

**Improving Compliance Rates Among Registered Sex Offenders: Recommendations for
Local Law Enforcement Agency Sex Offender Verification Programs**

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Improving Compliance Rates Among Registered Sex Offenders: Recommendations for Local
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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

Statement of the Problem

Over the past two decades in the United States there has been a growing concern among the public, and within the criminal justice system, regarding the tracking of convicted sex offenders. In response to this concern, and as a result of a legislative mandate, every State has created a centralized registry of convicted sex offenders. The registries serve the purpose of protecting the community through providing information on convicted sex offenders to citizens and law enforcement. That information can then be used to prevent future sexual victimization and to identify potential suspects in the case of sex crimes. The most significant challenge in maintaining a sex offender registry is gathering accurate information on the whereabouts of convicted sex offenders.

A method of gathering accurate information on convicted sex offenders is the implementation of sex offender verification programs by local law enforcement agencies. In many States, local law enforcement agencies serve as the primary means of gathering accurate information for the registry and verifying that sex offenders are compliant with the registry requirements. However, little guidance is provided to local law enforcement agencies regarding the best method(s) to complete this task. This research is designed to provide local law

enforcement agencies with recommended practices to be implemented in a sex offender verification program, in order to increase the compliance rate among registered sex offenders.

Methods of Approach

Secondary data, including empirical and theoretical findings, will be presented to provide insight into prevalent issues in sex offender management including the nature of sex offenses, recidivism among sex offenders, and sex offender legislation. The theoretical framework for this research is provided through discussion of deterrence theory and rational choice theory. Case studies will be presented on three sex offender verification programs that have been implemented in the United States. The information from the case studies will be examined within the framework of the empirical and theoretical findings to identify effective practices that can be implemented in sex offender verification programs.

Results of Study

The practices of conducting risk assessments on sex offenders, performing face-to-face verification checks, and developing a close working relationship with the local District Attorney's Office were identified as promising practices for sex offender verification programs. The theoretical framework provided in this research provides support for these practices. The practices are designed to assist local law enforcement agencies in achieving the goal of increased compliance rates among registered sex offenders. A significant result of this study was the discovery that a significant void exists in the literature regarding empirical study of sex offender verification programs. It is recommended that future research examine the effectiveness of these programs as a means of increasing compliance among registered sex offenders.

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Improving Compliance Rates Among Registered Sex Offenders: Recommendations for Local Law Enforcement Agency Sex Offender Registry Verification Programs

Statement of the Problem

Over the past two decades in the United States there has been a growing concern among the public, and within the criminal justice system, regarding the tracking of convicted sex offenders. In response to this concern, every State has created a centralized registry of convicted sex offenders. The goal of these registries, which can be accessed by the general public, is to enhance public safety by providing citizens access to information on convicted sex offenders in their community, and to allow them to take measures to protect themselves from potential victimization at the hands of a convicted sex offender. Registries also serve to provide law enforcement agencies with information to “narrow the focus of investigations, compare forensic evidence, and identify potential suspects with similar crime patterns” (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008, p.2). The most significant challenge in maintaining a registry that serves these purposes is gathering current and accurate information on the whereabouts of convicted sex offenders.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that in 1994 there were 234,000 offenders convicted of rape or sexual assault under the control of corrections agencies in the United States and that approximately 60 percent of those offenders were under supervision in the community (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2007). The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimated that in 2007 there were 602,000 registered sex offenders in the United States and its territories (IACP, 2007). Even allowing for a modest increase between 1994 and 2007 in the number of sex offenders under the control of corrections agencies, there are a significant number of sex offenders who are required to register, but do not fall under the

supervision of corrections agencies. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that as many as 100,000 offenders who are required to register as sex offenders, but are no longer under direct supervision, are either missing or non-compliant with the registration requirements in their respective states (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2007a).

The passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act in 2006 placed the burden on individual States to comply with specific registration requirements for sex offenders. States that fail to comply face a reduction in federal funding for law enforcement (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). While this law creates federal criteria for tracking registered sex offenders, it does not specify how the information that sex offenders are providing to the registry is verified. Many States are now requiring assistance from their local law enforcement agencies in tracking sex offenders and verifying that they are compliant with registry requirements; however, there is a lack of available guidance for law enforcement agencies in how to develop effective of sex offender verification programs.

Purpose of this Research

Corrections agencies have direct control over sex offenders who are incarcerated or under community supervision. This enables corrections agencies to maintain current information on these offenders for sex offender registries. There is a void to fill in the verification process once offenders are released from incarceration or supervision. Local law enforcement agencies are becoming a key part in verifying that sex offender registrants who are no longer under the supervision of the correctional system are remaining compliant with their registration requirements.

