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California State University - San Bernardino, terisaberger@gmail.com

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KNOWLEDGE VERSUS PERCEPTION: SOCIAL WORKERS' VIEW
OF SEX OFFENDERS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Terisa Maria Berger

June 2017

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Approved by:

Dr. Erica Lizano, Research Project Supervisor

Dr. Janet Chang M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

Social workers comprise one of the leading professions who interact with sex offenders through means of treatment, as well as unexpected life events. The purpose of this study is to evaluate social workers' knowledge of sex offender laws and how their knowledge impacts their thoughts and feelings about working with sex offenders. Through a survey, social workers registered with the National Association of Social Work (NASW) in Southern California were asked to complete a questionnaire, in which addressed laws and thoughts in regards to sex offenders. One hundred surveys at random were evaluated. The study findings show a relationship between greater knowledge about the sex offender population and lower levels of apprehension a social worker has when working with a sex offender.

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CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The assessment section gives the background of the study and the reason the research is imperative to the social work field. The research focused on sexual offenders, and expressed questions that involved social workers' knowledge versus their perception of sexual offenders. The study hypothesized that one's education and knowledge base affects how one thinks which subsequently influences behavior, in this case it influences the social worker's ability to effectively work with sex offenders. The positivist research paradigm gives an understanding to the direction the study took and the type of data collected. The literature review is sectioned in three parts consisting of sex offender laws, social work training and knowledge of sex offenders, and the perception of sex offenders; this supports the hypothesis. The theoretical orientation of this research study and the contribution it makes to the social work field are discussed to show the importance of the study.

Research Focus and/or Question

The research question for this study is what makes social workers open to working with sex offenders? Taking into consideration the knowledge social workers have regarding the laws that classify individuals as sex offenders, could

this knowledge or lack thereof influence their perception of sex offenders and how they interact with sex offenders? It is hypothesized that, the more knowledge/ education a social worker has on the legal and social aspects of what makes a person a sex offender, the more likely he or she would be open to work with a sex offender in any capacity within the social work field.

Research Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

This study adopted a positivist paradigm, the goal of this paradigm according to (Morris, 2006), is to find the causes and correlations between variables. The thought is that “positivist researchers suppose that one can identify the laws and mechanisms of human behavior and therefore reveal cause and effect relationships” (Morris, 2006). In this study, the focus is to quantitatively measure the correlation between knowledge and thoughts/feelings. The researcher hypothesized that knowledge would directly affect thoughts and feelings towards sex offenders, the thoughts and feelings will then subsequently impact the work a social worker does with sex offenders. This research paradigm also allowed for a bigger population to be surveyed through an online questionnaire and for the social workers to remain anonymous.

Literature Review

This literature review focused on sexual offender laws in California, the perception society including social workers have when it comes to sex offenders,

and the knowledge base social workers have regarding working with this population.

California Law on Sex Offenders

According to Penal Code 290 of the California legislation, a sex offender is one who commits “crimes against the person involving sexual assault and against public decency and good morals.” The persons required to register on the sexual offender registry according to subdivision (c) of penal code 290, includes anyone who has been convicted in the federal or state court since July 1, 1944, and their crime involved a sexual component. The sex crime may include bigamy, incest, and the crime against nature (California penal code 285), such as marriages that are incestuous, or individuals that are of the age 14 years or older, who commit adultery or fornicate with one another. (California Penal Code 288) states a sexual crime is committed if: a lewd act for sexual gratification is committed against a child under 14, anyone who uses force in a sexual act, and a caregiver commits a sexual act upon a dependent. This includes acts of oral copulation, contacting a minor with intent to commit a sexual act, arranging a meeting with a minor, or engaging in sexual penetration with a minor. California Penal Code 289 expands penal code 288 and includes anyone being forced to participate in a sexual act. Other sexual crimes include, (California penal code 286) any person that commits sodomy, (California Penal Code 236.1) any person that commits human trafficking, and (California Penal Code 243.4) any person who commits assault and battery with unwanted

touching for purpose of sexual arousal. California Penal Codes 261,262, 264.1, 266, 266c, 266h, 266i, 266j, 267, 269 all talk about rape, abduction, carnal abuse of children, and seduction. This gives multiple scenarios that would be considered rape. The laws stipulate that if the victim is under duress or if fear is used to illicit the victim to be involved in a sexual act then it is a sexual crime. In California Penal Code 311.1 – 311.4, 311.10, and 311.11, obscene matter refers to anyone who brings into California data (photos, film, videos, emails, etc.) that contain or simulate sexual conduct of a minor for distribution or exchange, or sexually exploits a child. California penal code 314 addresses indecent exposure, obscene exhibitions, and brawdy and other disorderly houses.

