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**SEX OFFENDER PERCEPTIONS: INVESTIGATING SOCIAL SUPPORTS AS
BUFFERS TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEGAN'S LAW**

by

Melissa D. Colson

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Law and Justice Studies
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at
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Thesis Chair: Natalie Schell-Busey, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Melissa D. Colson

SEX OFFENDER PERCEPTIONS: INVESTIGATING SOCIAL SUPPORTS AS BUFFERS TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEGAN'S LAW

2018-2019

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Master of Arts in Criminal Justice

The purpose of this study was to identify supports and whether supports perceived as helpful lessen negative experiences with job difficulty, housing difficulty, vigilantism, and isolation. Additionally, registrants' perceptions of hopelessness and sex offender registration and community notification laws (SORN) as a public safety measure were examined to determine whether more helpful supports positively impacted their attitudes. Another aspect of this study explored differences with males and females since females have rarely been examined. Narratives were compiled to further describe offender experiences and perceptions. This study used a survey to collect data on sex offenders, including offender demographics and victim characteristics. Regression analyses illustrated that registrants found that individual counseling and religious support (therapy support) lowered the likelihood of vigilantism and living alone while more helpful supports lessened feelings of isolation and hopelessness, but perceptions of SORN as a public safety measure were not significant. These findings indicated that negative experiences may leave sex offenders feeling ostracized and isolated, as a result creating additional barriers to reintegration.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the early 20th century the fear of being sexually victimized has been exacerbated by different media outlets, which include newspapers and radio in the 1930s (Sutherland, 1950a), television news broadcasters, and more recently, social media. Labels such as sexually degenerate and psychopathic and mentally defective and impulsive have evoked policy debates about controlling sex offenders since the 1990s. Today, such descriptions continue to invoke fear throughout American communities, where sexual violence has long been considered a social problem. Given the attention and public scrutiny sexual violence receives, legislators are under pressure to enact laws to protect society from sexual predators, including sexual psychopath laws and sex offender registration laws. Over time, sex offender registration laws have evolved to include community notification, which discloses the whereabouts of sex offenders to the public.

First enacted at the state level, community notification laws, more commonly known as Megan's Law, resulted from the widespread publicity and community outcry following the rape and murder of Megan Kanka in 1994 (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Terry, 2011; Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro & Veysey, 2008). Federally, the Jacob Wetterling Act requires sex offenders to register their personal information with and notify law enforcement of changes in address following their release from custody, and the Pam Lyncher Act establishes a national sex offender registry (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Levenson, D'Amora & Hern, 2007). Federal law requires that all 50 states enact and enforce sex offender registration and community notification (SORN) laws, and federal funding has been given to states to assist with the enforcement of the laws.

On October 31, 1994, New Jersey enacted community notification laws, which later included Internet registration by July 23, 2001 (New Jersey Statute 2C: 7-12). Individuals required to register under New Jersey's Megan's Law include those who have been "convicted, adjudicated delinquent or found not guilty of a sex offense because of insanity" (New Jersey Statute 2C:7-1, 1994). Additionally, the New Jersey criminal statute defines sexual assault as unwanted or forced sexual penetration or sexual contact towards a person (New Jersey Statute 2C: 14-1, 1979). This statute goes on to define the actor as an individual accused of a sexual offense, and the victim is described as "the individual alleging to have been subjected to sexual assault or sexual contact" (New Jersey Statute 2C: 14-1, 1979).

New Jersey uses risk assessments and a tiered system to classify sex offenders according to their risk for reoffending and includes low, moderate, and high risk offenders (Visgaitis, 2011; Zgoba et al., 2008). Tier I (low risk) consists of notification to only law enforcement and victims. The next tier, Tier II is a moderate risk classification, which includes the notification of: schools, daycares, public parks, churches, and other areas where children gather. Finally, Tier III consists of sex offenders posing the highest risk for reoffending and requires active notification. Active notification for Tier III offenders include: community meetings, disseminating pamphlets, and door-to-door notification of sex offenders residing in the community and the risk the offenders pose. Even though sex offenders are required to register for their lifetime, these offenders can petition to be removed from the registry after 15 years.

The risk assessments used are based on the offender's offense history, characteristics of the sex offense(s), and response to treatment and social support (New

Jersey Statute 2C: 7-8, 1994). The New Jersey Internet registry displays information on Tier II and III offenders who pose the greatest risk for reoffending. Additionally, the Internet registry discloses the following information: the offender's name, picture, address, gender, race, modus operandi, date of birth, height, weight, eye color, and other identifying marks, scars or tattoos (New Jersey Statute 2C: 7-4, 1994). To date, there are 4,020 sex offenders on the New Jersey Internet registry and 15,273 registered sex offenders residing in New Jersey (Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Like sex crime statistics throughout the United States, sex crimes in New Jersey have been declining for two decades. Publicized cases of rapes and/or murders of children and women by repeat sex offenders led to the creation of sex offender registration and community notification laws (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Terry, 2011). Despite the fact that sex crimes have declined 59% from 1990 to 2010, sex offender laws remain popular, and these policies have become stricter since their first enactment in 1994 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). While sex offender laws seek to prevent victimization and reduce recidivism, these laws have resulted in unintended social consequences for sex offenders, such as adverse experiences with various types of stigmatization: residence restrictions, employment hardships, social isolation, vigilantism, and difficulty maintaining support systems (Tewksbury & Copes, 2012; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010). A common theme in sex offender research is that the restrictions have led to stress, depression, fear, and ostracism from family and community members. This study will examine some of these

experienced social consequences, which are expected to enhance our understanding of the extent to which sex offenders have been impacted by Megan's Law.

Currently, there are few studies examining the impact social support has on sex offenders (Seidler, 2010; Wilson, Cortoni & McWhinnie, 2009). There is evidence that suggests social support systems assist offenders in improving their coping and decision-making skills (Wilson et al., 2009; Gutierrez-Lobos, Eher, Grunhut, Bankier, Schmidl-Mohl, Fruhwald & Semler, 2001). There is also research on juvenile delinquency and general offenders showing that positive social support is beneficial to offender reentry (Best, Hernando, Gossop, Sidwell & Strang, 2003; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). It is necessary to acknowledge that associating with supports that accept and/or participate in criminal activity or have antisocial behavior patterns is conducive to offenders returning to a criminal lifestyle (Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Gutierrez-Lobos et al., 2001). This study gauges the types of social supports offenders have, their helpfulness, and any experiences and obstacles offenders encountered with their supports systems as a result of being Internet registered.

The studies examining the social consequences of registration and community notification concentrate mostly on all male offenders, making reviews of female sex offenders' infrequent occurrences (Tewksbury, 2004). Even though males make up the majority of arrests (95%), convictions, and registered sex offenders, an exploration of the experiences of males and females can better explain the extent to which sex offenders are impacted by the public disclosure of their sex offender status, as well as the social consequences frequently experienced (Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). Therefore, in this study, I also examine whether males and females experience

similar consequences of being registered and whether their social support systems equally mitigate those consequences.

Significance of the Study

Previous research has focused on negative experiences and attitudes towards Megan's Law, as well as frequency distributions of offender and offense characteristics (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). This study will build on prior research by investigating whether or not social support lessens these negative experiences. This will help inform policy by creating an awareness of the outcomes associated with publicizing the crimes of sex offenders returning to the community. It is important to minimize the identified consequences associated with SORN laws to prevent reoffending, a public safety concern SORN was meant to address. If support alleviates negative experiences, policy can focus on intervention programs that can aid offenders who have insufficient support networks (Cullen, Wright, & Chamlin, 1999).

Like the crime of sexual violence, female perpetrated sex crimes are underreported (Faller, 1987; Vandiver, 2006). Females have often been eliminated from samples because they are not heavily represented on the Internet registry; whereas males are more likely to be arrested for sex crimes and experience placement on the Internet registry (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008). Studies concentrating on the demographics and offense characteristics of female sex offenders have shown females typically engage in intrafamilial victimization (Faller, 1987; Grayston & De Luca, 1999), so studying this issue can further explain whether offense characteristics such as the victim's relationship contribute to negative experiences for female offenders compared to

male offenders. While the number of females in this study precludes a statistical comparison, I will qualitatively explore whether male and female experiences differ.

Purpose of the Study

In order to investigate the questions specified above, a questionnaire based on social consequences, length of time listed on the Internet registry, social support systems, along with the offender's demographics and victim characteristics was distributed to registered sex offenders in New Jersey. This study investigates whether social support lessens the negative impact of registration and notification laws. Additionally, this study will qualitatively explore male and female experiences and attitudes towards registration and community notification laws. Specifically, I examine the social consequences sex offenders experience as a result of being subjected to registration and community notification laws and whether social support mediates these effects for males and females. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework as well as the history of sex offender laws and a synthesized review of the empirical research on sex offenders.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Rational Choice Theory

Clarke and Cornish adapted rational choice theory to explain crime. Like classical theory, the rational choice perspective assumes offenders are motivated by self-interest and seek to receive the most benefit and limit the negative consequences resulting from their criminal behavior (Cullen, 1994). While classical theory assumes the individual is rational, Clarke and Cornish assume limited rationality when individuals decide to participate in and/or continue committing crime (Cullen, 1994; Nagin & Paternoster, 1993). This limited rationality requires considering the costs and benefits of offending, such as the social stigma attached to criminal behavior and the benefits of self-gratification. The rational choice perspective has also explored the situational factors considered in crime when a crime-specific focus is adopted.

Situational factors found in rational choice theory have concentrated on victim characteristics and the offender's attack methods. Like other criminal offenders, sex offenders can be constrained by time and location (Cornish & Clarke, 1987; Cullen, 1994; Nagin & Paternoster, 1993). These constraints or situational factors are influential in the continuation of and desistance from sex offending. For instance, individual vulnerability and certain environmental conditions, such as poverty stricken neighborhoods, are situational factors that are conducive to offending. On the other hand, social support systems can reduce or mitigate negative effects, such as living conditions, mental health disorders, and substance abuse for offenders. In the end, the sex offender weighs the risks, costs and benefits of offending before participating in criminal behavior.

As a crime-control and prevention policy, Megan's Law was enacted to address the problem of sexual violence in the United States (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). More important, the rational choice perspective proposes that sex offenders consider the legal consequences of participating in crime, such as incarceration and being listed on the Internet registry (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). As a prevention policy, Megan's Law is designed to deter and reduce opportunities for sex offending. Further, sex offender policies have relied on deterrence theory, which emphasizes specific deterrence to prevent future sexual reoffending (Cullen, 1994).

For sex offenders, rewards such as sexual gratification and/or control are essential to the decision-making process, and these rewards compete with the costs of getting caught and the stigma of the offense. The desires for sexual gratification or need for control leads offenders to look for opportunities to offend, and sex offenders begin considering situations where they can seize the opportunity to engage in sex crimes. Some studies have demonstrated this rational decision-making process (Beauregard, Rossmo, & Proulx, 2007). In an examination of 69 serial sex offenders by Beauregard et al. (2007) the offenders' methods for selecting a victim to perpetrate their crime was identified. This study found that sex offenders have been driven by various choices and decisions, such as victim selection, hunting ground, and location of the attack.

Social Support Theory

While registration and notification laws were intended as a deterrent to be weighed in the cost-benefit analysis, available social support systems are additional factors that may contribute to the decision to commit a sex offense. The concept of social support was expanded on by Cullen (1994). Of the many propositions created by Cullen,

social support is based on the idea that social support and crime are directly related (Cullen, 1994). Social support theory asserts that crime can be prevented, and offenders can be rehabilitated with positive social support. It follows, then, that, a lack of social support results in higher crime rates (Cullen, 1994). Cullen also emphasizes that “social support lessens the effect of exposure to criminogenic strains” (p.596). This assertion is based on the offender’s family dynamics and the context of the offender’s neighborhood, which are important to community reentry and lessening the negative experiences for offenders.

Social support has been categorized in two ways: 1) expressive, which emphasizes emotional and self-esteem support; and 2) instrumental support, which emphasizes tangible needs, such as jobs, money, and housing (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cullen, 1994; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Also, emphasized are the avenues which deliver support, such as formal and informal relationships. Formal agencies disseminating support will include mental health clinicians, the judiciary, and criminal justice practitioners, such as law enforcement, probation and parole, and corrections. Informal supports come from family, friends, and people within the community, religious institutions, and support groups.

It is also important to explain the circumstances in which offenders need support and the extent to which social support lessens stress and crime. When offenders return to the community, offenders rely on their informal support networks. These informal supports typically consist of family, friends, and religious institutions (Johnson, Jang, Li & Larson, 2000; Liu & Chui, 2014; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Considered the most important, family support provides instrumental and expressive support. More

specifically, support from family is essential in assisting offenders in their search for stable employment and housing, as well as their desire to establish and mend social relationships. When basic needs go unmet, such stressors further contribute to psychological and social consequences (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1986).

Regarding sex offenders and support systems, research has found static (unchangeable) risk factors that have been predictors for sexual recidivism and dynamic (changeable) risk factors that were predictors of general recidivism (Hanson & Harris, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). In an examination of community supervised recidivistic (N=208) and non-recidivistic (N=201) sex offenders, Hanson and Harris (1998) identified static and dynamic risk factors that could assist in managing sex offenders in communities. Aside from static and dynamic risks, such as a criminal record, antisocial behavior, a lack of individual risk management, and impulsive behaviors, recidivistic sex offenders also had inadequate supports (Hanson & Harris, 1998). Likewise, in their meta-analysis of recidivism studies, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) identified support deficits or inadequate social relationships and child maltreatment as contributing factors to sex offender recidivism.

General offenders and supports. Studies also show the importance of positive supports for incarcerated adult and juvenile offenders, as they adjust to imprisonment. Jiang and Winfree's (2006) study on the relationship between social support and prison adjustment compared incarcerated males (N= 12,269) and females (N= 3,116) by examining acquired infractions. This study found that female inmates had more support, particularly from their children, than male inmates. It was also found that "fewer infractions existed for married male inmates when compared to unmarried males, and

there were no significant differences among married and unmarried female inmates” (Jiang & Winfree, 2006, p. 49). It was suggested that stereotypical gender roles influenced behavior among female inmates, as well as for spouses visiting incarcerated husbands. More specifically, females were more likely to focus on relationships, caregiving, and visit incarcerated husbands when compared to male spouses (Jiang & Winfree, 2006).

In an examination of Chinese female offenders’ adjustment to prison life, Liu and Chui (2014) found female inmates relied on the support of family and others (ie. prison officers), with friends being least important. Female offenders considered friends less important because “friends” were typically other inmates. Overall, this study did not find friends to be influential in adjusting to prison life, and offenders with absentee friends adjusted more quickly (Liu & Chui, 2014).

Like Liu and Chui (2014), Shulman and Cauffman’s (2011) study of incarcerated juvenile offenders found that social supports helped juveniles cope with incarceration. Even though specific supports such as family, the primary support, and friends were not identified as positive coping mechanisms, Shulman and Cauffman (2011) acknowledged that supports can be diverse for incarcerated juveniles. These diverse supports were described as assistance from other offenders, facility staff, and family. For sex offenders, support from family and friends is key to reintegration because of the public disclosure of their crime(s) and the negative connotation of the sex offender label. Since research shows sex offenders most frequently victimize family members and acquaintances, these supports can be difficult to maintain (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013; Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). However, family and friends who maintain a relationship

with sex offenders have reported being negatively affected, expressing feelings of isolation and experiences with vigilantes (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012). As a result, sex offender's most basic relationship or lack thereof can result in the offender experiencing the unintended consequence of social isolation.

While positive support can benefit sex offenders in their return to the community, research on general offenders show instances where associating with supports can result in reoffending. In their study on general offenders, Best et al. (2003) reviewed drug users and criminal activity, finding that drug users who spent a significant amount of time with other drug users engaged in other criminal activities, such as shoplifting and theft. Similarly, Mowen and Visser's (2015) study of family support and conflict during incarceration found that family conflict was a significant predictor for drug use and crime post-incarceration. These studies illustrate that the quality of supports matter and that positive and anti-criminal supports aid in reintegration.

Labeling Theory

Related to social isolation, labeling theory says that the stigma of the criminal title, especially the sex offender label, diminishes support networks, resulting in sex offenders being relegated to associating with other criminals. Labeling theory was created by Tannenbaum in the early 20th century and was expanded on by Lemert (Robbers, 2009). Identified as the dramatization of evil, Tannenbaum emphasized that individuals were ostracized and stigmatized by their label and these individuals would become their label (Robbers, 2009). Lemert added to labeling theory by claiming there were two parts to the label which included primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance refers to

the act that results in receiving the label (Lemert, 1952; Robbers, 2009). Secondary deviance requires that society views the behavior as deviant and that the individual accepts the label as their new self-image (Lemert, 1952; Robbers, 2009). According to labeling theory, being labeled a sex offender promotes criminal behavior.

Stigmatization. In a study of the effects of labeling on 153 sex offenders in Virginia, Robbers (2009) found that most sex offenders were negatively perceived and treated by their communities. Job loss and social isolation were a common experience of sex offenders whose sex offender status was directly or indirectly disclosed (Robbers, 2009). These negative experiences contribute to recidivism.

The stigmatization experienced by sex offenders has resulted in traditional labeling and shaming. Shaming was proposed by Braithwaite, who described two types of shaming: reintegrative, which disapproves of the act by individuals close to the offender; and disintegrative shaming, which continuously punishes the offender with humiliation and ostracism (Braithwaite, 2000; McAlinden, 2005). Reintegrative shaming takes a restorative justice approach, where the community is made whole again (McAlinden, 2005).

However, the United States has been known for its use of disintegrative shaming, especially with regard to sex offenders (McAlinden, 2005). Disintegrative shaming has been permitted in the name of public safety and awareness of those declared sexually dangerous. Unfortunately for sex offenders, the “sex offender” label and the shaming punishment of community notification hinders successful reintegration because sex offenders struggle with finding and/or maintaining housing, employment and prosocial support systems; additionally, sex offenders experience social isolation and vigilantism

(Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; McAlinden, 2005). When acknowledging the above factors as contributors to unsuccessful reentry, sex offenders who struggle with daily conventional activities may find participation in criminal activities to be their only option.

History of Sex Offender Laws

In the early 1900s sexual violence was first recognized in the form of child sexual abuse by Sigmund Freud (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). While a substantial portion of clinicians denied the initial idea of child sexual abuse, over time, the concept of child sexual abuse was accepted. Upon accepting child sexual abuse, the psychiatric community resolved the issue through victim blaming, suggesting children had to be taught to control their impulsive behaviors (Faller, 1987; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007).

As sexual violence became more prevalent, or more widely recognized, individual states began enacting sex offender legislation that would aid in monitoring sexually violent criminals. This legislation was called "sexual psychopath laws," which were first enacted in Michigan in 1937 (Sutherland, 1950b). In Florida, in 1937, the response to sexual violence took a different approach by creating sex offender registration laws which assisted law enforcement in monitoring offenders in urban communities (Fetzer, 2010; Logan, 2003). In 1947, California became the first state to adopt registration laws statewide (Fetzer, 2010). Given the attention to sex offenders, these social policies created a domino effect among other states; in the end, sexual psychopath and registration laws were enacted throughout the United States.

Sexual psychopath laws. The earliest of all sex offender legislation, sexual psychopath laws were based on uncontrollable and impulsive sexual behavior. These laws led to psychiatric diagnoses of sexual psychopathy and resulted in indefinite confinement in mental health facilities (Sutherland, 1950b). Sexual psychopath laws sought to treat and rehabilitate sex offenders, rather than imposing punishment.

However, by the 1970s, the United States saw a policy shift that evolved from a treatment approach to a punitive purpose (Karpman, 1951; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Sutherland, 1950b). The evolution of more punitive social policies was due to the Martinson Report. In 1974, the Martinson report declared correctional rehabilitation to be ineffective. When considering the offender's environment, rehabilitation was still unsuccessful; thus, people interpreted the work as declaring "nothing works" (Martinson, 1974). Research such as Martinson's led to strict social policies such as mandatory sentencing, civil commitment of sexually violent predators, and registration and community notification laws.

