

*JRP Digest* contains summaries of recent research published in *Justice Research and Policy*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Justice Research and Statistics Association. Its purpose is to inform state policy makers and other justice practitioners about recent research findings in a short, concise format. Visit *JRP* on the web at <http://jrja.metapress.com>, or visit JRSA's web site at [www.jrsa.org](http://www.jrsa.org).

## Understanding the Impact of Sex Offender Registration

Armstrong, T., Katz, C. M., Webb, V. *Understanding the Impact of Sex Offender Registration: An Examination of Changes in Offense Type and the Predictors of Recidivism Among Registered Sex Offenders. Justice Research and Policy, 111, 1-26.*

### Why Was the Study Done?

The Jacob Wetterling Act, passed in 1994 and amended in 1996, required states to create registries of sexually violent offenders and release this information to the public. The Adam Walsh Act, passed in 2006, required jurisdictions to make registries available on the Internet, established a national sex offender registry and Web site, created a national sex offender classification system, and expanded registration and notification requirements.

Unfortunately, there is little research to use in evaluating the wisdom of laws requiring sex offender registration and community notification. Only a few empirical studies on the impact of community notification registries were found in a recent search of the literature, and only two explored the potential impact of sex offender registries on the behavior of sex offenders.

This study offers an assessment of the impact of sex offender registration on a random sample of 244 registered sex offenders in Phoenix, Arizona. The study also looks at the predictors of recidivism among this sample.

### What Did the Researchers Do?

The researchers formulated two research questions: (1) Does sex offender registration influence the relative frequency of sex offenses? and (2) What are the predictors of recidivism among registered sex offenders? A screening tool that generates two risk scales, one for "sex offending risk" and one for "general recidivism," was used to score offenders on 19 different factors for each type of risk. Depending on the total score, an offender was placed into one of four possible categories of sex offense risk (ranging from lower to very high) and one of five for general recidivism risk (ranging from lower to ultra-high).

Data were collected on measures of demographic characteristics, measures of criminal justice system involvement, and offense history information. The researchers compared the types of offenses committed before and after registration, and examined the relationship between offender characteristics and rates of recidivism after registration. They also explored whether or not the predictors of general recidivism are different from the predictors of specific types of recidivism.

### Justice Research and Policy

<http://jrja.metapress.com>

Full articles are available on the *JRP* web site for a small fee. Subscriptions to *JRP*, which include access to all past issues, are also available for a reasonable rate.

This issue of *JRP Digest* was published in May 2010  
by the Justice Research and Statistics Association  
777 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20002  
[www.jrsa.org](http://www.jrsa.org)

### INSIDE

- Situational Aspects of Sexual Offending
- Police Approaches to Drug Law Enforcement
- Racial Integration in Prison
- Citizen Review of Police

## What Did the Researchers Find?

The relative frequency of sexual offenses was lower after registration than before registration. Among the sample used here, 46% were rearrested after registration, and 20% had an arrest charge for a sex offense during a post-registration follow-up period averaging 5½ years. Similar to findings from other recent research, the findings of this research suggest that those convicted of sex offenses typically recidivate less frequently than those charged with serious non-sex offenses.

The analysis also found that the relative frequency of arrest charges for sexual assault and child-sex offenses was lower after registration. (Results from other studies have varied, however, suggesting that these results should be interpreted with caution.) Testing the predictors of recidivism among the sex offender sample found that recidivism was predicted by the number of prior arrests, age at conviction for a registration offense, sex offender level, and probation.

## What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

One of the challenges for policy makers is to understand the conditions under which registries work and the conditions under which they do not work. This study's analysis of predictors of recidivism showed that measures of sex offender level and probation status predicted three of the five measures of recidivism. In other words, the sex offender classification scheme used to classify offenders in this study did indeed identify offenders at greater risk for recidivism. Although these findings are encouraging for policy makers attempting to identify groups at risk for increased recidivism, it is important to acknowledge that as a whole, the results showed that prediction of sex offender recidivism is extremely difficult.

