcome of notification.

Assessing the social and psychological impact that sex offender community notification has on residents of that community is a difficult task. In theory, if notification initiatives are to enhance resident safety, residents must respond to the information that law enforcement provides. While nearly 60% of the respondents in the present study indicated that they were more safety conscious as a result of notification, only 20% indicated that they were less likely to go out alone, and even less, only 13%, indicated that they were more involved in community activities that promoted neighborhood safety. It appears that while those notified may be giving "lip service" to the enhanced safety goal of notification, they might not actually be putting any real effort into achieving that goal. Given this apparent dichotomy, consideration must be given to the possibility that other factors may be affecting residents' safety consciousness. Are other signs of community disorder or neighborhood deterioration contributing to residents' perceptions of their safety and fear of being victimized? Do these other factors somehow pre-condition respondents to answer in the affirmative when asked if they are more safety conscious as a result of sex offender notification?

The answers to these questions may lie in the link between neighborhood disorder and citizens' fear of crime. In "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety," Wilson and Kelling (1982) suggest that physical and social disorder create an environment in which criminal activity can flourish. Skogan (1990) notes that crime rates are not the only thing affected by disorder, and reports that people living in these areas of disorderliness become anxious and fearful for their own and their children's safety. Such findings suggest that sex offender community notification aside, vandalism, graffiti, gangs, harassment, public drunkenness, drug dealing, prostitution, and similar signs of disorder all contribute to fear of crime. In his study of community notification, Zevitz (2003) reports "that other neighborhood factors, such as the presence of groups of loitering youth or reports of drug activity, may be at work in regard to quality-of-life notions and crime-related perceptions or feelings" (p.57). In regard to the present study, the large number of "homeless shelters, half-way houses, *and* low end motels" (Katz and Webb, 2006, p.2) found in the five "transitional" areas creates an environment conducive to disorder; disorder which may lead to fear among community residents. Residents, in turn, become more safety conscious. Depending on the level of their fear, they may choose not to go out alone, which may limit their involvement in activities that promote community safety. This scenario could also play out in other study areas where both existing disorder and sex offender notification simultaneously impact residents' perceptions of their quality of life and fear.

A related consideration for policy makers concerns the extent to which community notification affects residents' dissatisfaction with their living environment. The stress caused by knowing that a sex offender is living in their midst may be so acute

Shenk, 1998). Some skeptics “even argue that Megan’s laws could have an adverse affect, silencing victims of incest for fear that those molesting them – their parents or siblings – will become pariahs.” (Shenk, 1995, p.27).

Results of this study provide only limited empirical support for the hypothesis that notification impacts residents socially and psychologically. While there was a significant relationship between areas that contained varying numbers of sex offenders and their level of involvement in community activities, a like relationship was not present between areas and the respondents’ safety consciousness or decisions to go out alone. These findings may partially confirm what other researchers have suggested; that community notification only “creates an illusion of safety” and “promotes a false sense of security” (Koloff, 2006, p.1; Steinbock, 1995, p.4). Zevitz (2003) notes that “very little is known about the impact sex offender community notification has on neighborhood life for the growing number of communities where the practice has occurred.” (p.42) While this study attempts to fill some of that void, findings suggest that there is a significant amount of additional research needed to address the efficacy of community notification.

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