The first legislation requiring sex offender registries began in 1994 (Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007), after an 11-year old boy, named Jacob, was abducted. The sexual offense and murder of Megan Kanka brought about the law commonly known as Megan's Law; this enacted the notification to the public that a sex offender was in the community. Erin's Law was another law enacted in Illinois in 2010. Anderson (2014) stated this law created a task force and prevention programs in school, and the laws focused on children being abused by strangers, even though Anderson (2014), suggested strangers are not the primary offenders.

Perceptions of Sex Offenders

The laws that surround sex offenses vary, yet when someone is on the sex offender registry the public view according to Willis, Levenson, and Ward

(2010), is more negative than towards other offenders. According to the study by (Sample & Kadleck, 2008), participants recognized a sex offender as being a man, one who uses sex as a way to control their victim, and one who has a problem. In this study, a legislator blamed movies that show domestic violence and rape for the sexual ideas of these men. Law enforcement officials according to Tewksbury and Mustaine (2013), tend to hold harsh views towards sex offenders which are closely related to those views of college students. In an article by Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, and Baker (2007), addressed that communities believe that sex offenders are more likely to reoffend, and that they presume that the sex offense was against a child. Social workers live amongst these communities and it is imperative to understand if they share the opinions of the communities at large.

Social Workers Knowledge of Sexual Offenders

“Social Workers provide the majority of mental health services in this country” (Grady, 2009a). Social Workers will be on the frontlines when treating sex offenders but they also interact with all mental health services, which means they could provide services, without knowledge, of the individual being a sex offender. According to Grady & Abramson (2011), only approximately 61% of the social work schools that participated in their study included training around the topic of sex offenses. Five of the 42 schools within the Masters of Social Work level gave no training around the topic of sex offenses (Grady & Abramson, 2011). Thus, Grady & Abramson (2011) found that the majority of students were

only slightly prepared to work with this population. The faculty state that not all sub populations can be included in social work education curriculum, but with a growing population of sex offenders (Grady, 2009a), this might be a class that receives a bit more attention.

Those who work with sex offenders tend to burnout at higher rates (Ermshar & Meier, 2014). Findings from previous studies lead us to a key question, are these higher rates of burnout among people working with sex offenders due to the lack of training received by the workers? The questionnaire presented in Fortney, Levenson, Brannon, and Baker (2007), was used to test the knowledge and feelings regarding sex offenders. The questions included are: what is the recidivism rate for sex offenders against children? What percent of sexual assaults of adults do you believe come to the attention of the authorities? What percent of adult sex offenders do you believe were sexually abused as children? What percent of convicted sex offenders do you believe will commit another sexual offense? (Fortney, Levenson, Brannon, & Baker, 2007). Terminology is also used as a base of knowledge in the questionnaire, such as what is a sexual offense, what is the sexual offender registration, what is a sexually violent predator, and what are notification laws (Grady, 2009a).

The acts that are considered crimes against the person involving sexual assault, crimes against public decency, and good morals, mark these individuals as sexual offenders. They must register on the sex offender registry in California and may be listed on the sex offender website due to Megan's Law. The

registration does not always contain the offense and thus the perception of the individual is left to society. As a social worker, it is imperative to understand the different reasons a person would have to register as a sex offender, understand their own perceptions of a sex offender, as well as have the knowledge base to be able to counsel sex offenders.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation for this study is based in Cognitive theory. This theory, according to Turner (2011), helps us understand how someone thinks about a situation, whether it be an individual, group, family, community, etc., and how their thoughts affect their behaviors. The theory helps one examine their thoughts and feelings, which as a social worker, this knowledge is important as to not let it affect the ability to assist others. The nature of the crimes committed by a sex offender, can elicit many thoughts and negative feelings, a social worker must be able to acknowledge and address their thoughts and emotions. In this study, it was hypothesized that one's education and knowledge base affects how one thinks which subsequently influences behavior, in this case it influences the social worker's ability to effectively work with sex offenders.