Civil commitment of sexually violent predators. Civil commitment laws are derived from sexual psychopath laws. There are two significant differences between civil commitment and sexual psychopath statutes. Sexual psychopaths never experience incarceration, rather these sex offenders receive treatment while confined to mental health facilities, where they are eventually released. On the other hand, civil commitment labels the sex offender a sexually violent predator and indefinite confinement of the offender occurs following the completion of a prison sentence (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Sutherland, 1950b; Winick, 1998). With civil commitment legislation came the creation of risk assessment instruments, which are used to determine a sex offender's

likelihood of recidivating; these include instruments such as the Static-99/Static-99R, Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offense Recidivism (RRASOR), and the Minnesota Sex Offending Screening Tool-Revised (MnSORT-R) (Lave, 2011; Wilson, Looman, Abracen & Pake, 2012).

In passing the Community Protection Act of 1990, Washington State used civil commitment to confine repeat sex offenders who have been declared sexually violent predators (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Winick, 1998). Civil commitment remains controversial; and it remains plagued by judicial challenges, such as substantive due process, double jeopardy, ex post facto, and Eighth Amendment violations. It is the case of *Kansas v. Hendricks* which laid the legal foundation for civil commitment laws.

Under the Kansas Sexually Violent Predator Act, sexually violent persons are confined to a commitment facility and provided treatment for their “mental abnormality or personality disorder” (Lave, 2011; Winick, 1998). During the commitment proceedings of *Kansas v. Hendricks*, Hendricks who had a history of sexually abusing children admitted to the jury that his urges persisted, subsequently acknowledging that his pedophilia had not been cured (Lave, 2011; Winick, 1998). Since Hendricks had been found to have the mental abnormality required of a sexually violent predator status, the Kansas Supreme Court decided to reverse the decision resulting from Hendricks’ commitment proceedings (Winick, 1998). The Kansas Supreme Court did not find the defined “mental abnormality” sufficient to fit the substantive due process requirement (Winick, 1998). The US Supreme Court reversed the state’s decision on the basis that the Kansas Act specified a criterion for civil commitment, which had been in accordance with substantive due process. Even though civil commitment targets repeat sex offenders

who are likely to reoffend, to date, there have been few recidivism studies on offenders released from civil commitment facilities because the majority of sexually violent predators remain indefinitely confined until there is sufficient evidence that these sex offenders are no longer sexually dangerous.

Sex offender registration and notification laws. Based on nationally publicized heinous sex crimes committed against children and women the public pressured legislators to precede with the enactment of registration and notification legislation, which have been declared public safety laws (Fetzer, 2010; Sutherland, 1950b).

Mandated by the federal government, registration and notification (SORN) laws have been in effect nationwide for about two decades. Due to the legislation's countless modifications that allow for increased monitoring and restricting of sex offenders, registration and notification laws continue to be contentiously disputed.

In 1989, at age 11 Jacob Wetterling was abducted; his remains were located in 2016. Information regarding sex offenders residing in a nearby halfway house had been withheld during the investigation, ultimately eliminating potential suspects (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). The scrutiny experienced during the investigation into Wetterling's abduction led to the creation of a sex offender registry, which requires sex offenders to register their addresses with local law enforcement (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). By 1994, the Wetterling Act was passed, and every state was mandated to comply with sex offender registration.

Perhaps the most well-known case may be that of Megan Kanka. In 1994, a seven year old, Megan was raped and murdered by a repeat sex offender, Jesse Timmendequas (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Zgoba et al., 2008). The murder of Megan

Kanka incited public outrage, and in the months following Kanka's murder, New Jersey passed community notification laws, otherwise referred to as Megan's Law (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Zgoba et al., 2008). At the federal level, the Wetterling Act was amended to include Megan's Law. In addition to the registration and community notification laws of 1996, the federal government enacted the Pam Lyncher Act, which established the national sex offender registry (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Fetzer, 2010).

With federal funding incentives, registration and notification laws quickly spread nationwide. Most recently, Title I of the Adam Walsh Act (AWA), the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) imposed stricter requirements on sex offenders, in addition to various other guidelines for the sex offender registry (Fetzer, 2010; Levenson & D'Amora, 2007; Visgaitis, 2011). Under SORNA, it became a federal offense for sex offenders to fail to register (Fetzer; Terry, 2011). Another SORNA caveat is that sex offender registration would be based on convictions for sex offenses, in addition to establishing a national sex offender registry (Fetzer, 2010). In short, SORNA's new stipulations have garnered many legal challenges by sex offenders not in compliance with the act.

After the high profile cases discussed above, sex offender laws were passed with little discussion among legislators. However, sex offenders have raised several challenges as to the constitutionality of registration and notification laws. Three important cases have challenged these laws.

In *Smith v. Doe*, Alaska's retroactive application of registration and notification laws was addressed. Challenges concerning retroactive application of sex offender laws

arose due to the plaintiffs being convicted prior to the enactment of registration and notification laws. In order to prove Alaska's statute violated the Ex Post Facto Clause the plaintiffs had to show that the "registration and notification laws were retroactive and punitive in intent and effect" (*Smith v. Doe*, 2003). Ultimately, the Court determined registration and notification to be non-punitive. This conclusion had been based on the five factors found in *Kennedy v. Mendoza-Martinez*. The five factors considered in *Smith* are: "in its necessary operation; 1) has not been regarded in our history and traditions as a punishment; 2) imposes an affirmative disability or restraint; 3) promotes traditional aims of punishment; 4) has a rational connection to a non-punitive purpose; or 5) is excessive with respect to the Act's purpose" (Yung, 2009, p. 374). Based on the *Mendoza-Martinez* factors, the *Smith* Court affirmed sex offender laws as non-punitive and the ex post facto violation invalid.

In *Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe*, the plaintiff, Doe who resided in a Connecticut community contested the release of personal identifying information on the Internet registry. This claim had been based on the denial of a predeprivation hearing, which determined the offender's current dangerousness (*Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe*, 2003). The Court remedied this complaint on the basis that sex offender registration has been based off of past convictions for sex offenses, rather than risk assessments that have been used to evaluate current danger for reoffending (*Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe*, 2003). The Connecticut statute claimed that the presentation of the information on sex offenders had been available to the public, but the Internet made the information easily accessible (*Connecticut Department of Public Safety v. Doe*, 2003).

Finally, in *Doe v. Miller*, the plaintiffs, which included numerous convicted sex offenders contested the enforcement of Iowa Code § 692A.2A, which imposed 2,000 feet resident restrictions on sex offenders. The district court concluded that resident restrictions were unconstitutional because the statute would restrict housing availability in urban and rural areas of Iowa. In weighing the five factors of *Kennedy v. Mendoza-Martinez*, the court concluded that Iowa Code § 692A.2A had been excessive and punitive because 692A.2A imposes an additional punishment ex post facto which is unconstitutional (*Doe v. Miller*, 2005). The cases of *Smith* and *Connecticut Department of Public Safety* are important because the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of registration and community notification laws. Despite *Doe v. Miller*, residential restrictions remain in place and have expanded across the U.S. because of over-inclusive registration and notification laws, which imply that all sex offenders are high risk and other aspects of their lives need monitoring to further protect communities.

Empirical Research

Sex offending. When considering statistics on sex crimes such as rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse and sex offending, it is important to acknowledge that these crimes are underreported. Thus, statistics based off of reported sex crimes are likely underestimating the prevalence of this behavior. Victims of sexual violence have reported experiencing feelings of shame, embarrassment, desire for privacy, or fear of abuser retribution as reasons for not reporting their victimization (Levenson & D'Amora, 2007). That said, one in six women and one in 33 men experience sexual victimization (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008). Sexual victimization is defined as using force or manipulation to coerce another person to participate in unwanted sexual activity (Center

for Sex Offender Management, 2008). Coupled with several highly publicized cases, facts such as these have catapulted the need for severe sex offender legislation.

Ultimately, though, sex offender laws have been enacted based on two misconceptions: sex offenders have high recidivism rates and “stranger danger.”

Regarding recidivism, studies tend to show that it is overestimated for sex offenders. An early study of sex offender recidivism by Sample and Bray (2003) used arrest data from Illinois from 1990 to 1997, which served to compare re-offense rates among various criminal offenses and assess whether some offenses are “gateway” offenses to sex crimes. In their study, Sample and Bray (2003) defined sex offending by registration requirements in Illinois: “conviction of sexual assault and abuse of children and adults; soliciting and exploitation of a child or juvenile prostitutes; and manufacturing, distributing, or possession of child pornography” (p. 70).

Sample and Bray (2003) sampled 146,918 arrestees who re-offended and found that sex offenders had a re-offense rate of 45.1% over five years. However, robbery re-offenses had rates of 74.9%, burglary (66%), and larceny 52.9% over five years (Sample & Bray, 2003). While the consequences of sexual assault and rape are more detrimental to those victimized, recidivism rates such as 45.1% are low compared to the general offenses of burglary and larceny. The notion that general offenses lead to sex offenses garners little support since non-sex offense arrestees reoffended at 1% and 2% for sex crimes (Sample & Bray, 2003). Ultimately, Sample and Bray (2003) concluded that based on recidivism data, sex offenders are not as dangerous as the public presumes when compared to other types of offenders.

Similarly, Hanson and Bussiere's (1998) meta-analysis of 23, 393 sex offenders reported a 13.4% sexual recidivism rate over three to four years. Hanson and Bussiere (1998) found that sex offenses have been categorized to show that rapists reoffended at 18.9% and child molesters reoffended at 12.7% over four to five years. Other research shows that non-sex offenders have been more likely to recidivate than sex offenders. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1989), burglary had a recidivism rate of 31.9%, those convicted of robbery reoffended at 19.6%, and drug offenders reoffended at a rate of 24.8%.

While early and current legislation promoted protecting women and children from "stranger danger," the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2013) reports that approximately 22% of sex offenders have been identified as strangers to their victims. Even though the sex offender registry has been used as a method to restrict and track the movements of registered sex offenders, the registry also promotes the notion that sex offenders frequently attack strangers. However, research has shown that seven out of 10 victims acknowledge their assailant is known to them (Cohen & Jeglic, 2007). Such statistics further illustrates the "stranger danger" assumption may be in opposition of the goals of registration and notification laws which seek to enhance public safety and reduce recidivism. Research consistently shows that friends, acquaintances, spouses/significant others, and relatives are most often the assailant (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013; Cohen & Jeglic, 2007).

Male sex offending. Studies on adult male sex offenders are extensive, especially with regard to their offense characteristics (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009; Vandiver & Teske, 2006). Existing research on adult male sex offenders consistently shows that

similarities exist between adult males and juvenile male sex offenders (Vandiver, 2006; Vandiver & Teske, 2006). The countless studies that focus on adult male sex offenders have sought to understand male sexual recidivism. Research has found that when compared to adult female sex offenders, adult male sex offenders have a criminal history involving sex and drug offenses as well as violent felony arrests (Freeman & Sandler, 2008; Miller et al., 2009). These male and female sex offender comparisons have also shown that males are more likely to be re-arrested for sexual offenses. Also, research on incarcerated rapists and sexual assaulters found that these sex offenders are typically Caucasian males (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). The same nationwide study found that the average age for a rapist was 31 years of age while sexual assaulters were 34 years old (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). When compared to rapists, there have been more reported cases of physical or sexual abuse during the childhood of offenders incarcerated for sexual assault. As defined by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), rape involves forced sexual intercourse by a person, and sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact, including threats or attempts to commit such acts (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). When defining rape and sexual assault, the gender of the victim and offender is irrelevant. As for the adult male sex offender's victim preference, adult males most frequently victimized females. This victim preference is a characteristic that has been found in juvenile male sex offenders as well (Freeman & Sandler, 2008; Miller et al., 2009; Vandiver, 2006a; Vandiver & Teske, 2006).

When studying juvenile sex offender characteristics and their continuance of sexual offending into adulthood, Vandiver (2006a) found that the gender and age of the victim and offender are significant to continued sexual offending. Among this sample of

juvenile sex offenders, on average victims were eight years old and 75% of victims were female (Vandiver, 2006a). It has also been found that most juvenile sex offenders are not rearrested for sexual offenses, rather the majority reoffended with non-sex crimes. This finding on juvenile sex offenders is consistent with the findings on adult sex offender recidivism studies (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998; Sample & Bray, 2003).

Female sex offending. While research regarding female sex offenders is scarce, it is becoming more prevalent (Tewksbury, 2004). Females currently account for approximately 5% of arrests for sex crimes, but like the general statistics on sex crimes, female sex offending is severely underreported (Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Vandiver, 2006b). Research on female sex offenders has established some common themes, such as females are a diverse group of offenders and females are known to offend with an accomplice; though solo offending is not completely uncommon (Faller, 1987; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver, 2006b). Even though the research on female sex offenders is limited, the existing research has sought to identify victim and offender characteristics and offending patterns. The characteristics of female sex offenders have been thoroughly described in previous literature (Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver, 2006b). Females are characterized as being in their 20s and 30s, and 75% to 95% are Caucasian (Faller, 1987; Vandiver, 2006). Female offenders have experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; females also report experiencing domestic violence by husbands or co-offenders and a wealth of family problems. Further, female offenders often suffer from mental health problems (Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Lawson, 2008). Despite the fact that reports of child maltreatment are prevalent in female sex offenders' histories, these characteristics are not unique to the sex offender population. Apart from

these characteristics, females have been described as typically offending with an accomplice. Sexual victimization by female sex offenders are considered uncommon; however, prior research states that when female offenders are involved, they are often coerced or persuaded to participate in sexual abuse by their male co-offenders (Faller, 1987; Vandiver, 2006b).

Effectiveness of Megan's Law

Evaluations that concentrate on the effectiveness of Megan's Law have focused on the stakeholder's perspective, the effectiveness of laws for reducing recidivism, and the negative consequences of these laws on offenders. The stakeholders' studies focus on sex abuse professionals, policy makers, community members and their awareness of these laws, and probation and parole officers. First, I will review the stakeholder studies, and then I turn to the studies that examine the objective effectiveness of the laws. I will conclude with a review of the negative affects the laws have on sex offenders.

Stakeholders' perceptions of Megan's laws. When evaluating the perspectives of sex abuse professionals (n= 261), Levenson, Fortney, and Baker (2010) found that 62% of professionals considered the laws fair and 42% agreed with the policies in their states. In their survey of parole board members in 48 states (61.8% male), Tewksbury and Mustaine (2011) obtained their perceptions on the effectiveness and fairness of registration and community notification policies. Similar to the results of Levenson et al. (2010), Tewksbury and Mustaine (2011) found that the majority of parole board members considered the Internet registries fair.

Other stakeholder perspectives focused on the impact sex offender policies have on the reduction of sex offenses. Levenson et al. (2010) found that few sex abuse

professionals believed these policies reduced sex offenses; yet more than half of these professionals stated their support for sex offender policies without evidence of their effectiveness. Likewise, Tewksbury and Mustaine (2011) found more than half of parole board members do not believe sex offender policies have a significant effect in the reduction of sex offenses.

In a survey of mental health professionals, Malesky and Keim (2001) asked whether the Internet registry would affect annual child sexual abuse rates and 80.8% believe child sexual abuse rates would not change (Malesky & Keim, 2001). Malesky and Keim (2001) also found that 59.4% disagreed that the Internet registry would be an effective deterrent for convicted sex offenders. In opposition to the lack of deterrent effect, Meloy et al. (2013) focused on policy makers' perspectives of the effectiveness of sex offender policies and found that more than half (55%) of policy makers believe the laws are working and 49.5% agreed that treatment could assist in deterring sex offending (Meloy et al., 2013).

Additionally, stakeholder studies have focused attention on community awareness of sex offenders and community notification meetings. Zevitz and Farkas (2000b) attended community notification meetings throughout Wisconsin. It was found that the majority of attendees became aware of community meetings from the news media (27%), and other means of notification included: flyers; friends, neighbors, etc.; and local officials or law enforcement (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). It was also found that more than half (59%) understood the meetings were to inform the public about an offender's release into their community. On the other hand, Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, and Kernsmith (2009) published an outcome evaluation on Internet registry use and sex offender

awareness in Michigan communities (n=733). This study found that the majority of community members are aware that sex offenders are required to register and that this information is public; however, only 37% of participants had viewed the registry (Kernsmith et al., 2009). The reasons for not viewing the registry included: participants did not have any interest in the registry, felt safe, or they did not have any children. Finally, Kernsmith et al. (2009) found that 27% of participants believed an offender resided in their neighborhood. In fact, 99.5% of study participants live in communities with registered sex offenders, which further indicates that people are still unaware of sex offenders living in their communities despite the existence of registries (Kernsmith et al., 2009).

Stakeholder studies have also focused on the implication of sex offender policies which include workload burden for criminal justice personnel and social consequences for sex offenders. In Wisconsin, Zevitz and Farkas (2000a) examined the impact of community notification on 77 probation and parole officers. While the average sex offender caseload is 25, 64% of officers reported having at least five high-risk and active sex offender cases (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a). Ultimately, Zevitz and Farkas (2000a) found that high-risk cases consumed a substantial portion of officers' time and budgetary resources. Regarding negative consequences, Meloy et al. (2013) received responses that 89% of legislators believed there have been negative consequences associated with sex offender legislation. Alternately, 11.5% of policy makers did not believe that sex offender laws resulted in negative consequences.

Stakeholder studies have shown that community members staunchly support sex offender legislation; still, few have used the resources provided to increase their

awareness of sex offenders residing in their communities. Treatment professionals and policy makers have also been supportive of sex offender policies, though their deterrent effect remains largely unknown (Levenson et al., 2010; Meloy et al., 2013). Regarding their effectiveness in reducing sex crimes, treatment professionals and parole board members were not convinced that the enacted policies would deter sex offending (Levenson et al., 2010; Malesky & Keim, 2001; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2011).

Objective studies of effectiveness: recidivism. To investigate the effectiveness of SORN laws in reducing recidivism, Tewksbury and Jennings (2010) published their findings on sex offenders released from the Iowa Department of Corrections five years before (1992-1996) and five years after (1997-2001) the enactment of SORN. The 98.2% male and 1.8% female sample sought to examine the impact SORN has had on sex offender recidivism (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010). Using a trajectory analysis, Tewksbury and Jennings (2010) found three groups of sex offenders for the pre-SORN and post-SORN cohort. In both the pre and post SORN groups, the first trajectory did not sexually reoffend over the five year period. The second trajectory group for the pre and post-SORN cohorts reoffended at lower rates but reoffending increased over time, though the increase was not significant (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010). The final cohort, the third group exhibited higher rates of recidivism. In the first year of release, the pre-SORN group had 1.5 convictions and the post-SORN group had more than 2.5 convictions (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010). In the end, Tewksbury and Jennings (2010) found that SORN had not significantly impacted sex offender recidivism rates.

Similarly, Zgoba, Veysey, and Dalessandro (2010) evaluated the effectiveness of community notification pre and post Megan's Law on 550 male sex offenders released

from the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center (ADTC) and general population prisons in New Jersey from 1990 through 2000. It was found that the pre-Megan's Law group was rearrested for a new sex crime at 10% versus the 7.6% post-Megan's Law group which was not significant (Zgoba et al., 2010). As for nonsexual recidivism rates, the pre-Megan's Law group of sex offenders were rearrested at 49.7% for any crime and the post-Megan's Law group 41.2%, which had a significance level of .05 (Zgoba et al., 2010). Based on post-Megan's Law comparison, 90.9% of sexual recidivists were incarcerated compared to general recidivists who were incarcerated at lower rates of 65.1% (Zgoba et al., 2010). Generally, community notification reduced general reoffending but did not significantly impact sexual recidivism (Zgoba et al., 2010). The differences in reoffending were suggested to result from the implementation of Megan's Law, which re-directed attention from general offenders to sex offenders, resulting in sex offenders being penalized more often than general offenders.