Policy implications can also be drawn from the analysis of overall recidivism rates and the analysis of pre- and post-registration differences in the relative frequency of sex offenses. As a group, the recidivism rates of sex offenders subject to registration and community notification have tended to be quite a bit lower than the recidivism rates of those arrested for non-sex offenses. This suggests that crime control policies that target sex

offenders, including policies requiring registration and community notification, are not likely to result in strong general crime control gains.

If the goal of sex offender registration policies is to reduce sex offender recidivism, then the limited literature directly assessing the impact of sex offender registration, including the current work, offers equivocal evidence regarding the efficacy of these policies. It is important to note, however, that just as these studies do not offer strong evidence that sex offender registries are effective, it also offers only limited evidence that they are not.

---

## Situational Aspects of Sexual Offending

*Colombino, N., Mercado, C.C., Jeglic, E.L. Situational Aspects of Sexual Offending: Implications for Residence Restriction Laws. Justice Research and Policy, 11, 27–44.*

## Why Was the Study Done?

Residence restriction laws, which aim to restrict known sex offenders from residing near child-dense community structures, appear, in part, to be based on the assumption that sex offenders are likely to seek out their victims in public places where children congregate (e.g., schools, parks, day care facilities). But some research suggests that sex offenders who perpetrate offenses against children tend to know their victims, while other studies have found that sex offenders tend to locate and offend against their victims in private settings.

The assumption that situational patterns of sexual offending are consistent across offender type has also been questioned. For example, one study found that rapists were more likely to offend in outdoor settings than were child molesters, and ample research has shown that rapists tend to commit crimes within close proximity of their homes. Sex offenders may vary with regard to where they locate victims and select offense locations, suggesting geographical restrictions could be more suitable for offenders who commit particular forms of offenses.

This study examined the locations where offenders first came into contact with their victims and the locations where offenders perpetrated offenses in an effort to determine the frequency with which sexual offenses occur in the particular locations that are statutorily defined as off limits for sex offenders.

## What Did the Researchers Do?

Data were extracted from the archival records of a correctional facility and included 405 adult male sex offenders, all of whom were released from prison between the years 1996 and 2006. The data collection tool included items pertaining to demographics and elements of the index offense, such as victim-offender relationship and location of crime events. The situational aspects of the index offense were coded as occurring in a “public,” “semi-public,” or a “private” location. *Public* locations included schools, bus stops, parks, day care centers, playgrounds, or, in other words, places often included in the statutory language of residence restriction laws. *Semi-public* locations were considered to be areas other than a private home that offer a degree of privacy, such as a motor vehicle, hotel room, or house party. *Private* locations were defined as either the offender’s or victim’s own home, a home shared by the offender and the victim, a home of a relative or acquaintance of the offender or the victim, or a home of some other person. The location where the offender first met the victim was defined as the location where the victim and offender first came into contact, and the location where the crime was perpetrated was defined as the location where the sex crime occurred.

## What Did the Researchers Find?

### *Where Offenders Met Victims*

Of the 405 offenses examined in the current study, more than 76% of the offenders met their victims in private locations, 16% met their victims in public locations, while 8% met their victims in semi-public locations. Only 7% of offenders first met their victim in a location often defined in residence restriction legislation.

### *Where Offenses Occurred*

Fewer than 20% of all offenses took place in public or semi-public locations, while over four fifths (82%)

occurred in private settings. In fact, 78% of all offenses occurred in the home of the offender, the home of the victim, or a home shared by the offender and the victim.

### *Victim-Offender Relationship by Location*

More than half of the offenders, (52%) were acquaintances of their victims, while just under 40% of the sex offenders in this sample were family members of the victim. Relatively few (9%) of the offenders in this sample were unknown to the victim prior to the offense. When victim-offender relationships were examined, significant differences were found among groups with regard to the location where the offenses were perpetrated. Individuals who perpetrated offenses against strangers were more likely to offend in public and semi-public locations than those who perpetrated offenses against family members.

### *Where Offenders Met Victims by Offender Type*

Offenders who perpetrated offenses against adults were significantly more likely to meet their victims in semi-public locations (17%) than were those who offended against children (4%). More than three quarters of those who perpetrated offenses against children met their victims in private locations (81%), while only 64% of those who perpetrated an index offense against an adult met their victims in private locations. Lastly, 19% of those who perpetrated offenses against adults met their victims in public locations, while 15% of those who offended against a child met their victims in a public location.