Potential Contribution to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

This study has the potential to contribute to both the micro and macro social work practice. The study is directed to show the importance of education in

regards to sex offenders. The macro level of social work implications would begin in the curriculum taught at the Bachelors and Masters levels in Social Work programs. Through this education, a person would learn the multiple ways a person could be required to register on a sex offender registry, and recognize that the crimes committed are not all violent and against children. This knowledge base could break stigmas in the community through advocacy work, could create possible changes in sex offender laws and sex offender registry requirements. Social worker involvement could bring back a quality of life to a population, as well as respect and dignity. The micro level of social work practice would be impacted through all aspects of social work interactions: medical, individual, group, etc., because social workers do not just interact with sex offenders in one type of setting. For example, a sex offender could be in a hospital setting, diagnosed with cancer. The medical social worker would complete an assessment, thus interacting with a sex offender, even though they did not choose to work with sex offenders.

Summary

The assessment chapter gives an understanding of the research study by introducing the hypothesis. The more knowledge/ education a social worker has on the legal and social aspects of what makes a person a sex offender, the more likely they would be open to work with a sex offender in any capacity within the social work field. The paradigm chosen to complete the research study is a

positivist paradigm, to quantitatively test the correlation between the two variables (knowledge and feelings). The literature review gives insight into the laws surrounding sex offenses and those who are placed on sex offender registries. It also shows the thoughts and perceptions of the community and how social workers are limited in education/knowledge in regards to sex offenders and their needs. Cognitive Theory is the theoretical orientation and the study can be used for both macro and micro purposes due to the nature of the study and analyzing how education (macro) can affect feelings and thoughts when interacting with the client (micro).

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

The engagement section focuses on the study site, and the forum in which the study was presented to the participants. The self-preparation section focuses on the way the instrument measured how the study was developed and the materials used to complete it. The issues that could affect the study such as diversity, ethical and political issues will be addressed, as well as role of technology in this study.

Study Site

The research study is grounded in a positivist paradigm and thus the research site limited the interaction between the participant and the researcher (Morris, 2006). The participants, the Southern California Region of the National Association Social Workers, were contacted to obtain their consent to participate in the study. The engagement with the participants was online through email, gathering their consent and willingness to participant in a survey. The survey was administered on an online platform called Survey Monkey. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is social workers that interact with individuals in all types of settings. Sex offenders could interact with social workers in a counseling setting, through a group or court mandated session, or

other means of interaction, such as in a medical setting or the individual seeking resources to obtain a better quality of life.

Self-Preparation

In preparation for the survey design, the researcher examined the literature around sex offender laws, perceptions of sex offenders, and knowledge/education provided to social workers, and extracted key terminology relevant to sex offenders and sex offenses that are used in the survey. The researcher split the questionnaire into multiple parts to ensure all parts of the study were covered, including knowledge/education on the sex offender laws, thoughts and feelings about sex offenders, and demographics of the participant. Survey questions were extracted from the “differences between group responses and published data” (Fortney, Levenson, Brannon, & Baker, 2007), which allowed a measurement of perceptions, while utilizing a measurement that has been tested on the public. The questions are detailed and concise, while keeping in mind the time it would take to complete the survey.

Diversity Issues

The diversity issues addressed in this research study are the difference in the perception of social workers that have worked with sex offenders, those have not yet come across this clientele, and those who do not wish to work with them. The length in which a social worker has been working in the field also introduced

a different variable to the survey, as well as if they have been affected by a sex crime. To minimize any diversity issues the survey was sent to all members of the NASW in Southern California Region.