Another evaluation on the effectiveness of community notification was conducted by Duwe and Donnay (2008), where the deterrent effect on (n= 155 level three or high risk offenders and notification group) sex offenders released from Minnesota prisons was compared to the recidivism rates of offenders who were not subject to notification. The pre-notification control group consisted of sex offenders who were not assigned a risk level and the non-notification control group was listed as level one and two offenders (Duwe & Donnay, 2008). Offenders in the notification and pre-notification groups were subjected to broad notification policies. Overall, the notification group had the lowest recidivism rates and the pre-notification group had the highest recidivism rates. This study suggests that using a tiered risk management system and broad community

notification has a deterrent effect on sexual recidivism; whereas the results of nonsexual and general recidivism were mixed (Duwe & Donnay, 2008).

Socia (2012) studied county residence restrictions in New York to determine if the additional sex offender restrictions reduced sex crime arrests (n=8,928). The counties targeted included diverse crime characteristics and counties with and without residence restrictions. This study's analysis categorized sex crime arrests in four categories: recidivistic sex offenders with child victims and recidivistic sex offenders with adult victims in which these offenders were Internet registered, as well as non-recidivistic sex offenders with child victims and non-recidivistic sex offenders with adult victims, where these were first time offenders (Socia, 2012).

Socia (2012) found that residence restrictions did not lead to increased recidivistic sex crimes. The implementation of residence restrictions were expected to reduce or increase crime as opposed to having no effect. These outcomes were expected because registered sex offenders would be impacted by child congregation areas, which limits their access to potential victims (crime reduction). The additional hardships were based on sex offenders being forced from their homes and potential experiences with isolation and economic instability due to restrictions. When considering non-recidivistic sex crimes, it was found that "residence restrictions were not significantly associated with sex crimes against children" (p. 624). It was also found that sex crime arrests committed against adults decreased by 10% in counties with residence restrictions (Socia, 2012). Overall, the deterrence findings were mixed. This study suggested that awareness of sex offenders and sex crimes may have risen from the enactment of resident restrictions (Socia, 2012).

Some states, like South Carolina use broad registration and notification policies, which require all sex offenders to be listed on the Internet registry. Letourneau, Levenson, Bandyopadhyay, Sinha, and Armstrong (2010) examined South Carolina's broad sex offender policy to determine its effects on sex offender recidivism. The final sample followed 6,064 male sex offenders between 1990 and 2004. This study found that eight percent were arrested for new sex offenses and five percent were convicted for new sex offenses (Letourneau et al., 2010). Overall, Letourneau et al.'s (2010) study of sex offender recidivism rates was consistent with other reviews evaluating the effectiveness of Megan's Law, which show Megan's Law as not having a significant impact on sexual recidivism rates (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010; Zgoba et al., 2010; Zgoba & Simon, 2005; Zgoba et al., 2008).

Negative Effects of SORN

Studies on sex offenders' experiences and attitudes toward registration and notification seek to provide insight on the effectiveness of sex offender legislation from the offenders' perspective. The goal of registration and notification has been to provide community members with the information and tools to protect themselves and their families from victimization and reduce sex offender recidivism (Tewksbury, 2005); these studies examine sex offenders' experiences with stigmatizing social consequences. These consequences include things, such as residence restrictions, employment difficulty, social isolation, vigilantism, and difficulty for social support systems since being listed on the Internet registry. Since there are so few females listed on the Internet registry, females are often eliminated from the samples (Tewksbury, 2004). Thus, most studies refer to

male offenders, and the few studies that examine or integrate females into their samples do not describe gender differences.

Residence restrictions. The first and most often examined form of stigmatization is that of residence restrictions. The creation of residential restrictions or buffer zones became more prevalent in 2005. These buffer zones have prohibited sex offenders from living within 1,000 and 2,500 feet of “child congregation” areas, such as daycares, schools, libraries, and parks (Levenson & D’Amora, 2007; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Zgoba, 2011). However, restrictions have subjected sex offenders to living in low socioeconomic and socially disorganized communities (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011), which further exacerbate the offenders’ risk for reoffending and community reentry.

The use of residence restrictions have been examined to determine whether further restricting sex offenders reduces sexual reoffending. Nobles, Levenson, and Youstin (2012) sampled 8,597 cases in Jacksonville, Florida in which males and females were arrested for various sex crimes over a 30 year period. It was hypothesized that the residential restrictions would lead to a decline in rearrests for sex offenses. Yet following the enactment of these residential policies, arrests for sex offenses increased from 13.76% to 15.45% (Nobles et al., 2012). This study did not describe the percentage of males and females in the study nor did it show the percentage arrested for sex crimes pre or post policy enactment. Additionally, arrest rates for sex crimes were lower for non-Whites, and males and older offenders were more likely to be arrested for sex crimes (Nobles et al., 2012). In the end, Nobles et al. (2012) found that the increase in sex crime arrests post policy enactment was not statistically significant, especially when controlling for

other variables like gender, age, and having multiple felonies, which were associated with increased odds of rearrests for sex crimes.

Levenson and Cotter (2005b) examined the impact of resident restrictions and offenders' attitudes towards these restrictions by surveying 135 sex offenders in Florida. This study did not include the offender's gender; rather it focused on offender characteristics like age, race, marital status, and education. Buffer zones have forced 50% of offenders from their residences; also, more than half of the participants struggled with finding affordable housing (Levenson & Cotter, 2005b). The survey also permitted open-ended responses which yielded responses of support from two participants, stating "it's good because you can't just walk from your home to a school" and "it doesn't tempt you;" while a large majority considered residential restrictions impractical or suggested applying restrictions on a case by case basis as appropriate (Levenson & Cotter, 2005b, p.173). In the end, residential restrictions further socially isolated offenders, which have led to financial difficulties and unstable livelihoods (Levenson & Cotter, 2005b).

Mustaine and Tewksbury (2011) examined social disorganization theory as applied to sex offenders. This study collected data on an unknown number of registered male and female sex offenders living in Orange County, Florida, which sought to determine where registered sex offenders were most likely to reside (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011). Mustaine and Tewksbury's (2011) results showed that "registered sex offenders were more likely to reside in: economically disadvantaged communities with residential instability, high rates of robbery and child sexual abuse, in addition to the anomaly of low concentrations of immigrants and homicide" (p. 54). These findings showed an additional consequence of Megan's Law in that concentrating registered sex

offenders in economically disadvantaged communities, where social support can be obstructed, and the offenders will be in proximity to victims of sexual assault or potential victims (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011).

Employment hardships. Participation in prosocial activities, such as maintaining stable employment has been suggested as a factor that diminishes the desire to continue to participate in a criminal lifestyle (Kruttschnitt, Uggen, & Shelton, 2000). Research has consistently noted that loss of employment is a frequent occurrence among sex offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury, 2004 & 2005). The enactment of sex offender laws has restricted various aspects of sex offenders' lives, such as where offenders can work, which seeks to limit offender contact with children.

In 2005, Tewksbury published a study examining the collateral consequences of sex offender registration. There were 121 offenders who participated in this study and 87.8% were male and 12.2% were female (Tewksbury, 2005). Tewksbury (2005) assesses employment hardships in which 42.7% of the sample experienced job loss and 23.1% had been denied a promotion because of sex offender registration. Furthermore, negative experiences with job loss and denial of promotion were reviewed from the perspective of sex offenders with (41.7%) and without (41.5%) child victims, where there was not a significant difference among offenders (Tewksbury, 2005). When reporting negative experiences and promotion denials the percentages were closely related with 22.2% having child victims and 19.5% without child victims (Tewksbury, 2005). Overall, this study found that offenders with child victims were less likely to report negative experiences than offenders with adult victims.

When examining the informal and formal social controls sex offenders encounter Kruttschnitt, Uggen, and Shelton (2000) studied 556 sex offenders placed on probation in Minnesota in 1992 in which the sample was 97% male and three percent female. Kruttschnitt et al. (2000) found that receiving sex offender treatment combined with probation and stable employment “significantly reduced the likelihood of reoffending” (p. 80). The results produced by Kruttschnitt et al. (2000) are similar to those of other researchers, which suggest that sex offenders who participate in conventional activities and maintain prosocial support systems have a better chance of reintegrating back into communities.

Social isolation and negative feelings. Sex offender registration and community notification have also resulted in social isolation and continue to have a negative psychological and social impact on the offenders. The majority of sex offenders impacted by SORN have reported experiencing feelings of embarrassment and hopelessness (Mercado et al., 2008; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012). Like Levenson and Cotter (2005b), Levenson et al. (2007) provide offender characteristics that exclude the gender of the offenders. Levenson et al. (2007) examined the impact of community notification on sex offenders (n= 239) in Indiana and Connecticut and found that 54% of offenders felt alone and isolated, 46% experienced feared for their safety, 58% felt embarrassed, and 44% of sex offenders experienced feelings of hopelessness. When detailing consequences of notification, sex offenders responded: “I feel labeled; once you are accused you are garbage” (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a, p. 60). This suggests that the offender’s self-perception is negative and the outlook for the future is negative. The stigma elicited by the “sex offender” label has

resulted in negative psychological and social consequences that leave sex offenders less likely to engage in prosocial activities such as family engagement and maintaining a job.

The research on sex offenders and suicide is lacking (Jeglic, Spada, & Mercado, 2013; Stinson & Gonsalves, 2014). In their study of nonfatal suicidal attempts by convicted sex offenders, Jeglic et al. (2013) sampled 822 male sex offenders in a treatment facility and 1,934 male sex offenders incarcerated in a state prison. Jeglic et al. (2013) found that sex offenders who had attempted suicide had a history of psychological problems and abuse or neglect as well as a diagnosis of cognitive impairments. Additionally, it had been found that 14% had attempted suicide during their lives while 11% attempted suicide prior to incarceration (Jeglic et al., 2013). Even though they have been considered the vilest criminals, suicide among sex offenders is a public health issue. The stigma experienced from community notification does not just impact the offender, but these self-harming behaviors affect the offenders' family.

As a result of the stigma sex offenders experience due to registration and community notification, offenders have detailed numerous psychological feelings, such as suicidal ideations, depression, and anxiety. In detailing narrative responses from surveys, sex offenders discussed their suicidal thoughts: "I've contemplated suicide" (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007, p. 595). Another sex offender responded: "I thought of suicide because I felt people were talking bad about me. Some people want me to die. That's what the law is about, to cause enough stress on the offenders so he will take his own life" (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a, p. 59). Offenders have also reported feelings of depression: "I have a general sense of aloneness and sadness" and "notification lowers my self-esteem" (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 595). The final theme, anxiety led to responses

such as: “I experience constant worry” (Levenson et al., 2007, p. 595). The stigma associated with being a known sex offender could lead to negative feelings, such as hopelessness and self-harming behaviors, which are stressors that may increase reoffending. Therefore, treating mental health or psychological issues may reduce negative feelings and reoffending (Jeglic et al., 2013). It is important to explore the social consequences and the impact these experiences have on the sex offenders’ psyche since these outcomes further contribute to self-destructive behaviors and negative coping skills. Sex offenders who have difficulties with coping are disadvantaged in that they frequently struggled with reintegration and pose an increased risk for reoffending (Burchfield & Mingus, 2014; Levenson & Cotter 2005a; Mercado et al., 2008).

Vigilantism. Another stigmatizing outcome sex offenders experienced as a result of community notification is vigilantism. The most common types of vigilantism experienced by offenders have been that of threats, harassment, and property damage. Sex offenders have also reported physical violence. In examining the impact of community notification and residency restrictions on Tier II and III sex offenders in New Jersey, Mercado et al. (2008) found that 48% of sex offenders sampled experienced threats or harassment; similarly, 34% of non-offenders who live with sex offenders have also “reported harassment, assaults, injury, property damage, and received threats” (p. 194-195). As for the occurrence of physical violence, both Mercado et al. (2008) and Levenson et al. (2007) found similar results that 11% and 10% of offenders report physical assaults. Although all offenders (N=1,601) listed on the New Jersey Internet registry received invitations to participate in Mercado et al.’s (2008) study, this study did not state the number of males and females that participated.

When considering sex offenders' experiences with exclusion, research has shown that community notification forces offenders from stable communities and subjects offenders to isolated, economically disadvantaged and criminally active neighborhoods. Such lifestyles can return offenders to their criminal way of life. The disenfranchisement experienced by Internet registered sex offenders has acknowledged that the adverse effects of registration and notification laws can increase an offender's likelihood of reoffending (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Tewksbury, 2005).

Social Supports

The research on sex offenders and their perceptions towards Megan's Law focuses on experiences with stigmatization as a result of being subject to sex offender legislation. When describing the different stigmatizing outcomes, there is some research that shows social supports are beneficial to offender coping, thus acting as a buffer to the negative outcomes of sex offender laws. Social support research shows there are several avenues in which offenders receive support, such as family, friends, community, and support groups (Johnson, Jang, Li & Larson, 2000; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Currently, research on families is more often studied than that of friends and community supports (Johnson et al., 2000; Martinez & Abrams, 2013).

Relationships. Like general offenders, sex offenders are dependent on family support following the completion of a prison sentence (Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Tewksbury & Connor, 2012). Family supports are essential when assisting offenders with finding housing and employment. This is especially true for sex offenders who experience more barriers upon returning to the community than general offenders (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Mercado, Alvarez & Levenson,

2008; Tewksbury, 2005). Research consistently shows sex offenders report negative feelings, such as anxiety, shame, and isolation due to the public disclosure of their crime(s) (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Tewksbury, 2005). As a result, family supports have been used to lessen the negative outcomes associated with Megan's Law.

Existing studies on family supports show family members have negative experiences because of their affiliation with a sex offender (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008). Family members of registered sex offenders have experienced sneering, harassment, and violence (Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012). Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) reported that 86% of family members experience stress, 77% feel isolated, and 49% of family members feel scared because of the public disclosure of their family members' sex offender status. The characteristics of family members participating in Levenson and Tewksbury's (2009) study was substantially female (80%), and the surveys on registered sex offenders typically referenced male offenders (97%). These feelings have been inflicted by other family members who are estranged from their sex offender relative and by community members (Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009).

Additionally, children of registered sex offenders also experience social consequences as a result of SORN laws. In their survey of sex offenders' family members Levenson and Tewksbury (2009) found that children have reported experiencing feelings of isolation due being treated differently by other children, adults, and neighbors, leaving children of registered sex offenders feeling stigmatized (71%). In short, some family members feel that sex offender policies lead to sex offenders being

excluded from family and community activities, including programs aimed at assisting offenders, which further impede community reintegration for sex offenders.

In another examination of the family members (n= 584) of registered sex offenders, Tewksbury and Levenson (2009) found that strong family support provides offenders with the necessary stability to reintegrate back into communities and deter reoffending. Like Levenson and Tewksbury (2009), this study found that negative consequences exist for the family members of registered sex offenders, such as feeling very stressed, psychological isolation, and loss of social ties. Like their sex offender relative, family members have resorted to limiting social activities because of feelings of embarrassment and shame (Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009).

According to Tewksbury and Copes (2012), being labeled a sex offender may restrict their opportunities. The limitations and restrictions created by the sex offender label have long lasting effects. The label has also led to generalized perceptions that sex offenders are “predators” or “monsters” (Sample & Bray, 2003; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). As a result, sex offenders returning to the community have had difficulties establishing and mending social relationships, such as making friends or establishing and repairing interpersonal relationships due to the public’s negative perceptions of sex offenders. These societal reactions hinder the reentry process and force offenders to rely solely on familial support, which can also be negatively impacted.

There are also limitations to the support family members can provide. For instance, general offenders may return to living with family members but because of residence restrictions this may not be an option for sex offenders. In addition to legal

restrictions, some sex offenders are estranged from family because of their sex crimes and/or familial victimization. Research by Tewksbury and Connor (2012) describe one-on-one interviews with 24 incarcerated male sex offenders who were asked about family experiences prior to and following their registering as a sex offender. A common theme arose in Tewksbury and Connor's (2012) study, in that sex offenders detailed both positive and negative experiences with family. Positive experiences were described as their family members have seen the offenders at their best and worst, so the offenders did not worry about abandonment (Tewksbury & Connor, 2012). The negative experiences and expectations offenders identified were based on their offense type, concern for family members with children, and past experiences with physical and sexual abuse. In sum, offenders expected family members would act as their support system, assisting them with finding housing and employment. Family that may choose to support their sex offender relative may encounter challenges with residence restrictions and stigmatization as a result of the public's negative perceptions of sex offenders (Tewksbury & Connor, 2012).

Community support and support groups. The support offenders receive from the community has not been heavily researched like that of family support systems (Martinez & Abrams, 2013). In prior research, sex offenders have identified that more support from their communities would benefit offenders (Burchfield & Mingus, 2014; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012). Johnson et al. (2000) examined the importance churches serve to buffer African-American juvenile delinquents from their disorganized neighborhoods and participation in criminal behavior. This study described neighborhood disorder as a neighborhood where there is a lack of control, peace, safety, and observance

of the law, as well as public drinking, drug use, and loitering (Johnson et al., 2000). This study found positive and significant relationships among African-American youths living in disorganized neighborhoods and crime. As for the buffering effects of religious involvement on disorganized neighborhoods and serious crime, these results were significant and negative (Johnson et al., 2000). The result of Johnson et al. (2000) study shows an additional type of social support that is capable of lessening negative environments. Even though this study examines juvenile delinquency, this specific type of social support, religious institutions, has been used to assist sex offenders in lessening the stigmatizing effects of sex offender legislation.

A Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) was created in the mid-1990s in Canada by the Mennonite church, and acts as a community support group (Hannem, 2011). COSA serves to assist high risk sex offenders living in the community (Hannem, 2011; Seidler, 2010; Wilson, McWhinnie, Picheca, Prinzo & Cortoni, 2007). COSA's primary purpose is to provide social support to offenders, as well as protection to victims and the community. COSA requires four to six community volunteers to be assigned to one offender, the core member, who is assisted by volunteers that help the offender with basic activities such as communication skills and problem-solving while addressing other concerns relating to sexual reoffending (Hannem, 2011). In addition to volunteers, offenders also rely on formal supports from social workers, mental health professionals, and law enforcement. Offenders who participate in circles have experienced less scrutiny from the public because circles actively help offenders manage their risk. Although based on restorative justice principles, COSA uses support combined with surveillance to assist offenders and keep the community safe (Wilson et al., 2007).

More recently, research has evaluated COSA models, where research has shown offenders who participate in circles have lower sexual re-offense rates (70%) (Wilson et al., 2009). In their study of the effectiveness of COSA, Wilson et al., (2009) followed 44 COSA participants and 44 sex offenders who were released without supervision and aftercare and did not participate in COSA. Overall, COSA participants sexually reoffended at lower rates. Similarly, COSA participants had lower recidivism for general offending and charges and convictions (Wilson et al., 2009).

Burchfield and Mingus (2008) studied sex offender experiences with social capital, which refers to information and resources obtained through social networks. This study selected all Internet registered and paroled sex offenders in Illinois in which Burchfield and Mingus (2008) obtained a final sample of 23, which included 22 males and one female. Through one-on-one interviews participants were asked about “finding housing, employment, interacting with neighbors, and developing and maintaining relationships, their relationship with their parole officer, and coping with the stigmatization of being labeled a sex offender” (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008, p. 363). When it comes to participating in local social capital, sex offenders reported and emphasized the fact that sex offender policies made reintegration difficult by creating barriers to developing and maintaining social and interpersonal relationships and finding employment and housing.