### *Where Offenses Occurred by Offender Type*

Offenders who perpetrated offenses against adults were significantly more likely to offend in semi-public locations (20%) than were those who offended against children (8%). Nearly 9 out of 10 child molesters (87%) offended against their victims in private settings, while 71% of adult sexual assault offenders perpetrated their offenses in a private location. Finally, 10% of adult sexual assault offenders perpetrated crimes in public locations, whereas a lesser 6% of child molesters offended in public locations.

## What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

The current study may be important to the evaluation of a number of sex offender-specific policies (such as GPS monitoring and community notification), but these findings have the most direct implications for sex offender residence restrictions. Because the majority of the offenders in this sample met their victims in private settings, committed their offenses in private locations, and knew their victims prior to the offense, the data demonstrate that most sexual offenses, and particularly child sexual offenses, stem from social rather than geographic proximity. Given that most sex crimes take place in private settings perpetrated against victims who have a relationship with the offender, policy measures that aim to prevent sexual victimization in the home may have broader utility than legislative aims that restrict offenders from public places where children congregate.

---

## Police Approaches to Drug Law Enforcement

*Lombardo, R.M. & Olson, D.E. Organizational Approaches to Drug Law Enforcement by Local Police Departments in the United States: Specialized Drug Units and Participation in Multi-Agency Drug Task Forces. Justice Research and Policy, 11, 45–76.*

### Why Was the Study Done?

The passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 brought unprecedented resources to the control of illicit drug use and distribution. One result was a jump in the number of arrests for drug crimes. Drug arrests almost doubled between 1985 and 1995, to almost 1.5 million per year; by 2006, annual drug arrests exceeded 1.8 million.

While most agree that controlling the drug problem requires involving the public health and educational systems, the criminal justice system is often the first to respond to emerging drug problems. How law enforcement agencies target drug law violations and drug markets varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and can include everything from preventative efforts, such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program

(DARE), to long-term, organized, and focused drug investigations involving specialized drug units within police departments and/or participation in multi-jurisdictional drug task forces.

This study focuses on these longer-term responses. In general, local law enforcement agency drug units limit their drug enforcement efforts to their specific geographic jurisdiction and carry out more sophisticated investigations than traditional patrol strategies. Multi-agency task forces also tend to carry out more sophisticated investigations, but carry out their investigative work across multiple participating jurisdictions. What factors determine whether a police department will operate a drug unit or participate in a multi-agency task force, and how many officers they assign to these efforts?

### What Did the Researchers Do?

After reviewing previous studies on organizational characteristics, the researchers hypothesized that specific features and characteristics of police organizations, and the communities they serve, affect the organization's decision to operate a police drug unit and/or participate in a multi-agency drug task force. They focused on three general groups of factors: 1) the agency's organizational structure and characteristics; 2) the size and characteristics of the population and jurisdiction served, and 3) the extent and nature of the drug and crime problem. They developed and used four models to test their hypothesis.

Data on 2,425 local law enforcement agencies were obtained (and combined) from three different and separate information sources: the 2003 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Survey, the 2000 Decennial Census, and the 2003 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) program. Thirteen independent and four dependent variables were created based in part on previous research findings, and bivariate and multivariate analyses were performed to test the models.

### What Did the Researchers Find?

The findings of this study indicate that county-level agencies, those with other formalized drug control efforts, high levels of violent crime, high degrees of task specialization and formalization, and high proportions

of the resident population accounted for by renters were more likely to operate drug units, participate in multi-agency drug task forces, and allocate more officers per capita to these efforts. While some of the variables included in the analyses were quite limited in the strength of their correlation to agencies' behaviors, still, the research provides some insight into the extent to which local law enforcement agencies engage in these specific approaches to drug control, and the number of officers they assign to these efforts. By far the most influential variables in the analyses to explain the approach agencies take in terms of drug enforcement was whether the agency participated in other drug enforcement efforts (drug unit or task force), if the agency was county-level, the level of violent crime, and organizational formality and decentralization.