Ethical Issues

The ethical issues that could have arisen during the research study process were limited by getting approval through the Proposal supervisor, the CSUSB School of Social Work IRB Sub-Committee Chair, and the institutional review board of the NASW. By submitting the research study to these two review boards, the research study was reviewed by many professionals that are not only in charge of the school of social work but also poised with the duty of protecting the field of social work. The participants were given instructions that not only outlined the survey but also informed them that they could quit the study at any time. There were instructions to answer the questions to the best of their ability, without help from any outside sources. Due to the survey being completed online, it allowed for anonymity, which allowed the participants to answer truthfully and have the security of confidentiality. Without this element, a participant might feel as though they could be held accountable for their thoughts and feelings towards sex offenders.

Political Issues

According to Tewksbury & Mustaine (2013), sex offender policies are widely discussed and debated. Political issues surrounding sex offenders are immense and due to public perception of anyone classified as a sex offender, this topic can create an issue for social workers if they are seen as advocating or helping sex offenders. According to Grady & Abramson (2011), social work educational programs, at all levels, lack in training future social workers on how to work with this clientele. Limited education in social service programs would suggest there is a poor understanding and limited data available for working with sex offenders. This issue could make the social work profession as a whole look ill equipped and thus hinder funding for the research. The instrument would address these issues, through addressing knowledge and how it can affect one's perception, thus allowing for a change if needed.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

The research proposal completed the entire study with technology. The first step was to contact the NASW of California online (www.naswca.org) to ask for the email list of social workers in the Southern California Region. With the permission of the NASW, the members were contacted by email to obtain their consent to participate. The engagement of participants was carried out through email which gave them the opportunity to consider participating. The consent form was signed electronically and presented before taking the survey. The

survey was administered through survey monkey, which allowed for the participant to remain anonymous and answer each question honestly. This type of instrument allowed for the participant to answer the questions at their own pace and when it is convenient for them. Once the survey was completed the participant submitted the questionnaire and then the researcher was notified that a survey was complete. The ability to use the internet as an avenue to contact, conduct the research, and receive the survey allowed there to be minimal contact between the researcher and the participants, as well as provided the participant the confidentiality needed with sensitive material.

Summary

The engagement phase of the study was only at the beginning of the research and was guided by the literature review. Every attempt to limit or avoid issues such as diversity, ethical, and political were enforced to ensure the participants felt safe and secure while participating. Participants were advised of the importance of the study and how it benefited not only the field of Social Work but also those they serve. The study was conducted through electronic means only, via email and survey monkey.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter describes the implementation stage of this research study, which introduced the planning of the study. The participants and why they are the appropriate individuals for the study are described. The way the data was gathered, and the time frame it took to complete the data collection process is described. This section addresses the data recording and data analysis. The communication of the results and the termination of the study with participants are addressed as well as the dissemination plan are also discussed here.

Study Participants

The study participants are members of the National Association Social Workers (NASW) from the Southern California Region. The NASW is a membership organization, and according to their website (NASW California chapter, 2016), “works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.” The NASW has members that work in different specialties such as, Administration, Aging, Child welfare, Courts, Medical, Mental Health, School Social Work, and Social and Economic Justice and Peace. The Southern

California Region of the NASW consists of 5 of the 9 geographical regions in the State of California. They cover the Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles (North, East, South, and West), Orange County, San Bernardino County, Riverside County and San Diego. The participants have a range of different demographics including: age (at least 18), gender (male and female), income (varies), ethnicities, and level of education (BASW, MSW, LCSW).

Selection of Participants

A descriptive design was considered to be the most adequate for this research study as it would help ensure that the data could be generalized, was a survey that was available online on Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey is a well know survey site that can be set up from anywhere, the data can be stored and analyzed as the participants take the survey. It also allowed for each questionnaire to be marked individually. The sample was chosen by systematic random sampling, each participant was given a number, once the data collection was completed the participants chosen were selected based on an equally spaced apart ratio (Morris, 2006). Social Workers were selected as the participants, to evaluate their knowledge and feelings in regards to sex offenders, whom are individuals that may require services through treatment or unexpected life events.