It cannot be overlooked that neighborhoods are environments that create barriers to reentry and coping among sex offenders. Another study by Burchfield and Mingus (2014) examined the effects of neighborhood support and sex offenders’ feelings of stress and secrecy as contributing factors of sex offender recidivism. This study was conducted

in Illinois on a sample of 333 sex offenders (316 males and 17 females) who were surveyed to examine the offender's experiences with social ties, housing, employment, probation and parole, knowledge of and compliance with sex offender policies, and coping mechanisms (Burchfield & Mingus, 2014). Burchfield and Mingus (2014) found that offenders with strong social ties and supportive neighborhoods aided in community reintegration. However, while not statistically significant, offenders who experienced vigilantism and/or had child victims believed their neighbors to be less supportive, which resulted in stress and the need for secrecy (Mingus & Burchfield, 2014).

Attitudes towards SORN

Previous research has assessed registered sex offenders' perceptions towards Megan's Law. In his examination of female sex offenders, Tewksbury (2004) assessed the negative experiences and attitudes of 40 female offenders from Kentucky and Indiana. When female sex offenders were asked about their attitudes towards being listed on the Internet registry, Tewksbury (2004) found that a minority of offenders "understood why people want a sex offender registry (M= 7.53)" and "thought of the registry as a good thing (M= 6.45)" (p. 12). Like Tewksbury (2004), Mercado et al. (2008) examined negative experiences associated with SORN as well as attitudes towards SORN. When Mercado et al. (2008) concentrated on sex offenders' perception of fairness (N= 1,601) it was found that a minority of 132 sex offenders disagreed with their risk being publicized, while publicizing offenders' work addresses was considered the most unfair. In general, Tewksbury (2004) and Mercado et al.'s (2008) examination results were consistent with those of previous research in that sex offenders typically felt the Internet registry was unfair (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Tewksbury, 2005).

Overview of the Present Study

The present study will examine registered sex offenders' experiences and attitudes towards registration and community notification. I will focus on social supports and whether these supports lessen the effects of negative experiences with Megan's Law, in addition to the consequences of registration and notification laws. There will also be an exploration of differences between male and female offenders. While research has investigated the characteristics and histories of female offenders, little is known about their reactions to these laws since most studies have used all male samples (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010). I will use responses to written-mailed surveys to examine my hypotheses regarding sex offender social supports and experiences and perceptions of SORN laws, which I describe in detail below.

Hypotheses

My hypotheses will better our understanding of the extent to which sex offenders have been impacted by Megan's Law and whether social support lessens the negative outcomes of sex offender laws. Additionally, prior research emphasizes the importance of knowing the characteristics of sex offenders (Faller, 1987; Freeman & Sandler, 2008; Vandiver, 2006; Vandiver & Teske, 2006), which will aid in explaining the groups of offenders most frequently impacted by residence restrictions, employment hardships, social isolation, and vigilantism.

In this study, I hypothesize (H_1) that registrants with support systems will experience fewer of the social consequences of residence restrictions, employment hardships, social isolation, and vigilantism. These hypotheses are based on the fact that

sex offenders rely on various supports, particularly from family and friends, to provide tangible and intangible assistance throughout reintegration, such as housing, jobs, and reassurance. I also hypothesize (H₂) that offenders who rank their supports as more helpful will experience fewer negative experiences. This is expected because sex offenders who have supports may be shielded from the deleterious effects of SORN laws. My final hypothesis (H₃) is that offenders with more helpful supports will have better attitudes towards SORN laws, such as less hopelessness and positive perceptions of SORN as an effective public safety measure.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Sample

The New Jersey Sex Offender Internet Registry was used to collect data on listed sex offenders. New Jersey's registry contains information on Tier II and Tier III sex offenders, who through risk assessments have been determined to have a high risk for reoffending (Visgaitis, 2011; Zgoba et al., 2008). This study randomly sampled approximately 25% of the Internet registry or 1,086 Internet registered sex offenders in New Jersey, which included 1,047 males and the entire female sex offender population, N= 39. This sample size was chosen due to its feasibility and the time constraints on this project. This study recruited Internet registered male and female sex offenders from the 21 metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties in New Jersey. To ensure that the sample drew equally from the entire state of New Jersey, participants were randomly selected by dividing New Jersey by North and South and participants were given 10 days to complete and return the voluntary and anonymous survey. North New Jersey consisted of: Passaic, Essex, Bergen, Sussex, Union, Hudson, Morris, Warren, Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon, and Mercer counties. South New Jersey consisted of: Camden, Burlington, Atlantic, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, Ocean, and Monmouth counties. Therefore, dividing the state geographically improved the likelihood of drawing a random sample that reflected the demographics of the entire state. This selection process excluded offenders who were fugitives or in police custody.

The offenders who were randomly selected to participate in this study had 10 days to complete and return this voluntary and anonymous survey. Ten days after the initial

mailing, the first round of follow-up surveys was re-sent to all 1,086 offenders. Due to promises of confidentiality, it was impossible to track who had responded and who had not so the follow-up was sent to all offenders. On the second follow-up ten days later, 17 addresses were updated, and 103 offenders were eliminated from the sample because the surveys were sent back by the postal service as undeliverable. This left 983 offenders in the sample. However, after the second follow-up another 359 offenders were eliminated from the study because of return-to-sender mail. Postal stamps provided various reasons on the return-to-sender stamps which included: unable to forward, insufficient address, no mail receptacle, not deliverable as addressed, no such street, and no such number. Further, an additional 434 participants simply did not respond. Thus, the initial random sample resulted in 190 responses. An inadvertent snowball sample was also produced after sampled participants distributed copies of the survey in sex offender treatment support groups to offenders who had not received the survey; the snowball sample produced 15 responses bringing the total to 205 responses, which represented a response rate of nearly 19%.

While this response rate may seem low, previous studies have produced similar response rates when examining the difficult to access sex offender population (Tewksbury, 2004, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). In an examination of 40 female sex offenders in Kentucky and Indiana, Tewksbury (2004) reported a response rate of 20%, and Tewksbury and Lees (2007) reported a response rate of 15.4% in a qualitative interview based study. Studies with greater participation have sampled sex offenders receiving outpatient counseling, such as Levenson et al. (2007) which had a 74%

response rate and a sample of 239 and Levenson & Cotter (2005a) who recruited 183 voluntary study participants that had been receiving long term treatment.

The survey instrument contained an explanatory consent letter, and a pre-addressed, stamped envelope. Offenders were given a survey that consisted of closed and open-ended questions and statements, which assessed the offender's demographics and victim's characteristics. My survey identified the offender's gender, ethnicity, age, relationship status, Home county, education level, and the length of time spent Internet registered. As for the victim characteristics, offenders provided their victims' gender, age, and the victim-offender relationship. This study also asked open-ended questions regarding experiences and obstacles encountered with their support systems. These survey questions were adapted from past research with additional questions tailored to this study (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a). Offenders listed on the Internet registry were asked about negative experiences they have encountered, which were measured dichotomously as no (0) or yes (1) questions. The questions based on a 5-point Likert scale asked whether offenders "Strongly Disagree (1)," "Disagree (2)," "Neutral (3)," "Agree (4)," or "Strongly Agree (5)" with statements describing the extent to which SORN has resulted in feelings of stigmatization.

Variables

My social supports variables discussed in hypothesis one were whether registrants had informal supports and therapy supports, and both were measured dichotomously and operationalized as 0 = no and 1 = yes. Counseling (.749) and religious (.708) support produced strong and positive correlations. Therefore, one of my dichotomously measured independent variables became therapy support, which examined registrants who received

support from individual counseling and religious support (46.8%, N = 96). Informal supports was created from registrants who stated that they had family and friends as a source of support (69.1%, N = 141). The pattern matrix (see table 1) for my supports variable combined family (.822) and friends (.779). Table 1 shows that “support groups” was not correlated with informal or therapy supports; therefore, it was not used. Having family and friends (69.1%, N = 141) as a primary source of support was a finding that was consistent with previous studies (Liu & Chui, 2014; Martinez & Abrams, 2013).

Table 1.

Pattern matrix for supports

| | Component | |
|------------|-----------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 |
| Family | .822 | -.140 |
| Friends | .779 | .045 |
| Group | .416 | .478 |
| Counseling | -.141 | .749 |
| Religious | .014 | .708 |

Scale variables that asked about the helpfulness of family, friends, and support groups were combined to make a variable called helpfulness of supports. I first conducted a factor analysis to try and determine whether variability in my observed variables reflected underlying unobserved variables or factors. However, the factor analysis on the helpfulness of supports did not produce a pattern matrix so these variables were combined on a theoretical basis - they all asked about the helpfulness of their support networks.

Next, I conducted a reliability analysis, which helped determine the consistency of my scale variables. My Cronbach's Alpha (see table 2) examined the helpfulness of supports variables of: family, friends, support group, counseling, and religious helpfulness; the initial Alpha was .603, which was in the questionable range. The analysis indicated that eliminating the alphas for individual counseling (.623) and religious (.614) helpfulness would increase the Cronbach's Alpha to .668 so those two scales were dropped from the variable. While this was an improved Alpha, its range was still considered questionable, so the results should be considered with that in mind.

Table 2.

Reliability analysis for helpfulness

| | Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Family helpfulness | .503 |
| Friends helpfulness | .445 |
| Support group helpfulness | .467 |
| Individual counseling helpfulness | .623 |
| Religious helpfulness | .614 |

a.) Original Cronbach's Alpha = .603

In order to create the final variables, I collapsed the scales using the median response scores. I used statistical rules and established a response minimum, which eliminated respondents that did not respond to a certain number of questions. I used a rule of two for the helpfulness of supports such that respondents had to respond to two of the three questions making up this variable.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics (the coding scheme, sample size, and percentage of the offenders responding to each subgroup) for my independent and control

variables. My descriptive statistics show that most registrants find these three supports of family, friends, and support groups more helpful (75.4%) than individual counseling and religious support, with only 8.2% finding their support networks less helpful, and the remaining 16.4% of registrants feeling neutral about the helpfulness of their support networks (see table 3). As theorized, sex offenders need and rely on positive instrumental and expressive support, which it seems they receive from family, friends, and support groups. The need for informal support was described in other studies of sex offenders as well (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Levenson & Cotter, 2005b; Martinez & Abrams, 2013).

Table 3.

Descriptive statistics for independent and control variables

| Independent | Code | N | % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------|------------------|-----|------|-------|----------------|
| Informal support | 0=No | 63 | 30.9 | .69 | .46 |
| | 1=Yes | 141 | 69.1 | | |
| Therapy support | 0=No | 109 | 53.2 | .47 | .50 |
| | 1=Yes | 96 | 46.8 | | |
| Helpfulness | 1=Very Unhelpful | 2 | 1.1 | 4.13 | 1.00 |
| | 2=Unhelpful | 13 | 7.1 | | |
| | 3=Neutral | 30 | 16.4 | | |
| | 4=Helpful | 53 | 29.0 | | |
| | 5=Very Helpful | 85 | 46.4 | | |
| Control | Code | N | % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Age | 19 through 29 | 6 | 3.2 | 51.57 | .86 |
| | 30 through 40 | 35 | 18.5 | | |
| | 41 through 51 | 61 | 32.3 | | |
| | 52 and up | 87 | 46.0 | | |
| Ethnicity | 0=Non-White | 84 | 41.0 | .59 | .49 |

Table 3.

(continued)

| Control | Code | N | % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|------|-------|----------------|
| | 1=White | 121 | 59.0 | | |
| Education level | 1=Less than high school | 27 | 13.4 | 2.43 | .88 |
| | 2=High school | 85 | 42.3 | | |
| | 3=Some college | 64 | 31.8 | | |
| | 4=College graduate | 25 | 12.4 | | |
| Home county | 0=Non-metropolitan | 115 | 57.5 | .43 | .50 |
| | 1=Metropolitan | 85 | 42.5 | | |
| Time registered | 1=Less than 7 years | 51 | 28.8 | 10.98 | 7.29 |
| | 2=7 to 14 years | 75 | 42.4 | | |
| | 3=15 years or longer | 51 | 28.8 | | |
| Victim's gender | 0=Female | 158 | 81.4 | .19 | .39 |
| | 1=Male | 36 | 18.6 | | |
| Victim's age | 1=5 or younger | 12 | 6.5 | 14.38 | 10.35 |
| | 2=6 to 11 | 56 | 30.1 | | |
| | 3=12 to 17 | 93 | 50.0 | | |
| | 4=18 and up | 25 | 13.4 | | |
| Victim-offender | 0=Non-stranger | 147 | 76.6 | .23 | .43 |
| | 1=Stranger | 45 | 23.4 | | |

Offender demographics and victim characteristics were used as control variables in this study (see table 3). The offender demographic variables were offender age, ethnicity, and education level. Offender's age was measured as an open-ended question. Since the age of offenders ranged from 23 to 84, I calculated the natural log of age (3.14 to 4.43), which normalized the distribution of continuous ages and worked better in the analysis since most of the other variables were either dichotomous or scales ranging from

one through five. In the multivariate analyses, offender's age was run as a continuous variable, but I present it in Table 3 as a categorical variable for ease of interpretation since offender age spans so many years. The average age was 51.57 years old; the majority of respondents were age 52 and up (N=87, 46%), and the smallest number of registrants were 19 through 29 (3.2%). When compared to the literature's offender demographics, the registrants in my study were somewhat older with other studies' participants having an average between 37 and 48 (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010; Tewksbury, 2004, 2005).

Due to low levels of respondents classifying themselves as Hispanic (14.1%), Asian (0.0%), and two or more races (6.3%), the ethnicity variable was coded as 0 = non-white and 1 = white. While the literature describes sex offenders as majority white (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury, 2004), Table 3 of my descriptive statistics show the ethnicity of registrants as more similar, where white registrants accounted for 59.0% of my sample and 41% were non-white. Education level was measured as 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, and 4 = college graduate. Descriptive statistics for the registrants' education level showed that most registrants have either a high school diploma (42.3%) or some college education (31.8%), which was also found by previous studies with similar sample sizes (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007), while only 13.4% of registrants held less than a high school education and even fewer (12.4%) were college graduates.

Contextual control variables include home county and length of time registered. The next variable focused on the registrants' geographic surroundings or their home

county. The establishment of residence restrictions limits, and in some states prohibits, offenders from residing in metropolitan areas, which limits social and economic opportunities. Previous studies have shown that the use of residence restrictions have forced sex offenders into non-metropolitan communities (Levenson et al., 200; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012), which can further isolate offenders from employment opportunities, stable housing, mental health, and social supports (Mercado et al., 2008; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011). In addition to limited social and economic opportunities and mental health treatment, the isolation of residing in non-metropolitan communities allows sex offenders to maintain anonymity, which has been found to increase sex offenders' risk for reoffending (Nobles et al., 2012; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). Thus, I control for home county in case offenders in non-metropolitan counties feel greater negative effects compared to those in metropolitan counties. The home county variable allowed study participants to select one of the 21 New Jersey counties listed in the questionnaire, but as shown in table 3 I collapsed this variable into a dichotomous variable such that 0 = non-metropolitan and 1 = metropolitan. As displayed in Table 3, 57.5% of offenders live in a non-metropolitan county and 42.5% of offenders live in metropolitan counties.

The final offender demographic variable was time registered. Under the federal law SORNA, lifetime registration is required for those convicted of, adjudicated delinquent for, or acquitted because of insanity for sex offenses (Fetzer, 2010). If the offender maintains a clean record and is able to demonstrate that they no longer pose a sexually violent risk to society, the offender can petition the New Jersey Superior Court to be removed from the Internet registry after 15 years. Prior research examining Internet

registered offenders listed for 10 and life have focused on attitudes towards Megan's Law and opinions of registration length (Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). Kentucky, for example, uses broad SORN policies, and research shows these offenders have negative attitudes towards Megan's Law, life registrants more so than 10 year registrants (Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). In another study on the length of Internet registration, Tewksbury (2004) reported that female sex offenders with lengthier Internet registration periods were at an increased likelihood for experiencing social consequences associated with the public disclosure of their sex offender status. When compared across the length of time spent Internet registered, differences among registrants' attitudes were not found to be statistically significant (Tewksbury, 2004, p. 33). Therefore, it was important to control for length of time registered when studying attitudes towards SORN policies. In this study, length of time was operationalized as a continuous variable.

Like the age variables, I calculated the natural logarithm of the length of time registered (.69 to 3.83) to normalize the distribution of the range of times that participants selected. The variable was continuous in the analyses, but for ease of discussion, I present this variable as a categorical variable in the descriptive statistics tables. Table 3 shows the same percentages of registrants, 28.8%, have been Internet registered for either less than seven years or 15 years or longer while most have been registered for seven to 14 years (42.4%). The average time listed as an Internet registered sex offender for my study was reported at 10.98 years, which was a lengthier registration period, compared to the literature (Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Tewksbury, 2004 & 2005).

Control variables were related to victim's characteristics and included: victim's gender, victim's age, and victim-offender relationship (see table 3). The victim's gender was measured as 0 = female and 1 = male. Descriptive statistics for the victim's gender showed that 158 (81.4%) victims were female and 36 victims were male (18.6%). This was consistent with past studies on sex offenders in which the majority of registrants had female victims (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010).

Victim's age was an open-ended question and was measured as a continuous variable for ease of discussion throughout the study. The majority of victims were ages 12 to 17 (50.0%), with 36.6% of victims being 11 or younger, and the remaining 13.4% of victims were 18 and up. Like the offender's age, the victim's age also had a wide range from three to 83. Again, I created a new variable using the natural log of the victim's ages, which ranged from 1.10 to 4.42, and I conducted my analyses using the continuous variable. The victims' ages as reported by registrants were similar to the present literature on sex offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008).

The final victim characteristic was that of victim-offender relationship. This variable was operationalized as 0 = non-stranger and 1 = stranger. My descriptive statistics for the victim-offender relationship describe 147 (76.6%) non-stranger victimizations and 45 (23.4%) stranger victimizations, which was in line with the literature showing that most victims know their offender (Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010; Vandiver, 2006; Zgoba et al., 2008; Zgoba et al., 2010).

For my dependent variables, I conducted a factor analysis to determine whether certain questions were measuring the same constructs. I then used the pattern matrix to group the dependent variables, which focused on known consequences that have been associated with registration and notification laws. The pattern matrix in Table 4 details the dependent variables of interest, which were: denied job, job loss, residence restrictions, forced from residence, threats/harassment, physical violence, property damage, live alone, live with children, live with others, reside with harmed, others harmed, social prior to, and more isolated now. The pattern matrix extracted four components that confirmed my ability to combine some of these variables to produce my dependent variables. I also provided descriptive statistics for my dependent variables in Table 8, which were measured dichotomously such that 0 = no and 1 = yes.

As highlighted in Table 4, component one, threats/harassment (.573), physical violence (.700), and property damage (.662) held positive and strong correlations. As a result, I grouped these variables to create a ‘vigilantism’ variable. Reside with harmed (.650) and others harmed (.769) were also positive and strongly correlated with these ‘vigilantism’ variables, but I only sought to obtain and report registrants’ experiences¹. I eliminated any harm caused to others in this variable. In Table 8, 67% of registrants reported that they had experienced vigilantism in some form. These self-reports were slightly higher than those of previous studies (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury, 2005).

¹ The vigilantism variable was originally coded to include threats/harassment, physical violence, property violence, and reside with harmed, and friends or acquaintances harmed. Regression analyses found that informal support (1.092, $p \leq .1$), more helpful support (-.612, $p \leq .05$), and ethnicity (1.044, $p \leq .05$) were significant variables, though informal support and ethnicity increased the log odds for experiencing vigilantism. More helpful support lowered the log odds for experiencing vigilantism. Since this study’s focus was on offender experiences and perceptions, it was not beneficial to include others harmed in the recode or analyses.

The next component extracted focused on registrants living alone (.716), with children (.546), or living with a significant other or other relative or person (.755). To combine these variables, I reverse coded the lives with children and lives with others variables so that registrants were responding that they actually lived alone which was scored as 1= no. I then created my lives alone variable that stated that registrants live alone and do not reside with children or others.