## What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

The Anti-Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988 provided substantial amounts of money to state and local units of government to develop and operate multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, and it had a big impact. State and local police agencies created more than 700 drug task forces between 1986 and 1993. By 1998, more than 1,000 drug task forces were operating in the United States, and more than 5,800 local police officers were assigned full time to these drug task forces (nearly twice the number of the agents employed by the Drug Enforcement Administration). There were also 13,600 officers assigned to specialized drug units within local police departments.

Understanding what factors influence complex organizations like law enforcement departments when they make decisions can help inform governmental policy makers who are faced with important funding decisions. Research has shown that complex organizations make decisions for other than rational purposes. This study attempts to lay the foundation for future examination of the complex processes involved in police decisions on creating drug units and participating in multi-agency drug task forces.

## Racial Integration in Prison

*Lindsey, T. "It'll Never Happen": Racial Integration in California Men's Prisons. Justice Research and Policy, 11, 77-104.*

### Why Was the Study Done?

For years the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has segregated inmates upon their arrival to a prison reception center according to race category—Black, White, Hispanic, Other. Inmates also participate in this segregation by adhering to their own rules known as “politics.” In 2005, as a result of a mediated legal agreement, the CDCR agreed to implement the Integrated Housing Program to racially integrate their adult, male inmates in two-man cells. Implementing this program has been challenging. The CDCR redesigned its intake paperwork, known as the 1882, to include criteria other than race category that may be more useful in predicting the violence expected from housing inmates from different races together. New questions helped officers use information, such as inmates' histories of violence, in housing placements; race is no longer the most important criterion. This study evaluates the relationship between inmates' willingness to integrate and department predictors included on the revised 1882. Although many studies have examined how race affects criminal justice decision making prior to incarceration, there is little information about how race categories affect decision making *inside* of the prison.

### What Did the Researcher Do?

The researcher collected data during Phase 1 of California's integration plan—prior to the physical integration of cells. These data included answers from 203 inmates to questions from officers—as the inmates were being processed during reception—about whether or not they agreed to integrate. She also spent time in three prisons collecting ethnographic and qualitative interview data. She then used logistic regression to find the variables that predict the likelihood of inmates answering “yes” or “no” to the question about whether they were willing to integrate. The analyses were designed to discover whether the race category of inmates was significantly related to their willingness to participate in the Integrated Housing Plan; whether

gang members were significantly less willing than non-gang members to participate in the plan; and whether inmates who had a history of violence were less willing to participate.

## What Did the Researcher Find?

Results from this study indicate that despite the expectation that race is the most important factor affecting inmates' attitudes toward integration in their cells, it is more important to consider inmates' gang membership, safety concerns, and age. This is not to say that histories of violence should be ignored or that race category will be, but these other factors may have played more important roles in the Integrated Housing Plan implemented in California prisons.

In this study, race category, separated from gang membership, had little to do with predicting inmates' attitudes toward integration. Gang members were less likely to agree to integrate than non-gang members. Inmates with safety concerns were much more likely to agree to integrate than those without safety concerns. (This is not surprising because they were placed in integrated Special Needs Yards. The alternative placement to a non-integrated mainline housing unit could mean death or serious harm.) Regarding age, for each additional year an inmate lives, the odds of him agreeing to integrated housing were 3.6 higher than for someone who was one year younger. It is probable that as inmates get older they are more likely to want to stay out of trouble as they serve their time.

## What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

Results from this study point to gang membership, safety concerns, and age as significant predictors in how an inmate answers the integrated housing question. It may be more practical for officers to separate known and self-reported gang members from the general population prior to the actual integration of cells. Inmate interviews indicated that gang members foment most of the violence related to racial politics as they act as enforcers. Separating gang members may assist in avoiding gang-motivated violence that often appears as racially motivated violence because of racial divisions. Officers may also want to watch younger inmates closely; the results indicate that inmates are more likely

to agree to integrated housing as they get older. Inmates reported that younger inmates are more volatile and that older inmates often just want to "do their time" with few problems.

The results of this study affect practical decision making, but they also pertain to organizations that process people. The experiences of incarcerated people and those being processed by the criminal justice system could help inform ways to preserve the safety and security of people in facilities.