Data Gathering

Data was gathered using a 26-question survey that was self-administered through an online survey on Survey Monkey. The questionnaire was separated into different sections to gather an understanding of the different components within the research. The first section was a nominal section that was multiple choice and measured demographic characteristics. This section asked questions about respondent age, gender, ethnicity, income, education, and the region in which they serve. The second section was a multiple-choice Likert-scale item section based on the Gutman Scale and was a measurement of ratio and interval variables. This section was based on the participants' knowledge in regards to the legal system and the history of sex offenders. Some survey questions were used before in a study by Fortney, Levenson, Brannon, & Baker (2007), and others are based on the terminology in the study (Grady, 2009b). The third portion of the survey was based on Likert-scale items that aim to measure the feelings of social workers. The questions are based out of a survey used to measure fears, anger, and thoughts on community notification of sex offenders (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). Please see Appendix A for a complete listing of the study's scale items.

Phases of Data Collection

The data collection was open online for a three-month window allowing for the participants to have ample time to complete and submit the survey. The

survey link to Survey monkey was sent out to 1000 email addresses belonging to members in the NASW Southern California region. The email stated the purpose of the study and asked for the NASW members to participate. As the responses were submitted each one was given a number and coded to assist with the final selection of the sample to be used.

Data Recording

The data was entered into the SPSS system, assigning each participant by number and each question as nominal, ordinal, or scale. The six demographic questions were coded as nominal, which is just a categorical measurement of the data with no real numerical value (Morris, 2006). Ordinal, which is a non-mathematical measurement, was not be used in this study. Scale represents ratio and interval variables; this coding was used to measure the responses to the 20 survey questions regarding the knowledge and thoughts section of the questionnaire. Once the data was entered it was be checked for errors. The errors that were located within the survey for that number were checked and corrected.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by utilizing a correlation test. Two different statistical analyses analyzed the data, first using a descriptive univariate statistic; this gave the numeric frequency of each variable through the mean, median, and

mode which gave the central tendency. Then, a bivariate analysis was completed to test the correlation between the independent (knowledge) and dependent (feelings) variables. The individual questions do not represent the correlation but how the questions are answered showed how a person's knowledge affects their perception.

Termination and Follow Up

The termination of the study was done at the end of the survey online. A debriefing statement at the end of the survey thanked them for participating and explained the study to the participants.

Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

The communication of the findings is presented in the California State University, San Bernardino School of Social Work thesis library which will contain a title, abstract, address the problem, discuss the literature, and describe the methods and findings. The information from the study, lead to a discussion, interpretation of the findings (Morris, 2006), as well as all references utilized to complete the research. The study will additionally be presented at the CSUSB School of Social Work, Poster day. If presented in a journal the study would then be able to be seen by the participants and anyone that seeks out such material.

Summary

The planning of the selection of participants from the NASW of the Southern California region gave an understanding of the thought process of Social Workers in regards to sex offenders. The survey had a mixture of the Gutman Scale and Likert Scale questions which evaluated the knowledge and feelings of social workers. The data compiled was entered into the SPSS system which analyzed the data and found the central tendency and standard deviation. The findings were recorded in an article format for anyone to access. Termination and follow up are completed once the survey is complete.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The results section gives the statistical analysis conducted in this study. The chapter includes the demographic characteristics of the sample, descriptive statistics, and the data results found through inferential statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics include age, gender, race, income, level of education, and the region of Southern California the participant is located.

Descriptive Statistics

The majority of the survey participants identified as female (N=90, 86.5%) and the remaining 13 (12.5%) identified as male, as seen in Table 1. There were five age ranges the participants were separated into: ages 18-25 (N=4, 3.8%), ages 26-35 (N=37, 35.6%), ages 36-45 (N=25, 24%), ages 46-55 (N=17, 16.3%) and ages 55+ (N=20, 24.0%). More than half of the participants are Caucasian (N=59, 56.7%), the next highest represented group was Hispanic/Latino (N=23, 22.1%), there were 11 African American participants (10.6%), Asian (N=1, 1.0%), Pacific Islander (N=1, 1.0%), and 8 participants (7.7%) identified with other. The participants' income was separated in five different categories. The majority of the participants claimed they made \$75,000 or more (N=43, 41.3%), 18 participants (17.3%), stated their annual income was from \$60,000 – \$74,999, 18