Table 4.

Pattern matrix for negative experiences

| | Component | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Denied job | .082 | .108 | -.081 | .785 |
| Job loss | .037 | -.038 | -.145 | .756 |
| Residence restrictions | .167 | .173 | -.796 | -.105 |
| Forced from residence | -.079 | -.252 | -.755 | .299 |
| Threats/harassment | .573 | -.221 | .112 | .260 |
| Physical violence | .700 | .131 | .183 | -.023 |
| Property damage | .662 | .174 | -.149 | .167 |
| Live alone | .164 | .716 | -.069 | -.117 |
| Lives with children | -.179 | .546 | .102 | .338 |
| Lives with others | .101 | .755 | .066 | .002 |
| Reside with harmed | .650 | -.148 | -.106 | .114 |
| Others harmed | .769 | .012 | -.178 | -.078 |
| Social prior | .202 | -.536 | .197 | .382 |
| More isolated now | .247 | -.086 | .157 | .592 |

A third component that was extracted focused on housing. The variables residence restrictions (-.796) and forced from residence (-.755) also held negative and strong correlations. Since the relationship presented as strong, I was able to assume that these variables measure the same general construct that respondents subjected to housing

restrictions were likely forced from a residence. Therefore, these variables became a 'housing difficulty' variable. The fourth and final component extracted by the factor analysis in Table 4 was the 'job difficulty' variable, which included being denied a job (.785) and job loss (.756), both having strong and positive correlations.

I then chose to use the variables social prior to registration and more isolated now to measure feelings of isolation. These two variables were conditional if/then statements, which were coded as one if registrants feel more isolated post SORN and were social prior to SORN. The recode required that registrants respond yes to more isolated now and social prior to, while responses of no to either question were coded as zero. Therefore, the variable compares people who were social before and now feel isolated to people who were social before but do not feel isolated and to people who were not social before and so do not feel any additional isolation as a result of SORN. My isolation variable moderately correlated with being denied a job and job loss; however, this may be because having employment provides offenders with opportunities for social interaction. Therefore, I chose to use social prior (.382) and more isolated now variable (.592) as a measure of registrants' experiences with feelings of isolation. Overall, the score responses from these dependent variables were combined using the statistical function sum such that anyone experiencing any of these categorical dependent variables was scored a 1 (yes) for that variable.

My dependent variables on offenders' perceptions focused on the negative feelings resulting from the stigmatization of Megan's Law, such as feelings of fear, shame, embarrassment and hopelessness. Offenders were also asked about their attitudes towards Megan's Law, which included statements such as: keeps me from reoffending; it

is a good law; it is important; and I should not be subject to Megan's Law. The dependent variables were self-reports of the experienced consequences of community notification. These variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and operationalized as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

My factor analysis for these scale variables produced two components from the pattern matrix, which can be found in Table 5. The first variable was named hopelessness and combined the following variables: alone and isolated (.865), lost relationships (.649), fear (.685), shame (.850), less hope (.801), and hopeless (.802). The second component combined the following variables: prevents reoffending (.572), good law (.866), important law (.862), and community safe (.820) and was named public safety. The last variable that participants responded to was 'should not be subject to Megan's Law' (-.286) was eliminated from this study because the results from the pattern analysis indicated that this variable's correlation to feelings of hopelessness was not strong enough. This variable was also negatively correlated with perceptions of SORN being a public safety measure, which may suggest that an abundance of negative experiences have left registrants feeling as though they should not be subjected to SORN laws because the laws have been more harmful than helpful.

Table 5.

Pattern matrix for attitudes

| | Component | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 |
| Alone and isolated | .865 | -.019 |
| Lost relationships | .649 | -.139 |
| Afraid for safety | .685 | -.123 |
| Shame/embarrassment | .850 | .122 |
| Less hope | .801 | .120 |
| Hopeless | .802 | .185 |
| Prevents reoffending | .031 | .572 |
| Good law | -.076 | .866 |
| Important law | .073 | .862 |
| Keeps community safe | -.023 | .820 |
| Should not be subjected | .473 | -.286 |

I conducted a reliability analysis (see table 6) to determine the internal consistency of the hopelessness variable. The original Cronbach's Alpha was .874, which was in the strong range. Table 6 indicated keeping all of the variables because eliminating a variable would lower a strong alpha. For perceptions of SORN laws, I used median response scores, which were based on level of agreement: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. In order for the variable hopelessness to be created, respondents were required to respond to a minimum of five out of six questions: alone and isolated, lost relationships, fears for safety, shame, less hope, and hopeless, otherwise the respondent was eliminated. Combining the above variables resulted in a new variable named hopelessness.

Table 6.

Reliability analysis for hopelessness

| | Cronbach's alpha if Item Deleted |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Alone and isolated | .834 |
| Lost relationships | .868 |
| Fear | .864 |
| Shame and embarrassment | .842 |
| Less hope | .849 |
| Hopeless | .854 |

a.) Original Cronbach's Alpha = .874

I also conducted a reliability analysis on the second component of the factor analysis (see table 7), which examined offenders' perceptions of the effectiveness of SORN as a public safety measure. The Cronbach's Alpha for this variable indicated that I should eliminate the dependent variable prevents reoffending, which produced a final Cronbach's Alpha of .840, an increase from .787. This alpha was in the good range and indicated a solid internal consistency for this variable. As a result, the public safety variable that was created included: good law, important law, and community safe.

Table 7.

Reliability analysis for public safety

| | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Prevents reoffending | .840 |
| Good law | .673 |
| Important law | .698 |
| Community safe | .715 |

a.) Original Cronbach's Alpha = .787

The public safety variable was also created using median response scores. When relying on a statistical rule of two, a minimum of two of the three questions required responses from the respondent; otherwise their responses were eliminated. I used a rule of five for the hopelessness variable meaning respondents needed to have responded to five out of the six questions that make up this variable. When combining the variables in SPSS, the middle response was selected; however, in the event that a middle response was not available, SPSS auto-selected the median response based on the Likert scale.

Table 8 describes the negative experiences of Internet registered sex offenders and their perceptions of SORN laws. I found that just over half of the sample (52.5%) replied that they had experienced job difficulty because of their sex offender status. When compared to other studies of sex offenders, Internet registered sex offenders in New Jersey have reported more employment and housing difficulty (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Tewksbury, 2005). Descriptive statistics in Table 8 also show that 63.9% of registrants responded that they have either been subjected to housing restrictions or forced to vacate a residence because of their sex offender status. The current literature on sex offenders also discuss registrants' experiences with housing difficulties, which have been attributed to active notification, expanding residential ordinances restricting sex offenders, and offender perceptions of neighborhood support (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Burchfield & Mingus, 2014).

The lives alone variable shows that 30.9% of registrants responded that they do live alone (see table 8 descriptive statistics for dependent variables). While most sex offenders responded to having informal and therapeutic supports (69.1% and 46.8%, see table 3), many still report negative experiences as Internet registered sex offenders,

particularly as it related to experiences with vigilantism (67%) and feelings of isolation. Variable descriptions in table 8 shows that registrants overwhelmingly responded yes to feeling more isolated at 90.1% (see table 8).

Table 8.

Descriptive statistics for dependent variables

| Dependent | Code | N | % | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----|------|------|----------------|
| Job difficulty | 0=No | 94 | 47.5 | .53 | .50 |
| | 1=Yes | 104 | 52.5 | | |
| Housing difficulty | 0=No | 73 | 36.1 | .64 | .48 |
| | 1=Yes | 129 | 63.9 | | |
| Lives alone | 0=No | 76 | 69.1 | .31 | .46 |
| | 1=Yes | 34 | 30.9 | | |
| Vigilantism | 0=No | 67 | 33.0 | .67 | .47 |
| | 1=Yes | 136 | 67.0 | | |
| Isolation | 0=No | 17 | 9.9 | .90 | .30 |
| | 1=Yes | 154 | 90.1 | | |
| Hopelessness | 1=Strongly disagree | 5 | 2.5 | 4.23 | 1.02 |
| | 2=Disagree | 13 | 6.5 | | |
| | 3=Neutral | 16 | 8.0 | | |
| | 4=Agree | 64 | 32.0 | | |
| | 5=Strongly disagree | 102 | 51.0 | | |
| Public safety | 1=Strongly disagree | 42 | 20.9 | 2.88 | 1.30 |
| | 2=Disagree | 35 | 17.4 | | |
| | 3=Neutral | 51 | 25.4 | | |
| | 4=Agree | 52 | 25.9 | | |
| | 5=Strongly agree | 21 | 10.4 | | |

Registrants were also asked to describe their level of agreement with feelings of hopelessness and their perceptions of SORN as a law meant to protect the public from sexual victimization. Most registrants (83%) agreed with feeling hopeless while nine percent disagreed with feeling hopeless and the remaining eight percent felt neutral. Overall, feelings of hopelessness may stem from the social stigma of their offender status being publicized, which results in feelings of isolation and fear. Registrants were divided in their opinions of SORN as a public safety measure, with 38.3% in disagreement and 36.3% in agreement while the remaining 25.4% felt neutral about SORN's ability to protect the public from victimization. This suggested that about one third of the registrants understand the need to maintain public safety, even though the laws may reinforce social stigmatization.

Statistical Analysis

I initially ran bivariate correlations with all of the variables in my study in order to assess whether there were any issues of multicollinearity in the analyses. The existence of multicollinearity between some variables of interest was one reason that I conducted factor and reliability analyses. Factor analyses allowed me to determine which variables were measuring similar underlying factors. Thus, I was able to reduce the number of redundant variables in my study because several variables were measuring the same underlying concept. After conducting the factor analyses and Cronbach alpha tests on my new combined variables (described above), I ran descriptive statistics of the independent, dependent, and control variables to get an initial understanding of my data. My descriptive statistics were discussed earlier. Next, I ran new bivariate analyses using the combined variables, which provided simple preliminary tests of my hypotheses. The

problem with simple correlations was that they can produce spurious results since there were no control variables. Thus, I confirmed hypotheses with multivariate analyses allowing me to control for other factors.

My multivariate analyses included five binary logistic regressions to investigate the impact of my independent variables on my dichotomous dependent variables, which were job difficulty, housing difficulty, vigilantism, lives alone, and isolation. I used a binary logistic regression because my dependent variables were dichotomous, making these variables categorical. Binary logistic regression was appropriate because ordinary least squares regression best fits analyses using independent variables and continuous dependent variables (Bachman & Paternoster, 2009). Next, I conducted two ordinal regressions for my scaled dependent variables, hopelessness and public safety. An ordinal regression was selected because these two dependent variables were measured at the ordinal level. Additionally, my ordinal variables violated the assumptions of a multinomial logistic regression, which requires categorical dependent variables with more than two levels, and OLS regression requires continuous, interval or ratio level dependent variables (Bachman & Paternoster, 2009).

Using two open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, I also compiled narratives based on common themes in their responses. The narratives were used to emphasize overall offender experiences and perceptions towards registration and notification laws. I also used cross tabulations for my qualitative exploration of male and female registrants and their negative experiences, which I will discuss below first because it adds to the descriptive understanding of the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

Qualitative Exploration of Male and Female Offenders

In my study of sex offender perceptions and the impact of support systems lessening the known negative consequences of SORN laws, I qualitatively examined my categorical and scale dependent variables across offender gender (0=female and 1=male) because most past research has ignored female sex offenders. Historically, if data on females was collected at all, it was dropped before analysis. While the number of females in my sample was small, it was important to explore similarities and differences for female and male registrants regarding their experiences and attitudes towards SORN laws since this has rarely been examined (Faller, 1987; Grayston & De Luca, 1999; Vandiver, 2006). Since this descriptive comparison adds to the understanding of the data, I will discuss these findings before turning to my more complex analyses.

Table 9 described the offender demographics by offender gender. On average female offenders were younger with a mean age of 40.75, compared to males whose mean age was 51.63. Statistics that were comparable to previous studies were the offenders' ethnicity, education level, victim's gender, and the victim-offender relationship. The literature also showed that most sex offenders were white males and that registrants were either high school educated or obtained some college, which was also found in the current study (see table 9). Other statistics that were comparable to the literature were that males most often victimized females (84.2%, N = 184) while females most often victimized males (77.8%, N = 9) (Freeman & Sandler, 2008; Miller et al., 2009; Vandiver, 2006a; Vandiver & Teske, 2006). The mean age of victims for male

offenders was 14.28, which was close to what other studies have reported (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008). In contrast to the literature, the mean age of victims for female offenders in this study were 11.28, which were somewhat younger than what Vandiver (2006) reported. Comparable to other studies, most male (76.5%) and female (75%) registrants identified their crimes as non-stranger victimizations (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013; Cohen & Jeglic, 2007).

Table 9.

Demographics by gender

| | Female offender | Male offender |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Age 19 to 29 | 0 (0%) | 6 (3%) |
| Age 30 to 40 | 2 (25%) | 33 (18%) |
| Age 41 to 51 | 3 (37.5%) | 57 (32%) |
| Age 52 and up | 3 (37.5%) | 84 (47%) |
| Non-white | 4 (44.4%) | 79 (40.5%) |
| White | 51 (55.6%) | 116 (59.5%) |
| Less than high school | 0 (0) | 26 (13.6%) |
| High school | 4 (44.4%) | 81 (42.4%) |
| Some college | 5 (55.6%) | 59 (30.9%) |
| College graduate | 0 (0%) | 25 (13.1%) |
| Female victim | 2 (22.2%) | 155 (84.2%) |
| Male victim | 7 (77.8%) | 29 (15.8%) |
| Age 5 or younger | 1 (14.3%) | 11 (6.2%) |
| Age 6 to 11 | 1 (14.3%) | 55 (30.9%) |
| Age 12 to 17 | 5 (71.4%) | 88 (49.4%) |
| Age 18 and up | 0 (0%) | 24 (13.5%) |
| Non-stranger | 6 (75%) | 140 (76.5%) |
| stranger | 2 (25%) | 43 (23.5%) |

Table 10 describes my dichotomous dependent variables by gender. While 44.4% of female sex offenders responded that they experienced denial of employment or job loss due to their sex offender status, a slightly higher percentage, 53.2%, of males

responded yes to this experience (see table 10). This may be due to a difference in the perceived level of dangerousness of male sex offenders or it could be related to fewer females seeking employment compared to males. When asked about being subjected to residence restrictions or being forced from their home, a similar percentage of females (66.6%, N=9) and of male (64.1%, N=192) sex offenders responded yes to such experiences. In my study, responses to housing difficulty were significantly higher than what can be found in previous studies, which placed housing difficulty between 20% and 35%, even when factoring in the length of time offenders spent registered (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury, 2004). These findings, however, were exploratory because of the small sample size of female offenders.

Table 10.

Consequences experienced by gender (yes)

| Consequences | Female (Yes) | Male (Yes) | Total |
|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| I have experienced denial of employment or job loss. | 4 (44.4%) | 100 (53.2%) | 104 (52.8%) |
| I have been subjected to residence restrictions or forced from my home. | 6 (66.6%) | 123 (64.1%) | 129 (64.2%) |
| I have experienced threats/harassment or physical violence or property damage. | 5 (55.6%) | 131 (67.9%) | 136 (67.3%) |
| I live alone. | 0 (0.0%) | 33 (31.7%) | 33 (30.3%) |
| I feel more isolated since becoming a registered sex offender. | 6 (85.7%) | 148 (90.8%) | 154 (90.6%) |

Continuing with Table 10, offenders were also asked about experiences with vigilantism or being threatened or harassed or physical violence or property damage.

55.6% of females responding to this study indicated experiencing vigilantism. A higher percentage (67.9%, see table 10) of males also responded yes to experiences with vigilantism. Since my vigilantism variable included multiple types of harm caused to sex offenders, the percentages may be inflated when compared to previous studies describing offenders' experiences with vigilantism, which show lesser experiences (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury, 2004). It seems that because male sex offenders receive significantly more public attention they may be more susceptible to the public outcry of vigilantes.

In order to understand feelings of isolation, offenders were asked if they lived alone. Generally, few offenders lived alone, but male offenders were more likely to live alone than female sex offenders (see table 10). It may be that there was a higher likelihood for parole to refuse residential accommodations for sex offenders requesting to reside with children or other sex offenders out of fear of liability for offender recidivism. Since male sex offenders had higher rates of job difficulty (see table 10), men may find it easier to live alone as a way to eliminate the responsibility of financially providing for others. Offenders were also asked to indicate whether they were social prior to registration and felt more isolated as Internet registered sex offenders, which resulted in 85.7% of females and 90.8% of males indicating that they have experienced these feelings. While it seems that there were similarities (housing difficulty) and differences (jobs, vigilantism, living alone, and isolation) between the sexes, these experiences need to be explored with larger samples of female offenders given the small number in this sample.

Table 11a describes female attitudes that resulted from being subjected to SORN. Overall, nearly all of the female sex offenders responding to my survey (88.8%) indicated agreement when asked if they felt hopeless because of SORN. The attitudes of male sex offenders can be found in Table 11b. Similar to female attitudes, male offenders overwhelmingly agreed with feeling hopeless (83.2%). Though about a third more females responded with agreement when compared to studies that included both male and female sex offender attitudes, this was likely due to high score variation within the variables (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008). However, male attitudes concerning SORN laws and their ability to protect society by preventing sexual victimization (35.1%) was in line with other studies, which show that just over a third of sex offenders were confident in SORN's abilities (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; Tewksbury, 2005). In comparison, a higher percentage of my female offenders viewed SORN as effective in preventing sexual victimization. It appears that female registrants had decisive views that either the registry was effective at publicly shaming registrants out of reoffending or that the public registration process was wholly ineffective. Females had strong feelings towards SORN while more men felt neutral on these issues.

Table 11a.

Female attitudes

| Attitudes | S. Disagree/Disagree | Neutral | S. Agree/Agree | Total |
|---|----------------------|----------|----------------|-------|
| I feel hopeless as a result of being subjected to SORN. | 1 (11.1%) | 0 (0.0%) | 8 (88.8%) | 9 |
| I feel SORN fulfills its intended purpose, which is to maintain public safety by preventing sexual victimization. | 4 (44.4%) | 0 (0.0%) | 5 (55.5%) | 9 |

Table 11b.

Male attitudes

| Attitudes | S. Disagree/Disagree | Neutral | S. Agree/Agree | Total |
|---|----------------------|------------|----------------|-------|
| I feel hopeless as a result of being subjected to SORN. | 16 (8.4%) | 16 (8.4%) | 158 (83.2%) | 190 |
| I feel SORN fulfills its intended purpose, which is to maintain public safety by preventing sexual victimization. | 73 (38.2%) | 51 (26.7%) | 67 (35.1%) | 191 |

This exploration provided a qualitative look at the experiences of male and female sex offenders and their perceptions of SORN. Aside from a few differences, such as victim’s age, experiences with job difficulty, and perceptions of SORN as a public safety measure, male and female sex offenders in this study seem to have similar experiences with, and perceptions of, SORN laws. While it was difficult to draw strong conclusions given my small sample size of female offenders, this initial qualitative exploration indicated some potential differences in male and female experiences. Thus, it would be important for future research investigate the similarities and differences in male and female sex offenders’ experiences.

Correlations

Tables 12a-12d display my correlations, which described basic relationships between the independent and dependent variables, their statistical significance, and the strength of the relationships between the variables across the correlation tables. Since Megan's Law was enacted as public safety legislation, it was important to assess whether those affected by this legislation feel registration and notification laws perform their designated job, in addition to assessing whether the known consequences of Megan's Law have caused an additional burden that may interfere with sex offender reintegration. Table 12a provides correlations for my independent and control variables.