---

## Citizen Review of Police

*Ochs, H.L. Public Participation in Policing: The Impact of Citizen Oversight on the Incidence of Lethal Force Over Time in the Largest U.S. Cities. Justice Research and Policy, 11, 105–140.*

## Why Was the Study Done?

Democratic societies have long debated the need for legitimate public participation in governance, and have searched for structures that would allow participation to be a help rather than a hindrance. While citizen participation in decision making may result in more opposition and greater chance of failure, it may also increase the likelihood of successful policy implementation and contribute to the legitimacy of the government's actions. An anomaly of citizen participation is that it may strain institutions that were not designed to function democratically. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempts have been made to professionalize policing, including the implementation of citizen review in some jurisdictions to promote accountability in policing. But, does public participation through citizen review boards result in more responsible policing, or does public oversight in this form amount to political interference? Is citizen oversight a significant contribution to the outcomes of democratic policing or does it undermine law enforcement? In this study, the author argues that while citizen participation has the potential to serve the public *and* the police well when adequately designed, reactive approaches to external review may not have the intended effect on the outcomes of democratic policing over time.

## What Did the Researcher Do?

This study focused on the most common approach to citizen oversight—reactive approaches, a deterrence-based method for addressing police misconduct. Reactive approaches assume that police misconduct will be prevented by having an oversight mechanism in place that reliably reacts to it. The researcher evaluated the impact of reactive, external review mechanisms over time on the use of lethal force by police in a sample consisting of 30 of the largest U.S. cities from 1994 to 2004. First, the researcher looked at the impact of citizen oversight over time by using the number of years that citizen review boards (CRBs) had been authorized in sample cities. Then, she looked more closely at the impact of each of four reactive models of citizen review boards. The *independent investigation model* is an oversight structure that independently investigates any aspect of police activity to determine if misconduct exists. Under the *investigatory review model* CRBs review investigations conducted by the police agency and make recommendations. The *appeals structure model* refers to citizen oversight structures that receive and review appeals from people who remain unsatisfied with the response of the police agency and provide recommendations to the police chief regarding those appeals. The *process audit model* refers to CRBs with the authority to investigate or audit the process by which the police agency accepts, responds to, and investigates complaints from the public. Finally, the researcher also tested the effect of independent police monitors. Eight of the existing 12 independent police monitoring agencies in the U.S. were included in the sample.

## What Did the Researcher Find?

This study of the impact of public participation confirms that reactive models of public participation in police oversight are ineffective at best and, as a whole, can have adverse consequences in the aggregate. The results demonstrate no statistically significant impact of citizen review boards broadly on the use of lethal force, but when citizen review boards were broken down by type, *process audit oversight* was shown to contribute to higher rates of lethal force over time.

A number of additional findings were of interest. All of the models demonstrated that black political incorpora-

tion reduces the incidence of lethal force over time. In addition, as the percentage of black sworn officers on the force increases, the incidence of lethal force is likely to increase over time. This finding is consistent with existing evidence that black officers may treat black citizens more harshly.

Further study is required to understand if this finding is at least in part conditioned upon the possibility that black officers may have more contact with black citizens than white officers. This study also lends support to the racial threat hypothesis. Cities in which the black population is very low or very high were likely to have a significantly higher incidence of lethal force. Additionally, the results show that the incidence of lethal force decreases as people living in poverty are more isolated, but because this data does not account for the geographical elements of crime and policing in the city, future research may tell us more about whether poverty isolation is more likely a mechanism or function of social control. The analysis also demonstrates that the incidence of lethal force increases over time in cities where black citizens are more likely to be victims of murder rather than perpetrators, constituting important evidence that the notion that black citizens are exposed to lethal force at higher rates because they are more likely perpetrators of crime is false.

## What Are the Implications of the Findings for Policy Making?

The police and the public have strong incentives for finding effective means for fostering positive police-public relations. Recent research indicates that proactive measures such as internal benchmarking that allows for the identification of officers disproportionately targeting racial minorities can allow those officers to be offered opportunities to improve their performance through continuing education and other strategies. Internal benchmarking techniques that are pre-emptive attempts to facilitate professionalism rather than punitive monitoring devices are also recommended and utilized in similar proactive early warning systems. Future research should explore the functioning of these strategies as well as the few proactive approaches to citizen review that exist in the United States.