participants (17.3%) claimed \$45,000 – \$59,999, the income category from \$30,000 – \$44,999 included 8 participants (7.7%), and 16 participants (15.4%) made less than \$29,999. The education level in social work completed by the participants ranged from a bachelor’s degree (N=12, 11.5%), MSW (N=39, 37.5%), LCSW (N=47, 45.2%), and a PhD (N=3, 2.9%). The participants were selected from five different NASW regions in Southern California that consisted of Region E: San Diego and Imperial (N=17, 16.3%), Region F: Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino (N=26, 25%), Region G: Santa Barbara, Ventura, North Los Angeles (N=12, 11.5%), Region H: West, Central Los Angeles (N=17, 16.3%), Region I: Pasadena, East, Central, South Los Angeles, Long Beach (N=29, 27.9%).

Table 1 – Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

	N	%
Age		
18 – 25	4	3.8
26 – 35	37	35.6
36 – 45	25	24
46 – 55	17	16.3
56+	20	19.2
Gender		
Male	13	12.5
Female	90	86.5
Race		
African American	11	10.6
Asian	1	1.0
Caucasian	59	56.7
Hispanic/Latino	23	22.7
Other	8	7.7
Pacific Islander	1	1.0

Table 1 - Continued

Income		
0 - \$29,999	16	15.4
\$30,000 - \$44,999	8	7.7
\$45,000 - \$59,999	18	17.3
\$60,000 - \$74,999	18	17.3
\$75000+	43	41.3
Highest Level of Education Completed		
BASW	12	11.5
MSW	39	37.5
LCSW	47	45.2
PhD	3	2.9
NASW Region		
Region E: San Diego and Imperial	17	16.3
Region F: Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino	26	25.0
Region G: Santa Barbara, Ventura, North Los Angeles	12	11.5
Region H: West, Central Los Angeles	17	
Region I: Pasadena, East, Central, South Los Angeles, Long Beach	29	27.9

Inferential Analysis

The analysis for the study was conducted utilizing SPSS. A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationships between demographic characteristics and attitudes towards sex offenders. Table 2 presents the significant results that shows the negative correlation ($r = -.24$) between being a woman and the belief that all sex offenders should have to be

on the sex offender registry. Females are less likely to think sex offenders should be on the sex offender registry.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Demographic Characteristics and Sex Offender Registry Attitudes

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	1					
2. Gender	-0.06	1				
3. Race/Ethnicity	0.05	-0.01	1			
4. Income	0.49**	0.00	0.05	1		
5. Highest Level of Education	0.58**	-0.13	-0.08	0.59**	1	
6. All sex offenders should have to be on the sex offender registry	0.12	-0.24*	-0.01	0.04	0.14	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 represents the correlation between the social work curriculum and education focused on sex offenders and a social worker's perception of sex offenders. There was a significant negative correlation within the analysis that represents the more education the less likely a social worker believes a sex offender should have to register ($r = -.205$). Also, seen in Table 3 is the significant negative correlation between education and the social worker's belief that sex offenders cannot be treated and will never change their behavior ($r = -.212$). This correlation within the analysis represents that more education is correlated to the belief that sex offenders can be treated and change.

Table 3: Correlations matrix of knowledge of sex offenders on attitudes

	1	2	3	4	5
1. What is the definition of a sex offender	1				
2. Within the Social Work Master's Program, did your curriculum address the class of individuals known as sex offenders	0.15	1			
3. Who is on the sex offender registry	-0.02	0.06	1		
4. All sex offenders should have to be on the sex offender registry	-0.13	-0.21*	-0.13	1	
5. Sex offenders cannot be treated, and will never change their behavior	-0.01	-0.21*	-0.02	0.55**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary

The results chapter gives an understanding of the data results and what instrument was used to analysis the data. The data was analyzed using SPSS. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and an inferential analysis. There were three significant findings, one that correlated women and their perception of the sex offender registry, another that correlated education and the sex offender registry, and the last significant finding correlated education and the treatment and behavior change for a sex offender.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The discussion section focuses on the understanding of the results presented in the study and the affects it has on the micro and macro level of Social Work practice. The limitations of the study will be discussed, as well as the need for future research. The chapter will close with final thoughts about Social Work education and perceptions of sex offenders.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to measure the correlation between knowledge and thoughts/feelings of Social Workers towards sex offenders. The results indicated that the more knowledgeable or educated a social worker is the more likely they are to believe that a sex offender can be treated and change their behaviors. The results also indicated that the more knowledge or education of a social worker the less they believe that all sex offenders should be on a sex offender registry. Women were found to also have a higher belief that not all sex offenders should be on the registry, this finding is directly related to the fact the majority of the participants were educated women. The results indicate that the more educated the social worker, the less he or she is to believe the myths about sexual offenders such as the majority of sex offenses were committed by

strangers towards children, that the offender we re-offend (Fortney, Levenson, Brannon, & Baker, 2007), and that they cannot be treated (Grady, 2009a). These findings show that the education within the social work programs is not sufficient, with stand-alone sex offender courses representing five percent of Universities. Though it is covered in other courses the “dimensions to the topic varied greatly” (Grady & Abramson, 2011). The results also indicated that past research about women needing to be more prepared to work with sex offenders (Ermshar & Meier, 2014) does seem to be accurate due to the female clinician advocating for treatment, against public perception of the sexual offender.

Macro and Micro Social Work Implications

The macro social work implications of this study would be to continue education with social workers in the field on the differences of what a sexual offense can be, to limit perceptions and fears about clients on the sex offender registry. There could also be more collaboration with forensic agencies to gain a better understanding of the individuals that commit sexual crimes, and the ability to treat the behaviors to reduce recidivism. The universities might consider incorporating lectures into the curriculum that covers sexual offenders, the spectrum of crimes, and how the sex offender registry operates.

The micro social work implications would be for organizations that provide services, require their clinicians to attend trainings and acquire a certain amount of credits each year to continue their growth and understanding.

Limitations

The research study completed was directed towards social workers' knowledge and attitudes in regards to sex offenders. Though the survey was completed online to protect the identity of the participant, the participant still might not have felt they could be completely honest about their perceptions of a sex offender. The values and ethics of a social worker include: service, social justice, dignity of worth and person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. This could have affected how they answered the survey questions. Another limitation was the number of male participants involved in the study. There were only 13 men that participated which could skew the results. The survey was based around the sex offender registry and the knowledge of what defined a sex offender, where other questions pertaining to types of sex offenses might have been more appropriate to gain the participants understanding about who commits sexual offenses. Limited research in present day limited the research, as to gaining the participants understanding of whom sex offenders are and the treatment and behavioral changes for the different types of offenders including: rapists, child molesters, female sex offenders, juvenile sex offenders, cyber offenders (Robertiello & Terry, 2007) and sexual offenses that were not against anyone.

Future Research

In the future, a study that focuses on the perception of social workers who have received no training or education about sex offenders would be surveyed, after which they would receive an education regarding who is required to register for the sex offender registry, the difference in sex crimes and who commits these crimes, and the recidivism rates. These participants would take the survey again to find if the education did in fact change their perception. This would further the research study presented by validating the results that education or knowledge does impact a social workers attitude towards sex offenders. It would be important for the study to be comprised of both males and females, with no personal biases in regards to sex offenders, and that has an interest in serving the community in which they work.

Conclusion

Social Workers serve a wide variety of clients in their community. Regardless of where they work, a person who has committed a sexual offense could be a client or a family member of a client. It is imperative for each person to be treated with dignity and worth regardless of their crimes. This could be problematic if the preconceived notion follows the myths of society versus knowledge of what it means to be a sex offender and the possibility of recidivism. This study is a starting point to understanding the importance of educating our

future social workers on sex offenders and how they can be treated and changed as long as we are open to learn.