My informal supports variable, or receiving support from family and friends, produced negative and statistically significant correlations with offender's age ($p \leq .05$, $-.145$), home county ($p \leq .05$, $-.143$), and time registered ($p \leq .05$, $-.167$). Though these variables do not address my hypotheses, it can be observed that offenders who report having support from family and friends were more likely to be younger, reside in non-metropolitan areas, and they have been Internet registered for a shorter period. Offenders who reported having therapy supports from individual counseling or religious support held a positive and significant correlation with education level ($p \leq .05$, $.180$), which indicated that more educated offenders reported having therapy supports. However, therapy support also produced a negative and significant correlation with time registered ($p \leq .01$, $-.234$), which indicated that the longer offenders spend Internet registered the less likely they were to have therapy supports.

Table 12a.

Correlations

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) |
|----------------------|--------|---------|-------|--------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| (1) Informal support | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Therapy support | .099 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Helpfulness | .411** | .031 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Offender's age | -.145* | .060 | .028 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| (5) Ethnicity | .051 | -.013 | -.051 | .051 | 1 | | | | | | |
| (6) Education | .127 | .180* | .001 | -.096 | .075 | 1 | | | | | |
| (7) Home county | -.143* | .001 | -.003 | -.082 | -.330** | -.013 | 1 | | | | |
| (8) Time registered | -.167* | -.234** | .026 | .294** | -.038 | -.085 | .000 | 1 | | | |
| (9) Victim's gender | .024 | -.050 | .082 | .042 | .153* | .088 | .066 | .051 | 1 | | |
| (10) Victim's age | .085 | -.012 | -.030 | -.126 | -.092 | -.015 | .004 | .128 | -.036 | 1 | |
| (11) Victim-offender | -.083 | .053 | -.023 | -.079 | .013 | .163* | -.024 | -.032 | -.050 | .232** | 1 |

** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

The helpfulness of supports showed one positive and significant correlation, which was with informal supports ($p \leq .01$, .411). This correlation showed that offenders who reported having family and friends as supports also reported having more helpful supports. It must be mentioned that these two variables were independent variables used in this study, and the helpfulness variable was created using the helpfulness of family, friends, and support groups, and the lack of variation within the variable may account for the moderate correlation between the two variables. A Pearson's R of .7 or higher would elicit concern for multicollinearity. Since this was not case, both variables were included in regression analyses.

Table 12a also showed that when examining victim characteristics in my correlations model, victim's gender and victim-offender relationship produced a few positive and significant correlations. Victim's gender was positively and significantly correlated to ethnicity ($p \leq .05$, .153), which indicated that white offenders were more likely to victimize males. As for victim-offender relationship, positive and significant correlations were found with education level ($p \leq .05$, .163) and victim's age ($p \leq .01$, .232). These correlations indicated that more educated offenders were more likely to victimize strangers and that older victims were most often unknown to the perpetrator (stranger victimizations).

The table also showed that home county has negative and significant correlations with ethnicity ($p \leq .01$, -.330). This indicated that offenders residing in metropolitan areas were more likely to be non-white offenders. My preliminary results also showed that the time offenders spend Internet registered held positive and significant correlations with

offender's age ($p \leq .01$, .294), meaning that offenders spending longer periods of time on the registry were older.

Table 12b adds my dichotomous dependent variables that measured problems because of being Internet registered. In support of my first hypothesis, therapy support and lives alone ($p \leq .05$, -.192) were correlated showing that offenders were less likely to live alone when they had therapy support, which may indicate that registrants may feel less isolated when they have therapy support. According to the correlations in Table 12b, the job difficulty variable produced a positive and statistically significant relationship with time registered ($p \leq .05$, .152). This indicated that offenders who have spent longer periods on the Internet registry have also reported higher levels of job difficulty. Likewise, the correlation between housing difficulty and the time registered ($p \leq .01$, .213) indicated that offenders who have been registered for longer periods have reported more experiences with housing difficulty. Another positive and significant correlation was between vigilantism and ethnicity ($p \leq .01$, .162), indicating that white offenders were more likely to experience vigilantism. Offender's age had a negative and significant correlation with vigilantism ($p \leq .05$, -.174), meaning that older offenders reported fewer experiences with vigilantism.

Table 12b.

Correlations

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) | (12) | (13) |
|-------------------------|--------|---------|-------|--------|---------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| (1) Informal support | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Therapy support | .099 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Helpfulness | .411** | .031 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Offender's age | -.145* | .060 | .028 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| (5) Ethnicity | .051 | -.013 | -.051 | .051 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| (6) Education | .127 | .180* | .001 | -.096 | .075 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| (7) Home county | -.143* | .001 | -.003 | -.082 | -.330** | -.013 | 1 | | | | | | |
| (8) Time registered | -.167* | -.234** | .022 | .294** | -.038 | -.085 | .000 | 1 | | | | | |
| (9) Job difficulty | -.036 | -.047 | -.089 | -.084 | -.020 | .088 | -.058 | .152* | 1 | | | | |
| (10) Housing difficulty | -.056 | -.076 | .047 | .058 | -.055 | -.052 | -.001 | .213** | .219** | 1 | | | |
| (11) Vigilantism | .018 | -.112 | -.126 | -.174* | .162* | .046 | -.073 | -.039 | .343** | .220** | 1 | | |
| (12) Lives alone | .145 | -.192* | .053 | -.015 | -.073 | -.086 | -.066 | -.058 | -.090 | .032 | -.050 | 1 | |
| (13) Isolated | -.105 | .014 | -.152 | -.090 | .102 | .225** | -.084 | -.029 | .310** | -.031 | .270** | -.263* | 1 |

** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

A variable that affected feelings of isolation was education, which had a positive and significant correlation ($p \leq .01$, .225), indicating that more educated offenders were more likely to report feeling isolated since becoming Internet registered sex offenders. The dependent variables that were positively and significantly correlated were housing and job difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .219), vigilantism and job difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .343), vigilantism and housing difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .220), isolation and job difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .310), and isolation and vigilantism ($p \leq .01$, .270). Clearly, offenders tended to experience more than one of these difficulties as a result of their registration through SORN.

Next, I examined my correlations in Table 12c, which focused on the impact of offender demographics on my support variables and two ordinal dependent variables. There were two variables that produced negative and significant relationships with the feelings of hopelessness, which were: informal support ($p \leq .01$, -.217) and the helpfulness of supports ($p \leq .01$, -.260). In support of my second hypothesis, offenders who had the informal support from family and friends and registrants with more helpful supports were less likely to feel helpless. My public safety variable had negative and significant correlations with three variables, which were: ethnicity ($p \leq .01$, -.307), education level ($p \leq .01$, -.285), and therapy support ($p \leq .05$, -.147). These correlations showed that white and more educated offenders were less likely to perceive SORN as an effective public safety measure.

Table 12c.

Correlations

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|------|
| (1) Informal support | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Therapy support | .099 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Helpfulness | .411** | .031 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| (4) Offender's age | -.145* | .060 | .028 | 1 | | | | | | |
| (5) Ethnicity | .051 | -.013 | -.051 | .051 | 1 | | | | | |
| (6) Education | .127 | .180* | .001 | -.096 | .075 | 1 | | | | |
| (7) Home county | -.143* | .001 | -.003 | -.082 | -.330** | -.013 | 1 | | | |
| (8) Time registered | -.167* | -.234** | .026 | .294** | -.038 | -.085 | .000 | 1 | | |
| (9) Hopelessness | -.217** | .016 | -.260** | -.040 | .035 | .072 | .051 | .040 | 1 | |
| (10) Public safety | -.112 | -.147* | .017 | -.063 | -.307** | -.285** | .166* | .093 | -.055 | 1 |

** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

Also, offenders who responded to having therapy supports did not perceive SORN as effective in protecting the public from sexual victimization. My public safety variable had a positive and significant correlation with home county ($p \leq .05$, .166), which meant that offenders residing in metropolitan areas were more likely to agree with SORN's public safety capabilities.

Table 12d displayed my correlations for my dichotomous and scale support variables, the victim's characteristics, and my categorical and scale dependent variables. Dependent variables in table 12d that were positive and significant with hopelessness were job difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .385), housing difficulty ($p \leq .01$, .188), vigilantism ($p \leq .01$, .378), and isolation ($p \leq .01$, .447). The correlation between these dependent variables indicated that offenders who reported experiences with job and housing difficulty, vigilantism, and isolation were also more likely to agree with feeling helpless. The other correlations were negative and significant with offenders' perceptions of public safety, which indicated that offenders who victimized strangers ($p \leq .05$, -.174) and offenders who felt isolated ($p \leq .01$, -.211) were less likely to perceive SORN as capable of preventing sexual victimization.

In sum, Tables 12a-d showed that registrants who found their supports more helpful were less hopeless, which was preliminary support for my third hypothesis. However, long term registrants were often older and experienced difficulty with jobs and housing and lacked informal supports. Additionally, preliminary associations were found with ethnicity, specifically white offenders who felt negatively impacted by SORN laws.

Table 12d.

Correlations

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) | (12) | (13) |
|------------------------|---------|--------|---------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------|------|
| (1) Informal support | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Therapy support | .099 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Helpfulness | .411** | .031 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Victim's gender | .024 | -.050 | .082 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| (5) Victim's age | .085 | -.012 | -.030 | -.036 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| (6) Victim-offender | -.083 | .053 | -.023 | -.050 | .232** | 1 | | | | | | | |
| (7) Job difficulty | -.036 | -.047 | -.089 | -.048 | .099 | -.055 | 1 | | | | | | |
| (8) Housing difficulty | -.056 | -.076 | .047 | -.107 | .077 | .011 | .219** | 1 | | | | | |
| (9) Vigilantism | .018 | -.112 | -.126 | -.075 | .047 | .042 | .343** | .220** | 1 | | | | |
| (10) Lives alone | .145 | -.192* | .053 | -.190 | -.079 | .039 | -.090 | .032 | -.050 | 1 | | | |
| (11) Isolation | -.105 | .014 | -.152 | .045 | .012 | -.022 | .310** | -.031 | .270** | -.263* | 1 | | |
| (12) Hopelessness | -.217** | .016 | -.260** | .024 | .008 | .023 | .385** | .188** | .378** | -.050 | .447** | 1 | |
| (13) Public safety | -.112 | -.147* | .017 | -.002 | .093 | -.174* | -.015 | .030 | -.117 | -.023 | -.211** | -.055 | 1 |

** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$

Correlations indicated that white registrants have reported residing in non-metropolitan areas and experienced vigilantism. Isolation also held moderately strong associations with vigilantism, as well as vigilantism and feeling hopeless. Stronger associations were found with registrants that responded to feeling isolated and hopeless.

The remaining correlations did not produce significant results, and there were no causes for concern regarding multicollinearity. The correlations indicated some preliminary support for my hypotheses that social supports and the helpfulness of supports may be related to negative experiences and hopelessness and offender perceptions towards SORN laws. Since bivariate results can be spurious, I now turn to multivariate analyses to investigate whether these reported relationships held when control variables were introduced.

Logistic Regressions

My logistic regression in table 13 shows the results for the dependent variable job difficulty. The only variable that produced a statistically significant ($p \leq .1$) result was education. I found that registrants with more education had higher log odds of experiencing job difficulty, compared to offenders with less education. This may be because those with more education were required to submit to criminal history checks, in addition to the SORN requirement that created buffer zones which prohibit sex offenders. Interestingly, having informal and therapy supports resulted in higher log odds for experiencing job difficulty, though this counterintuitive finding was not statistically significant. Additionally, registrants who perceived their support networks to be more helpful were less likely to experience job difficulty, though this finding was also not significant.

Table 13.

Logistic regression for job difficulty (R² = .134, N = 121)

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Informal support | .118 | .546 | 1.125 |
| Therapy support | .090 | .413 | 1.094 |
| Helpfulness | -.184 | .225 | .832 |
| Offender's age | -1.146 | .768 | .318 |
| Ethnicity | -.296 | .439 | .744 |
| Education | .440* | .234 | 1.552* |
| Home county | -.399 | .435 | .671 |
| Time registered | .445 | .346 | 1.561 |
| Victim's gender | -.402 | .513 | .669 |
| Victim's age | .303 | .392 | 1.354 |
| Victim-offender | -.586 | .528 | .557 |
| Constant | 2.896 | 3.376 | 18.098 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

The results for my housing difficulty dependent variable can be found in Table 14. The log odds for experiencing housing difficulty were lower for registrants with informal and therapy supports; however, this result was not significant. The helpfulness of supports was also not significant, and it was in opposition of my third hypothesis, which showed that the log odds of experiencing housing difficulty were higher for registrants with more helpful supports. It may be that registrants have simply been stigmatized by negative perceptions of sex offenders. Thus, housing for sex offenders can be difficult to locate for various reasons, such as buffer zones, employment hardship, the media, and a not in my backyard (NIMBY) perspective (Burchfield & Mingus, 2014; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011; Nobles et al., 2012; Tewksbury & Copes, 2012). These results also had one statistically significant finding ($p \leq .1$) with the variable time registered. I found that the sex offenders' log odds for experiencing housing difficulty

were higher when offenders spent a longer time on the Internet registry, which suggested a possible cumulative negative effect of time spent on the registry.

Table 14.

Logistic regression for housing difficulty (R² = .118, N = 123)

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Informal support | -.003 | .562 | .997 |
| Therapy support | -.157 | .415 | .855 |
| Helpfulness | .034 | .220 | 1.035 |
| Offender's age | .361 | .753 | 1.435 |
| Ethnicity | -.379 | .436 | .685 |
| Education | -.064 | .228 | .938 |
| Home county | -.095 | .429 | .909 |
| Time registered | .650* | .343 | 1.916* |
| Victim's gender | -.560 | .509 | .571 |
| Victim's age | .479 | .422 | 1.615 |
| Victim-offender | .470 | .544 | 1.600 |
| Constant | -3.232 | 3.411 | .039 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

Table 15 showed the results for the dependent variable vigilantism in which there was only one statistically significant variable. Therapy support ($p \leq .1$) was negative and significant and showed that the log odds of experiencing vigilantism were lower for offenders with this type of support, which supports my first hypothesis. The table also showed that offenders who considered their supports more helpful had lower log odds for experiencing vigilantism, a finding that was not statistically significant.

Table 15.

Logistic regression for vigilantism ($R^2 = .195, N = 123$)

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| Informal support | .688 | .580 | 1.990 |
| Therapy support | -1.060 | .454 | .347* |
| Helpfulness | -.375 | .246 | .687 |
| Offender's age | -.973 | .844 | .378 |
| Ethnicity | .662 | .458 | 1.939 |
| Education | .172 | .250 | 1.188 |
| Home county | -.015 | .457 | .986 |
| Time registered | -.202 | .368 | .817 |
| Victim's gender | -.558 | .539 | .573 |
| Victim's age | .403 | .404 | 1.497 |
| Victim-offender | -.042 | .565 | .959 |
| Constant | 4.873 | 3.780 | 130.649 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

The results in Table 16 analyzed the dependent variable lives alone. In this analysis I found three statistically significant variables ($p \leq .05$): therapy supports, ethnicity, and victim's age. I found that the log odds for living alone were lower for offenders receiving therapy supports. Ethnicity also showed that the log odds for living alone were lower for white registrants when compared to non-white registrants. Table 16 also showed a positive relationship between the log odds of living alone and registrants with informal supports, but this was not significant. Additionally, the log odds for living alone were lower for Internet registered sex offenders whose victims were older.

Table 16.

Logistic regression for lives alone ($R^2 = .309, N = 65$)

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|------------------|----------|-------|--------|
| Informal support | .366 | .984 | 1.442 |
| Therapy support | -1.444** | .708 | .236** |
| Helpfulness | .083 | .331 | 1.087 |
| Offender's age | .849 | 1.093 | 2.338 |
| Ethnicity | -1.846** | .787 | .158** |
| Education | .081 | .376 | 1.084 |
| Home county | -1.046 | .725 | .351 |
| Time registered | -.224 | .537 | .799 |
| Victim's gender | -1.653 | 1.323 | .191 |
| Victim's age | -1.669** | .812 | .188** |
| Victim-offender | .999 | .874 | 2.716 |
| Constant | 1.935 | 4.948 | 6.923 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

Regarding sex offenders' negative experiences with SORN laws, the final variable examined was that of isolation (see table 17). I used the variables social prior to SORN and more isolated now to assess feelings of isolation. The helpfulness of supports was found to lower the log odds for feeling isolated and was statistically significant ($p \leq .1$) and supports my second hypothesis. The variable education ($p \leq .05$) was also statistically significant. With, the log odds for feeling isolated increasing for more educated registrants. Though not significant, informal supports were found to lower the log odds for feeling isolated. Therapy supports, however, increased the log odds for feeling isolated and was not significant. This finding was consistent with registrants' experiences with job difficulty (see table 13).

Table 17.

Logistic regression for isolation ($R^2 = .572$, $N = 104$)

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|------------------|---------|----------|-------------|
| Informal support | -3.354 | 2.912 | .035 |
| Therapy support | .095 | 1.414 | 1.100 |
| Helpfulness | -2.824* | 1.632 | .059* |
| Offender's age | -.112 | 2.498 | .894 |
| Ethnicity | .497 | 1.450 | 1.644 |
| Education | 2.551** | 1.082 | 12.825** |
| Home county | -.296 | 1.283 | .743 |
| Time registered | .693 | 1.076 | 1.999 |
| Victim's gender | 19.252 | 6840.196 | 229602362.5 |
| Victim's age | 3.582 | 2.457 | 35.928 |
| Victim-offender | -1.398 | 1.637 | .247 |
| Constant | 3.788 | 13.021 | 44.185 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

In my logistic regressions, I found that my first and second hypotheses were supported; therapy supports was significant for offenders who reported experiencing vigilantism and living alone. This could be due to the fact that there was less heterogeneity within the informal supports variable ($N = 69.1\%$) and more variation in the therapy supports variable ($N = 46.8\%$). I also found that helpfulness of supports lessened sex offender experiences with job difficulty, vigilantism, and feelings of isolation (see tables 13, 15, and 17), though only significant for isolation. The reliability analysis indicated some possible issues with my helpfulness of supports variables, though, so this finding should be considered with that in mind. Other notable findings included: more education resulted in increased experiences with job difficulty and isolation (see tables 13 and 17); lengthier registration periods resulted in more experiences with housing difficulty (see table 14); and white offenders and offenders with informal supports indicated more experiences with vigilantism. Moreover, being white

and having older victims also indicated that offenders were less likely to live alone (see table 16).

Ordinal Regressions

In an ordinal regression model, threshold values (α) represent the different levels of the dependent variable (Norusis, 2011). For the threshold values, each level was representative of four different logit equations. Given exposure to the location or predictor coefficients, I was able to determine whether any of these variables significantly impacted the dependent variable. In my study, Internet registered sex offenders were asked their level of agreement with feelings of hopelessness, as related to being subjected to public registration and notification, as well as their perceptions of SORN's ability to maintain public safety.

Table 18 shows the ordinal regression for hopelessness. My dichotomous supports variables were not significant but the log odds for feeling hopeless were lower for registrants with informal supports and higher for registrants with therapy supports when controlling for the other predictors. I found that the coefficient for helpfulness of support was statistically significant (see table 18, $p \leq .05$), and the negative coefficient indicates that when controlling for the other predictors, offenders who found their supports more helpful lowered their log odds for feeling hopeless (see table 18), a finding that supports my third hypothesis.

Table 18.

