

IMPACT OF SEX OFFENDER LEGISLATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Establishing the Practical Efficacy and Monetary Value of Megan's Law- 2

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This study presents findings from an extensive examination of the impact of community notification and registration laws (Megan's Law) on sexual offending in New Jersey. This study was conducted in order to determine the 1) level of general and sexual offense recidivism, 2) type of sexual re-offenses, and 3) time to first re-arrest for sexual and non-sexual re-offenses (i.e. community tenure). In order to determine the impact of the legislation on criminal re-offenses, sexual offenders released pre vs. post implementation were tracked on numerous variables with experimental and statistical controls (e.g. comparison group, random selection of offenders, time at risk for re-offense, etc.) utilized to minimize possible confounds affecting the results. Data on 550 sexual offenders released during the years 1990 to 2000 were collected and analyzed. Major findings include that Megan's Law may be effective in reducing overall recidivism; Megan's Law was associated with a reduction of stranger-perpetrated index offenses (the percentage of stranger-perpetrated sexual offenses is more than twice as high prior to the implementation of Megan's Law); Weapon use during a sexual offense was statistically more prevalent for offenses committed prior to the implementation of Megan's Law; and significantly less sexual offenders have been paroled after the implementation of Megan's Law.

**Legislative Escalation & Sex Offenders:
The Continuing Disconnect Between Science & Public Policy**

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In the last 15 years, local, state & the federal governments have enacted an increasing number of laws dedicated to the prevention, punishment, and control and monitoring of sex offenders. Sex offender registration and notification is the

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most widely known of these policies. Governmental policies have expanded well beyond the public information on sex offender's presence. Current and widespread sex offender policies include chemical castration, residency & mobility restrictions, GPS (global positioning systems) monitoring, and mandatory HIV & DNA testing. Additionally several states, contradicting a general decline in the use of capital punishment, have expanded their statutes to allow for the execution of sex offenders.

These policy trends are occurring in spite of research documenting their negative & neutral empirical impacts. There is a significant volume of literature suggesting that the majority of these policies do not reduce recidivism, have minimal positive impact in increasing public safety and often increase offender's stressors and reduce their support mechanisms. In addition, a central assumption of these laws is their focus on stranger sexual assault which contradicts the volume of literature highlighting the greater risk of known assailant sexual assault.

A forthcoming book from Springer Publishing, *Sex Offender Laws: Reality & Rhetoric* analyzes these sex offender policy trends. This illuminative publication combines the perspectives of criminal justice, psychology, law, public policy and victimology. The publication also examines the viability of policy alternatives including the containment model and restorative justice. This presentation will highlight key areas from the forthcoming book.