APPENDIX A
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS



California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee
APPROVED 6/1/2017 VOID AFTER 5/31/2019
IRB# SW1649 CHAIR Janet [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine Social Workers knowledge in regards to sex offenders and how that knowledge affects thoughts and feelings expressed by the Social Worker. The study is being conducted by a graduate student, Terisa Berger, under the supervision of Dr. Erica Lizano at the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine how knowledge about sex offenders can affect a Social Workers' perception of sex offenders.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of a few questions on their current knowledge of sex offender laws, thoughts and feelings about sex offenders, and some demographics characteristics.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 25 to 30 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Erica Lizano at 909-537-5584.

RESULTS: Please contact Terisa Berger (email: 003875988@coyote.csusb.edu), or the ScholarWorks database at the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino for the results of the study after June 2017.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

909.838.4030

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University . Bakersfield . Channel Islands . Chico . Dominguez Hills . East Bay . Fresno . Fullerton . Humboldt . Long Beach . Los Angeles
Maritime Academy . Monterey Bay . Northridge . Pomona . Sacramento . San Bernardino . San Diego . San Francisco . San Jose . San Luis Obispo . San Marcos . Sonoma . Stanislaus

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate Social Workers knowledge, thoughts, and perceptions of sex offenders. We are interested in how knowledge of what constitutes a sex offender can affect your thoughts and perceptions. This study is meant to bring about awareness and place a value on education.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Terisa Berger at 909-537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Terisa Berger (email: 003875988@coyote.csusb.edu) after June 2017.

Survey Questions

1. Age:

- 18 – 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 – 45
- 46 – 55
- 55+

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female

3. Ethnicity:

- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- African American
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Other

4. Income:

- 0 – \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$44,999
- \$45,000 - \$59,999
- \$60,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000+

5. Education:

- BASW
- MSW
- LCSW
- PhD

6. NASW member of what region?

- Region E San Diego and Imperial
- Region F Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino
- Region G Santa Barbara, Ventura, North L
- Region H West, Central Los Angeles
- Region I Pasadena, East, Central, South Los Angeles, Long Beach

7. What is the definition of a sex offender?

- A white male that learned his behavior from television and movies
- An individual who has been charged and convicted of illegal sexual behavior.
- A man that has to use sex to gain power and control.
- A person that has committed a sexual crime against a child

8. Who is on the sex offender registry?

- Only those who commit sexual crimes against children
- Convicted sex offenders that are required by law to register with their local law enforcement agencies
- Those individuals that commit sexual crimes against children or commit rape.

9. What child case in 1994 brought about Congress passing the legislation that required states to develop registries listing sex offender addresses?

- Erin
- Jacob
- Megan

10. What child case in 1996, brought about the law in which allowed the dissemination of sex offender registry information directly to the public?

- Erin
- Jacob
- Megan

11. What child case brought about the law in which requires a creation of a task force and implementation of evidence based sexual abuse prevention programs in public schools?

- Erin
- Jacob
- Megan

12. Within the Social Work Master's program did your curriculum address the class of individuals known as sex offenders?

- Yes
- No
- Touched on the subject

13. What is the recidivism rate for sex offenders against children?

- 75%
- 57%
- 39%
- 13%

14. What percent of sexual assaults of adults do you believe come to the attention of the authorities?

- 32%
- 27%
- 15%
- 50%

15. What percent of adult sex offenders do you believe were sexually abused as children?

- 18%
- 28%
- 38%
- 48%

16. What percent of convicted sex offenders do you believe will commit another sexual offense?

- 14%
- 37%
- 68%
- 89%

17. All sex offenders should have to be on the sex offender registry.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. Anger is felt if a sex offender is in your area.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. Fear is felt if a sex offender is in your community.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Notification gives a false sense of security

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. Agree with Community notification law for all sex offenders

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. Tolerant of sex offender in community

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. Sex offenders should not be allowed to live near schools.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. Sex offenders cannot be treated, and will never change their behavior

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

25. Women clinicians are more at risk when treating sex offenders

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

26. Clinicians can become sexually aroused and even report experiencing sadistic sexual fantasies when treating sex offenders.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Note: Survey questions cited:

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Grady, M. (2009a). Sex offenders part I: Theories and models of etiology, assessment, and intervention. *Social Work in Mental Health*, 7(4), 353-371.

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