Ordinal regression for hopelessness ($R^2 = .107$, $N = 121$)

| | | Estimate | S.E. |
|-----------|------------------|----------|-------|
| Threshold | Hopelessness=1 | -3.603 | 3.016 |
| | Hopelessness=2 | -2.548 | 2.994 |
| | Hopelessness=3 | -1.676 | 2.986 |
| | Hopelessness=4 | .065 | 2.980 |
| Location | Informal support | -.519 | .505 |
| | Therapy support | .075 | .368 |
| | Helpfulness | -.424** | .207 |
| | Offender's age | -.125 | .666 |
| | Ethnicity | .072 | .389 |
| | Education | .279 | .207 |
| | Home county | .250 | .385 |
| | Time registered | .249 | .300 |
| | Victim's gender | -.319 | .452 |
| | Victim's age | .447 | .351 |
| | Victim-offender | -.313 | .456 |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

In Table 19, I ran an ordinal regression for my scale dependent variable, one that I called public safety. I assessed offenders' perceptions of the effectiveness of SORN laws. Table 16 shows the coefficients as they affect four alpha (α) values. This variable had three statistically significant coefficients. Both ethnicity and education were significant at the .05 level while home county was significant at the .1 level. Alpha values, such as .05 lessens the occurrence of a Type I error; whereas, the .1 α increases the chance of inferring a relationship between variables that was non-existent.

The variables informal and therapy supports were opposite the direction hypothesized, though not significant. The helpfulness variable in this model was also in the opposite direction to my hypothesis and not statistically significant. One of the

controls, ethnicity, was significant ($p \leq .05$) and indicated that the log odds of perceiving SORN as an effective public safety measure were lower for white offenders.

Table 19.

Ordinal regression for public safety ($R^2 = .242$, $N = 121$)

| | | Estimate | S.E. |
|-----------------|------------------|----------|-------|
| Threshold | Public safety=1 | -6.122** | 2.907 |
| | Public safety=2 | -5.065* | 2.892 |
| | Public safety=3 | -3.758 | 2.876 |
| | Public safety=4 | -1.956 | 2.869 |
| Location | Informal support | -.051 | .470 |
| | Therapy support | -.074 | .351 |
| | Helpfulness | -.308 | .191 |
| | Offender's age | -.633 | .642 |
| | Ethnicity | -1.010** | .379 |
| | Education | -.590** | .203 |
| | Home county | .653* | .370 |
| | Time registered | .044 | .287 |
| | Victim's gender | .182 | .439 |
| | Victim's age | .361 | .325 |
| Victim-offender | -.571 | .445 | |

** $p \leq .05$, * $p \leq .1$

I also found that the coefficient for education was significant ($p \leq .05$) and showed that the log odds of SORN's effectiveness were lower for more educated offenders, compared to less educated offenders once the predictors were controlled for. Another significant coefficient in this assessment of offenders' perceptions of SORN was home county. Home county (see table 19, $p \leq .1$) indicated that offenders residing in metropolitan areas held more favorable opinions of SORN's effectiveness when compared to non-

metropolitan offenders who were more likely to disagree with SORN's intended purpose to enhance safety.

My ordinal regressions show mixed support for my third hypothesis. For the public safety of SORN laws, my supports variables in table 19 were not significant, and they were all opposite the hypothesized direction. This may be because registrants have different opinions regarding SORN's ability to protect society from sexual victimization.

However, there was support for my third hypothesis in table 18; this table shows that registrants who rank their supports more helpful lowered their log odds of experiencing feelings of hopelessness. Interestingly, therapy supports increased the log odds for feeling hopeless, though this was not significant. It may be that therapy supports reflect on negative social experiences, which result in feelings of hopelessness. These supports may also address how registrants intend on coping with feelings of fear, shame, and hopelessness, rather than providing positive reassurance that they will adjust to their new lives.

Narratives

In addition to my qualitative gender comparison and quantitative analyses, I also used open-ended questions to investigate registrants' social experiences and the impact of SORN on their support systems and registrant's perceptions of the laws. The narratives were formed using two open-ended question located on page eight of the questionnaire. The first open-ended questions asked how their lives had changed since being listed on the Internet registry, and then survey respondents were asked to discuss their experiences – which included negative and positive experiences – since becoming Internet registered sex offenders, as well as obstacles they have encountered with their support systems.

Since SORN's purpose has been to impact convicted sex offenders in a way that would reduce and deter sex offending, respondents' narratives resulted in themes of job and housing difficulty, isolation, negative feelings, inadequate supports, in addition to receiving prosocial support.

In this study, most registrants, 73.9% (N = 122), responded to the first open-ended question, how has your life changed since being listed on the registry? More than one-third of those responding (42.6%) expressed having negative experiences, such as job and housing difficulty. The remaining 53.3% expressed negative feelings, such as feelings of isolation, shame, anxiety, worry, depression, fear, and hopelessness.

More specifically, registrants described housing difficulties as a direct result of being a registered sex offender. Difficulty locating housing was the result of the implementation of child congregation boundaries, which prohibit offenders from living or working near areas where children frequent. Also, the stigma of sex offenses forced some registrants from their homes. In this study, about one-eighth of registrants reported having difficulty finding adequate housing because of different restrictions and/or housing affordability. As stated by a 59 year old, 10 year registrant: "I have been disqualified from affordable government housing because I am a registered sex offender." Another offender not only remarked on the difficulty of finding housing but also mentioned the conditions of the housing he (62 year old with adult victim) qualifies for. He said, "I cannot get subsidized housing because of my criminal record... I'm forced to live in bed bug, drug, and crime infested housing." This highlights the fact that even when sex offenders are able to find housing, it is not always quality housing, which is an additional burden from SORN laws that could greatly impact their rehabilitation. These

descriptions affirm what other studies have described that sex offenders have been subjected to residing in criminally active neighborhoods (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2011). These neighborhoods can be transient and also provide access to potential victims of sexual violence and maltreatment; and therefore, these neighborhoods could increase sex offenders' risk for reoffending.

Another theme arising from the narratives was that of isolation. Previous studies of sex offenders have found isolation to be problematic because isolation has been considered a way for sex offenders to go undetected and elude treatment and/or law enforcement (Burchfield & Mingus, 2014; Mercado et al., 2008; Zgoba, 2011). When responding to the first open-ended question, I found that 28.7% of sex offenders self-reported feelings of isolation, though regression analyses (see table 14) showed that these feelings may be mitigated by the supports when offenders perceived them to be more helpful. A 32-year old child molester and six year registrant also described having support but also expressed concern about being isolated from the possible support from other sex offenders:

“My family and friends are wonderful, albeit a small group. As for friends I’ve made since being placed on the Registry, they simply don’t know. There is a worry, of course, that one day they will. I could go on for hours about how detrimental Megan’s Law is to the reintegration and recovery of offenders. I am lucky to have my support system, most others do not...offenders [who] are mutually interested in recovery and support are paralyzed by parole for being in contact with one another.”

Though vigilantism was not specified, some offenders expressed fear of retribution from others as their reason for isolation. A 64 year old, 15 year registrant expressed that, “I live in fear that co-workers and neighbors will discover my offenses and cause trouble. Sex offenses are shameful and hard to talk about with anyone. People just can’t understand how I’d do such things.” A concern for vigilantism was merited

since this study found that 67% (see table 5. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables) of respondents experienced some type of vigilantism, figures that were consistent with previous studies on Internet registered sex offenders (Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; & Tewksbury, 2004 & 2005).

Other studies have addressed negative feelings exhibited by sex offenders (Lasher & McGrath, 2012; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Levenson et al., 2007; Mercado et al., 2008; Stinson & Gonsalves, 2014). The results of the current study found that when registrants responded to the question, how has your life changed since being listed on the Internet registry, 24.6% of respondents self-reported feelings of shame, fear, anxiety, depression, and stress as a result of being Internet registered sex offender. This sentiment was expressed by a 73-year old child molester, “I feel unable to do anything freely. I’m under more stress at work because they know my background...” or as a 38-year old child molester states, “I have a lower sense of self-worth.” A 50-year old respondent with a child victim stated, “Occasional fear and feeling hopeless have become all too common in my life. The cause is the continued “punishment” of Megan’s Law.” The “continued punishment” that this registrant feels illustrates the way in which Megan’s Law punishes offenders after their debt to society has been paid. This was a common criticism of SORN; it violates offender constitutional rights while functioning under the guise of protecting the public from victimization. These negative feelings about their “continued punishment” highlight additional difficulties during reintegration, and these difficulties could impede reintegration for sex offenders.

Other registrants’ negative feelings were expressed in a way such that Megan’s Law was viewed as excessively punitive, though offenders acknowledged their behavior

has consequences. One response by a 52 year old, 15 year registrant expressed embarrassment:

“The registry in itself has not had much impact on my life. What has had an impact is being placed on community supervision for life. It had a direct impact, as it affects my freedoms. I never pursued employment because the officer must notify potential employers of my status.”

Another 10 year registrant discussed the one-size-fits-all nature of the laws and discussed his own personal victimization:

“It’s one law blanketing all of us. It’s used wrong because it takes into account things we may have been charged with but not guilty of, so the court system is terrible... The system is designed to keep you pinned down, not help elevate you to reach your potential, especially those of us who are victims as well.”

While a 31 year old, 4 year registrant with a child victim similarly described being the victim of sexual abuse,

“My life has always been tough from all angles, growing up without parents, molested at seven years old by a man, coming to the USA and being rejected in school because of my language, and being rejected by my dad as a son. Now that I am a sex offender my life is very fragile. It is easy to get in trouble; any little thing could send you back to jail...”

These two quotes highlight the fact that even though most individuals who were sexually abused do not become abusers, a portion of abusers have experienced sexual abuse.

Studies show that about 35% of male sex offenders and about 47.5% of female sex offenders were victims of sexual abuse (Faller, 1987; Glasser, Kolvin, Campbell, Glasser, Leitch, & Farrelly, 2001). In its current state, SORN punishes offenders without considering their individual circumstances, showing that the perpetrator has not been exempt from the law. Since experiences with childhood sexual abuse hinders an individual’s ability to build and maintain healthy relationships (Pierucki, n.d.), this type of trauma should be addressed with long-term therapy, in addition to required but

separate sex offender specific therapy that focuses on the offender's sexually deviant behavior.

The respondents seem to be noting that SORN's one size fits all approach has been an additional or unfair punishment for offenders who have experienced childhood sexual victimization. Policy may want to support therapy to address childhood sexual abuse, in addition to sexually deviant behaviors. The treatment approach could focus on long-term individual counseling and support groups for sex offenders who have experienced childhood sexual victimization. Policy could also set standards so that therapy teaches offenders appropriate coping mechanisms to prevent future deviant behaviors. This treatment should be separate from other sex offender treatment groups.

While most open-ended responses to this first question mentioned hardships, not all respondents felt this way. As a 53 year old child molester, who has been listed for 16 years expressed, "supports give me the answers I need and things to do that keep me and others safe." Views such as this may explain why registrants who had therapy supports were less likely to live alone (see table 16) and those who perceived their supports as more helpful felt less isolated and less hopeless (see tables 17 and 18). While another respondent, a 40 year old with a child victim stated, "I don't believe my life has significantly changed since being listed on the registry. However, I do feel that I'm less motivated to take healthy risks or improve my circumstances."

The other open-ended question from my narratives asked the offenders to discuss any experiences or obstacles encountered with their support systems (ie. family, friends, community, and support groups; N = 43). In New Jersey, sex offenders have been required to attend treatment support groups and individual counseling. Twenty-six

percent of offenders shared their opinions about experiences or obstacles they have encountered with their supports and their attitudes have been echoed in previous studies (Tewksbury & Copes, 2012; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007).

For example, some registrants expressed having inadequate support systems as an obstacle during reintegration. One registrant, for example, a non-metropolitan offender with a child victim described obstacles such as, “in the southernmost counties, the lack of available resources for self-improvement and support groups etc. makes the task of rehabilitation extremely difficult...” Similarly, another non-metropolitan child molester stated that “I think that my personal needs in therapy are not met.” While another registrant stated, “based on my experiences at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center, I have actively avoided all forms of post-incarceration sex offender treatment because I wildly dispute the treatment philosophy.” While support from treatment was eliminated as a variable in my study, Hanson and Bussiere’s meta-analysis found that completing treatment programs lowered sex offenders’ risk for recidivism. The results of the current study found that registrants with therapy supports do report less vigilantism and have been less likely to live alone, the remaining outcome variables were not significant, findings that differed from those of Mercado et al.’s (2008).

Other studies showed that prosocial supports received from family and community and clinicians (ie. COSA) help offenders manage their risk throughout the reintegration process with the use of coping mechanisms and teaching offenders problem solving skills (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Hannem, 2011; Levenson & Cotter, 2005a; Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Tewksbury & Conner, 2012). Other respondents in this study reported receiving prosocial support. Some, like this 38 year old, 12 year registrant who

stated that: "...The most important part of reintegrating into society is a "caring" support system. Group therapy doesn't work for everyone and individual is too costly...you can live a half normal life." Another registrant, a 47 year old who has spent nine years

Internet registered proclaimed his support for therapy:

"My family was standoffish at first...They have since forgiven me, but I still feel awkward around them. The only place I feel safe is with other sex offenders. Therapy was the best! I still keep in touch with the guys from group therapy. We talk every day; just to be sure everyone is doing the right things and following the rules."

This theme was continued by a 50 year old registrant with a child victim, who described prosocial experiences with formal support systems:

"After both group and individual therapy, I've learned the cause and effect of my offenses and all the harm I've caused to myself and others. It has become second nature to avoid the people and situations that caused me to act out...My treatment included two different programs...which were extremely helpful in my recovery...even my probation officer was a strong source of support."

These quotes highlight the importance of prosocial support systems and give us insight on how those systems are helpful. These two respondents express the impact their supports have on buffering negative social experiences, in addition to connecting sex offenders to resources. Prosocial supports could be the difference in prolonging or deterring recidivism, and I will revisit this in the policy discussion below.

The evaluation of sex offender policies in other studies found that parole board members and sex abuse professionals largely viewed registries as fair (Levenson et al., 2010; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2011), even though more than half of clinicians did not consider SORN an effective deterrent and examined communities admit being unaware of their proximity to registered sex offenders (Kernsmith et al., 2009; Malesky & Keim, 2001). The next two respondents were known exhibitionists, one of which we heard from earlier. They described their perceptions of SORN as an ineffective law meant to further

punish sex offenders. A 52 year old, 15 year registrant with a child victim stated that Megan's Law is useless, for his particular paraphilia, in its attempt to deter sex offending by expressing that:

"Megan's Law could never have stopped me from offending. In fact, I reoffended twice after being placed on Megan's Law. You see, I suffer from compulsive exhibitionism. There is: no worldly deterrent, amount of psychology/psychiatry, law enforcement, community support, etc. that could have prevented me from exposing myself... I have not had a desire to expose myself for 12 years."

Another registrant, a 49 year old and 17 year registrant with a child victim further describes the uselessness of Megan's Law, which was considered additional punishment:

"...My support system began to question me, and I lost some because they believe the accusations. The website is just another way of punishing sex offenders. What does it benefit the public to have me on the registry? I was a flasher; I never flashed anyone anywhere close to my residence. Being on the registry in no way prevents anyone from reoffending. All sex offenders suffer from low self-esteem and being unable to express their emotions and feelings, which in turn hinders us from developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Again, so why put a scarlet letter on us, to feel more [in] secure?"

While a 36 year registrant with a child victim's focus on reoffending by stating that:

"...My offense was in 2003. In 12 years, I have not reoffended, nor will I ever reoffend. I've been clean and sober for 12 years. I've learned my lesson. I am not attracted to children. In truth, I actually despise people who purposely hurt children. During my evaluation at Avenel, it was said that I am not a repeat offender. I think Megan's Law is a good law, but it should be re-looked at and revamped, especially for one-time offenders who change their lives around. Between parole and Megan's Law, I've actually wanted to kill myself several times (yes, it's that serious), especially since I cannot be a full-time dad to my children."

The respondent above highlights another characteristic of sex offenders, struggles with substance abuse. Treatment teaches offenders coping mechanisms to avoid triggers that could prevent reoffending. It could be that risk assessment was viewed as one way to determine offenders' likelihood of reoffending, but the respondent also recommends the need for narrower classification schemes for the different paraphilias when listing offenders on the Internet registry, such as pedophile, child molester, rapist, and voyeur.

These classifications may be important to registrants because society can be harsher towards offenders who harm children. The respondent's recommendation, however, could lead to subjecting other registrants to vigilantes.

Similar to offenders who experienced child sexual abuse, policy could require that offenders participate in sex offender specific therapy, such as support group and individual counseling. Since studies show sex offenders who complete therapy have a lower risk for reoffending (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998), therapy could be used as an incentive for one-time or single conviction sex offenders to be removed from the list. Policy could require specific stipulations, such as individual and group therapy for five years without rearrests or reconvictions for any crime. If the offender can avoid rearrests or reconvictions during this period, the offender can petition to be removed from the registry. Sex offenders would have to remain rearrest or reconviction free during the five year period to be removed from the registry. However, offenders must remain rearrest and reconviction free of any crime, otherwise offenders will remain Internet registered for 15 years.

Established out of fear of publicized heinous sex crimes, SORN's underlying purpose has been to deter and reduce sexual victimization. These laws attempt to achieve this by making the public aware of high risk (Tier II and III) sex offenders, whom risk assessment determined are most at risk for reoffending. SORN, however, has resulted in unintended social consequences directly affecting Internet registered sex offenders. Though some registrants can petition to be removed from the registry after 15 years, the narratives in this study show that most registrants have experienced barriers to reintegration, such as social ostracism, which may last a lifetime.

Most responses to the open-ended questions were compiled of registrants who have been Internet registered for a lengthy period. This was important because registrants were able to describe changes over time and provide an overview of the impact of public registration on the offender, their supports, and their generalized perceptions of the laws. The narratives of Internet registered sex offenders detail that offenders have been restricted by SORN laws and that obtaining jobs and housing have been difficult. One particular registrant even describes being relegated to a less than desirable neighborhood, which demonstrates the consequences beyond just difficulty finding housing and shows that the housing that they end up with can be problematic as well. Some respondents were also affected by SORN's disregard of their experiences with maltreatment and substance abuse, while others emphasized that their support systems were beneficial to their reentry.

Registrants also described their feelings of isolation which they feel were the result of the public's perception of the heinousness of sexual offenses. The negative perceptions of society may have stigmatized registrants from establishing new relationships while avoiding discussing their offenses with pre-established supports. Some registrants mentioned that they have received prosocial supports and have acquired positive coping mechanisms from different informal and therapy supports systems.

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, Recommendation, and Conclusion

Summary

This study examines sex offenders' supports and the helpfulness of those supports in mitigating the known social consequences of SORN laws since a lack of support has been influential in the reintegration process (Johnson et al., 2000; Lui & Chui, 2014; Mowen & Visher, 2015). It also gives Internet registered sex offenders a platform to present their perceptions of these laws and their ability to enhance public safety from sexual victimization, though some offenders may use this as an opportunity to express discontent with the SORN. Since a lack of support could increase sex offenders' risk for reoffending, it is important to examine and measure the relationships between self-reports of social consequences, perceptions of the laws (DVs), and supports and their helpfulness (IVs). Using a questionnaire, I am able to gauge offender demographics, victim characteristics, and offender perceptions of SORN laws. I also qualitatively explore male and female experiences, particularly as it relates to understanding if males and females have different experiences with registration and notification. Further, I examine offenders' experiences and perceptions of Megan's Law using narratives from this survey's open-ended questions. I will now discuss my findings, policy recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Discussion

This study's purpose is to determine if registrants with supports experience fewer social consequences and have more positive attitudes towards SORN, in addition to exploring male and female experiences with registration and notification laws. The data

shows that registrants have adverse experiences with known social consequences; more than half of registrants report experiencing job and housing difficulty while two-thirds report experiencing vigilantism and 90.1% report feelings of isolation (See table 5. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables).

The regression analyses test three hypotheses. The first hypothesis determines if registrants with supports experience fewer negative experiences. The basis of this hypothesis is that sex offenders rely on instrumental (tangible needs) and expressive supports (emotional/intangible needs), which they receive from informal and therapy support systems. While the other supports may be useful for treating the offender in general, this study demonstrates that it is therapy support that benefits sex offenders in lessening some negative experiences, and this support is the only independent variable that produces significant results when pairing with the dichotomous dependent variables vigilantism and lives alone, resulting in lessening social experiences. It seems then, that therapy supports are important, not only for helping offenders avoid future recidivism (Hanson & Bussiere, 1998) but also for protecting offenders from negative experiences. It is important that practitioners and policy makers are made aware of this apparent double benefit of therapy supports so they can ensure that all offenders receive this beneficial support.

It is interesting that informal supports did not help to lessen negative experiences. Just over two-thirds of study respondents have informal supports and 75.4% perceive their support systems as helpful (see table 2. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables). While most offenders have informal support and perceive them as helpful, it could be that they are not effective in lessening some negative experiences because of the

shame they experience and public fear of sexual reoffending. The negative perceptions of one respondent who states that “my family was standoffish at first...They have since forgiven me, but I still feel awkward around them...” This quote highlights the embarrassment registrant experience despite having their informal support systems.

It also could be that offenders have informal supports, but those supports are unable to help them instrumentally with housing and job needs. Registrants may be in touch with their family but unable to live with them due to children (and possible victims) in the house. Thus, informal supports may not be capable of lessening certain negative experiences. This could indicate that, despite having informal, emotional supports, offenders need more programs to address instrumental needs.

Mercado et al. (2008) also studies sex offender experiences with social consequences and their attitudes towards SORN laws as it relates to sex offenders in New Jersey. In Mercado et al.’s study registrants receiving treatment are more likely to report feelings of isolation, shame, embarrassment, and hopelessness, which are similar experiences registrants express in the current study, particularly as the hopelessness variable describes (See tables 17 and 18). However, while Mercado et al. (2008) assesses level of agreement with residential proximity to their supports, the current study identifies the types of supports and their helpfulness, the impact of which will be discussed below for the next hypothesis. The findings in my study may be more comprehensive since it provides insight on the helpfulness of supports, not just the presence of them, in lessening negative experiences. I now turn to that hypothesis.

The next hypothesis is that offenders ranking their supports as more helpful experience fewer negative social experiences. This hypothesis has support from the

isolation variable ($p \leq .1$), which is important because it shows that more helpful support systems may reduce feelings of isolation. These variables are expressive or intangible needs that relate to stigmatization, which sex offenders may experience more of, or more severely because their offenses are public knowledge.

Registrants may feel less isolation as they mend personal relationships, though registrants express difficulty building new relationships and disclosing their sex offender status, as another registrant expresses with fear retribution as a reason for isolation, “I live in fear that co-workers and neighbors will discover my offenses and cause trouble...” which shows that informal supports may not be effective in helping registrants build new relationships. Generally, the importance of rebuilding social relationships could inform policy by encouraging stakeholders and registrants to participate in establishing Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA). Preliminary results from studies of COSA in Minnesota show that pairing prosocial support from informal and formal networks with surveillance may be a better alternative to helping sex offenders manage the risks of sexual deviancy (Hannem, 2011; Hoing et al., 2013). Although informal and therapeutic supports are not significant in lessening some negative experiences, perceiving support systems as helpful is significant in lessening feelings of isolation.

The third and final hypothesis is that offenders reporting more helpful supports will have better attitudes towards SORN laws and feel less hopeless. For the support of SORN laws, I reject this hypothesis; my results show that having helpful supports did not change registrants’ perception of SORN as an ineffective prevention measure. It is possible that experiences, such as job difficulty, housing difficulty, and isolation are

additional stressors that make it difficult for registrants to choose to avoid the triggers that could lead to reoffending. It is important to reduce the stress that sex offenders experience as a motivator for risk management. However, I did find that the helpfulness of supports ($p \leq .05$) results in registrants feeling less hopeless. This shows that more helpful supports reduce negative feelings. Obviously, it is important for offenders to avoid negative thought patterns because feeling hopeless could lead the registrant to believe there is no reason to avoid reoffending, so it is important that helpful supports protect offenders from these negative feelings. This finding is also important because it demonstrates that for reducing feelings of hopelessness just having supports is not enough; the offender must perceive those supports to be helpful. Helpful supports provide expressive support that improves the emotional well-being and self-perception of the offender. Program counselors could focus on encouraging registrants to recognize the helpfulness of their supports in order to lower feelings of hopelessness.

While it does not relate to my hypotheses, there are several demographic variables of statistical significance across dependent variables that have some policy implications. Registrants reporting job difficulty and feelings of isolation, for example, have more education. These registrants may have to adjust their standards for employment because of the stipulations of being a sex offender; it would be useful if counselors set realistic expectations for these more educated offenders. Another demographic variable is that registrants spending longer periods on the registry often experience housing difficulty. It is imperative that registered sex offenders obtain and retain employment and housing. This is a basic need for survival; and when deficient, this may be a motivator for offenders' behavior, particularly when determining desistance from crime. A policy

implication would be to provide resources to assist sex offenders with housing since they are registered for a lengthy period of time and may be forgotten over time. Other demographics show that white registrants are less likely to live alone. This shows that white registrants receive expressive and instrumental support, which support theory considers important to offender rehabilitation and crime prevention (Cullen, 1994). Registrants with older victims are also less likely to live alone. It could be that child victims have been considered a vulnerable population, which could make registrants who victimized children more stigmatized and shunned in society.

Regarding offender attitudes, white and more educated registrants are less likely to perceive SORN as an effective public safety measure, while metropolitan registrants are more likely to perceive SORN as effective. The initial finding is important because white registrants make up 59% of sex offenders in this study (see table 2), which is slightly higher than the national average of 57% (rainn.org). The impact of the difficulties registrants experience during reintegration could have the potential to exacerbate the occurrence of reoffending among sex offenders, particularly white registrants since national statistics show greater variation between white sex offenders and other ethnic groups. More educated registrants may perceive SORN as less effective because they acknowledge that victimization typically occurs within non-stranger relationships. This indicates that more educated registrants may also have an advanced understanding of SORN laws, which goes beyond registering their information with the police and not residing with children. Metropolitan registrants may perceive SORN as effective because offenders may live in close proximity to victims of sexual violence and maltreated youths; therefore, limiting offender access to potential victims. Non-metropolitan

registrants, however, reside in areas where potential victims may be difficult to access because residents are likely scattered over a larger geographic region, so they do not perceive a need for the law to deter them from offending.

A limitation of this study is the fact that this study does not use a control group to compare registrants affected by different laws in other states, which would examine sex offenders impacted by conviction-based, or broad notification policies and those impacted by states using risk assessments. In New Jersey, the use of risk assessment instruments is meant to determine which sex offenders are at the highest risk for sexual reoffending (Mercado et al., 2008; Zgoba et al., 2008). The risk assessment model also seeks to maintain fewer registrants, which may contribute to a reduction in negative experiences of sex offenders and their informal support systems.

Another limitation of this study is the amount of return-to-sender mail (462 returned surveys) that I received. It is possible that accurate registry information could have increased the number of female study participants. It is also possible that I would have had more responses to receiving therapeutic support given a larger sample. This limitation suggests the existence of transiency among the sex offender population, which may be due to difficulty finding and maintaining employment and/or housing. This not only limits my sample size, but it also could have contributed to selection bias. There may be something different about offenders that are reachable and willing to take the survey when compared to those whose addresses are outdated or those who refuse to respond. Selection bias may also have occurred because registrants may have used this study as an opportunity to express discontent with SORN and its overall impact on offenders' lives. Further, it could also be that the offenders responding are more

compliant with Megan's Law or more successful in their rehabilitation. Despite these limitations, I believe that the findings in this study are important because they have implications for both policy and future research.

Recommendation

This study began with a qualitative exploration of the experiences and perceptions of male and female offenders. The findings show that overall, males and females have similar experiences with SORN laws, but that women have fewer experiences with job difficulty, vigilantism, and they did not live alone. Unfortunately, these findings are only exploratory in nature because of the limited female sample. Therefore, future studies need to increase the females in their samples to allow for a quantitative examination of their experiences and perceptions to determine whether my exploratory findings hold.

The main emphasis of this study is the impact of informal and therapy support systems and their helpfulness in lessening negative experiences and perceptions of SORN. The results show that sex offenders have adverse experiences during their return to the community and a wealth of psychological and interpersonal issues and/or needs that future research should address in order to promote successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Analysis show that therapy supports are helpful in lessening vigilantism and registrants' odds of living alone. Therapy support's role has typically been to treat sex offenders and guide them through reintegration by targeting issues with substance abuse and treating any other psychological or mental health issues. However, my study demonstrates that therapy is beneficial not only for avoiding recidivism, but also for reducing the negative consequences registrants experience. Policymakers should be made

aware of this “double” benefit of therapy support, and it should be integrated into every sex offender treatment plan.

My study is unique in that it not only finds therapy to be useful in reducing negative experiences but also provides insight on why offenders find it helpful. The open-ended questions reveal that offenders find therapy effective when it helps them understand the harmful nature of their act as well as teaches offenders to avoid triggers, so they refrain from the behavior in the future. This information is important for practitioners so that they continue to provide this style of counseling in therapy sessions.

Another issue that came up in the narratives is the issue of SORN as a one size fits all model. Under these laws, all sex offenders are on the registry, regardless of previous victimization or one-time offender status. It might be time to adjust SORN policies to individualize them. It could be interesting for therapy supports to provide long-term treatment to sex offenders who have experiences with sexual abuse. This, of course, would be separate from non-offending victims of sexual abuse. It could also benefit offenders to be separated according to their risk level for effective treatment (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2007). Policy could also stipulate that sex offenders who remain rearrest and reconviction free for any crime over five years could be removed from the Internet registry rather than serving 15 years on the registry.

Further, building and mending personal relationships are other difficulties registrants describe in the narratives. The negative feelings registrants describe have been viewed by Braithwaite as shaming, which may disrupt successful reintegration. The restorative justice approach of reintegrative shaming disapproves of the criminal behavior while providing offenders with prosocial supports that focus on their psychological and

social needs (Braithwaite, 2000). Registrants' informal supports are plentiful among family and friends, but few respondents reported receiving support from support groups and religious institutions. Further, these informal supports did not seem to address the instrumental needs of many offenders. Other inadequacies are with receiving support from the justice system, such as community corrections and law enforcement, in addition to support from mental health clinicians and victim's rights groups. Sex offenders have also been plagued by negative public perceptions so support from the community has been almost nonexistent. Therefore, a lack of community support creates challenges to sex offender reintegration.

These perceptions may improve with more support from the system that attempts to rehabilitate them. The use of COSAs may also serve as a remedy to the lack of formal support, and these support groups have found some success in sex offender reintegration (Hannem, 2011; Hoing et al., 2013). COSAs focus on the offender and emphasize strategies for reducing and managing offender risk; these groups and strategies known to lessen negative perceptions of sex offenders and provide support to registrants as they experience difficulties during reintegration. COSA also pairs support and surveillance as a reinforcement for public safety, which has been the driving force in passing sex offender legislation. Another difficulty is with instrumental needs, such as housing. Registrants' narratives and quantitative analyses illustrate that this difficulty worsens as offenders spend more time Internet registered. Using comprehensive support groups, such as COSA may be helpful in finding housing willing to accept sex offenders. COSA may also serve to support offenders' emotional needs because some may not have family and friends in their support network, which I can reduce hopelessness.

Conclusion

This study supports previous literature findings that Internet registered sex offenders undergo a variety of negative experiences. The current study provides support that informal supports alone are not enough to lessen negative experiences, as sex offenders experience more stigmatization because their offenses are public knowledge. Lessening some negative experiences, such as isolation, is possible when supports are helpful. This finding is important because current sex offender literature does not measure the helpfulness of supports. Coupling negative experiences with negative feelings could increase antisocial thought patterns, which could also cause reoffending.

The results also show that therapy support is significant for lessening some negative experiences. Therapy supports consisting of individual counseling and religious support, produce positive outcomes, such as registrants are less likely to experience vigilantism and live alone. Additionally, while risk assessments classify sex offenders on the Internet registry, offender treatment may need modifying according to risk level to ensure that each offender is learning the necessary strategies to prevent recidivism. The results also show that feeling hopeless is lower for registrants with more helpful supports. Most registrants have negative perceptions of SORN laws as an effective public safety measure, which previous studies also support. Through narratives, I find that support from the justice system has been inadequate. In previous studies on supports and offenders, law enforcement and community corrections have been instrumental to offenders during reintegration (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a). Therefore, creating well-rounded support systems, which focus on offender accountability and support could

redirect antisocial and criminal behaviors and may improve overall perceptions of SORN laws.

Another aspect of this study focuses on male and female experiences and perceptions towards SORN. This study improves on past studies by including females in preliminary analyses. In this exploration, females report less job difficulty, vigilantism, and they did not live alone. It is important to include and further research female sex offenders to develop a better understanding as to whether females have significantly different experiences than males. Studying prosocial supports and recommending well-rounded support systems, could contribute to resolving registrants' experiences with social consequences and negative perceptions of SORN laws.

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Appendix A

Alternate Consent Form

CONSENT

Rowan University

We are inviting you to participate in a research survey entitled “Sex Offender Perceptions: Investigating Social Supports as Buffers to the Consequences of Megan’s Law.” You are receiving this invitation because you are subject to New Jersey’s Megan’s Law and you are listed on the New Jersey Internet sex offender registry. We are adding to existing research which suggests there are more consequences than benefits to Megan’s Law. By focusing on the consequences of Megan’s Law we are giving you a platform to express your opinions about your experiences with Megan’s Law. In order to participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older.

The survey may take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this paper survey.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the social consequences of Megan’s Law on Internet registered sex offenders, as well as obtaining the offender’s attitudes towards Megan’s Law. Additionally, conducting this study will explore the differences between adult males and females, and whether social support lessens the consequences of Megan’s Law. This survey will randomly select and distribute surveys to 1,047 male sex offenders listed on the New Jersey Internet registry, as well as to all of the female sex offenders listed on the Internet registry.

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey; all information is anonymous and confidential. There may be no direct benefit to you; however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand the different experiences of adult male and female Internet registered sex offenders and the impact of social support on sex offenders.

Your responses will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file and surveys will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Melissa Colson or Dr. Schell-Busey at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Melissa Colson and Dr. Natalie Schell-Busey
Department of Law/Justice Studies
College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Campbell Library
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Appendix B

Survey

This survey is voluntary and anonymous. You have been provided with a Consent form that does not require your signature. If you choose to participate in this survey simply complete the survey and use the return envelope to mail to the address provided. Please do not write your name or any other identifying information on this survey.

Your Information

- 1.) Identify your gender.
 - A) Female
 - B) Male

- 2.) Identify your age.

- 3.) Identify your race.
 - A) Caucasian/ White
 - B) African-American/ Black
 - C) Hispanic
 - D) Asian
 - E) Two or more races

- 4.) Identify your relationship status.
 - A) Single
 - B) Significant Other/Partner
 - C) Married
 - D) Divorced
 - E) Widow

- 5.) Identify your highest level of education.
 - A) Less than high school
 - B) High School
 - C) Some College
 - D) College Graduate

- 6.) Identify your county. Select one.

| | | | | | |
|------------|------------|----------|------------|-----------|----------|
| Salem | Cumberland | Cape May | Gloucester | Atlantic | Camden |
| Burlington | Ocean | Mercer | Monmouth | Hunterdon | Somerset |
| Middlesex | Warren | Morris | Union | Sussex | Passaic |
| Bergen | Essex | Hudson | | | |

- 7.) How long have you been listed on the Internet registry?

- 8.) Do you have any of the following support systems: (Select all that apply.)
- A) Family
 - B) Friends
 - C) Support groups
 - D) Individual Counseling
 - E) Religious support
 - F) Community support

Victim Characteristics

- 9.) Identify the **gender** of your victim.
- A) Female
 - B) Male
 - C) Both female and male
- 10.) Identify the **age** of your victim.
- 11.) Identify your relationship to your victim.
- A) Spouse/ Significant Other
 - B) Other Family Member
 - C) Acquaintance
 - D) Stranger

For the following questions respond with **Yes** or **No**.

- 12.) Have you ever been denied employment because of your sex offender status?
- A) Yes
 - B) No
- 13.) Have you lost a job because a coworker or your boss found out about your sex offender status?
- A) Yes
 - B) No
- 14.) Have you been subjected to residence restrictions?
- A) Yes
 - B) No
- 15.) Have you had to move from a home or apartment because a landlord or neighbor(s) found out about your sex offender status?
- A) Yes
 - B) No

16.) Have you been threatened or harassed by anyone because of your sex offender status?

A) Yes

B) No

17.) Have you been physically assaulted or injured by anyone who discovered your sex offender status?

A) Yes

B) No

18.) Has your property been damaged because of your sex offender status?

A) Yes

B) No

19.) Do you live alone?

A) Yes

B) No

If you answered **yes**, skip to question 22.

20.) If you answered **no** to question 18, are the people you live with your children?

A) Yes

B) No

21.) If you answered **yes** to question 19, are those living with you a spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend or other relative?

A) Yes

B) No

22.) Have the person(s) living with you been threatened, harassed, assaulted, injured, or suffered property damage because of their affiliation with a sex offender?

A) Yes

B) No

23.) Have your friends or acquaintances been threatened, harassed, assaulted, injured, or suffered property damage because of their affiliation with a sex offender?

A) Yes

B) No

24.) Were you socially active before being arrested and convicted of sex offenses? (This includes but is not limited to attending family, community, and work events, as well as attending school functions with your children, dating, and social gatherings with friends.)

- A) Yes
- B) No

25.) If **Yes** to the above question, do you feel more isolated now that you are on the Internet registry?

- A) Yes
- B) No

These next six questions seek your response on the helpfulness of your support systems. Answer the following questions by responding: **very helpful, helpful, neutral, unhelpful, or very unhelpful.**

26.) If you selected family, how helpful has your family been during this process?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

26b). If you selected friends, how helpful have your friends been during this process?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

26c). If you selected support groups, how helpful have the support groups been during this process?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

26d). If you selected individual counseling, how helpful has individual counseling been during this process?

- A) Very helpful

- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

26e). If you selected religious support, how helpful has religious support been during this process?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

26f). If you selected community support, how helpful has community support been during this process?

- A) Very helpful
- B) Helpful
- C) Neutral
- D) Unhelpful
- E) Very unhelpful

Megan's Law is a set of laws enacted in the 1990s that involve sex offender registration and community notification laws. Sex offender registration laws require those convicted of, adjudicated delinquent for, or acquitted because of insanity for sex offenses to register their addresses with their local police departments. Community notification laws require certain groups and community members to be notified a sex offender is being released into their community. In New Jersey, sex offenders subject to community notification have been determined, through risk assessment to be Tier II and Tier III sex offenders. Answer the following statements responding with: **strongly agree**, **agree**, **neutral**, **disagree**, or **strongly disagree**.

27.) I feel alone and isolated because of Megan's Law.

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

- 28.) I have lost friends or a close relationship because of Megan's Law.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral
 - D) Disagree
 - E) Strongly Disagree
- 29.) I feel afraid for my safety because of Megan's Law.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral
 - D) Disagree
 - E) Strongly Disagree
- 30.) I feel shame and embarrassment because Megan's Law keeps me from participating in activities.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral
 - D) Disagree
 - E) Strongly Disagree
- 31.) I have less hope for the future now that I will be a registered sex offender for life.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral
 - D) Disagree
 - E) Strongly Disagree
- 32.) I feel hopeless because of Megan's Law.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral
 - D) Disagree
 - E) Strongly Disagree
- 33.) I feel Megan's Law keeps me from reoffending.
- A) Strongly Agree
 - B) Agree
 - C) Neutral

- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

34.) I feel Megan's Law is a good law.

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

35.) I understand why Megan's Law is important.

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

36.) Megan's Law keeps the community safe.

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

37.) I do not think I should be subject to Megan's Law.

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

38.) How has your life changed since being listed on the registry?

39.) Discuss any experiences or obstacles you have encountered with your support systems (ie. Family, friends, community, and support groups).