The purpose of this research is to develop a guide of best practices for law enforcement agencies that are developing programs designed to not only verify that sex offenders are compliant with registry requirements, but to increase compliance rates among sex offenders residing in their respective jurisdictions. There are several practices that local law enforcement agencies should include in their verification programs that will serve to assist them in increasing compliance rates among sex offenders in their jurisdiction. It is vital that law enforcement agencies have clearly defined procedures for the verification of sex offender registry information and the handling of offenders found to be non-compliant with the registry requirements.

Goal of this Research

The goal of this research is to provide an outline of best practices for the implementation of a sex offender registry verification program. It is important to understand that individual law enforcement agencies are constrained by many factors including, but not limited to, budgetary concerns, staffing, workload distribution, and community support for such a program. The recommendations presented here are adaptable to fit the needs of agencies of all sizes in communities containing varied numbers of convicted sex offenders who are no longer under the control of corrections agencies.

This research focuses on the policies and practices that law enforcement agencies can implement to increase compliance rates among sex offenders required to provide current information for the registry in the State in which they reside. Attention will also be given to the development of an effective working relationship between law enforcement agencies and the local prosecutor. Working closely with prosecutors enables law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system to hold non-compliant offenders accountable for their failure to comply

with registry requirements. This relationship is essential in order for the registry to serve its purpose.

Plan of Organization

A review of current literature will provide the background necessary to understand what steps have been taken at the state and national level to bring the issue of sex offender registration to its current level of importance within the criminal justice system. This includes a review of federal legislation relating to sex offender registration, a view of compliance rates among offenders required to register, and a discussion of the nature of sex offenses and why these offenders are often viewed as lifetime offenders.

Deterrence and rational choice theory will then be examined in relation to individuals who are required to register with the sex offender registry. Using these theories will assist in explaining how sex offender registry verification programs have the potential to increase compliance with registry requirements.

Case studies of sex offender verification programs that have been implemented by various law enforcement agencies will be presented. An in depth look at these programs will provide real world examples of different methods that are being used to motivate offenders to comply with registry requirements. The case studies will also address the impact that these individual programs have had on compliance rates among offenders residing within a respective agency's jurisdiction.

Finally, recommendations for the implementation of sex offender registry verification programs will be presented. Due to the fact that many programs are either in their infancy, or have not yet been developed and implemented, suggestions for further study of programs, in order to identify effective practices, will be presented.

SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section consists of a review of the literature pertaining to sex offenses and sex offender registration. The nature of sex offenses will be examined to provide insight into why sex offender management is vital to protecting the public. A look at recidivism among sex offenders will provide the reader with an understanding of the prevalence of repeat sex offenses among convicted sex offenders. A review of federal and state legislation will highlight the steps that have been taken to ensure that sex offender registration is a key component of our criminal justice system. An overview of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act will be presented. This will be followed by a look at sex offender management practices that have been implemented as a result of recent legislation. Lastly, the current state of compliance with registration laws will be explored.

Nature of Sex Offenses

Petrunik (2003) states that victims of sexual offenses suffer more psychological and emotional trauma than do victims of property crimes or physical assaults. A victim of a sex offense has been violated in the most personal way imaginable, and these offenses may be viewed as “violations that damage the very core of victims” (Petrunik, 2003, p.44). Sex offenses are even more disturbing when perpetrated against a child. According to Petrunik, society views a sex offender who destroys the innocence of a child as the lowest form of human being. The result of this perception is that an offender who commits a non-violent sexual offense against a child will likely be subject to more controls within the criminal justice system than an offender who commits a non-sexual violent offense.

In addition to the enormous impact that sex offenses have on victims, there are two characteristics of sex offenders that are cause for concern. First, sex offenses are generally not

impulsive acts. According to Talbot, Gilligan, Carter, and Matson (2002), most sex offenders spend a period of time, from hours to months, planning their crime before it is actually perpetrated. This is troublesome to law enforcement in that they are faced with an offender that has put a degree of planning into their offense that makes it nearly impossible for the victim to prevent its perpetration. With enough patience, the offender is able to wait for the opportunity to commit the offense that they may have mentally rehearsed for a significant period of time. Second, according to a study in the state of Oregon, sex offenders are more likely to continue to commit sex offenses throughout their lifetime (Gilligan and Talbot, 2000). This is in contrast to the majority of criminal offenders who tend to decrease offending as they age, with most of them ceasing criminal activity sometime in their mid-twenties (Moffitt, 2003).

Recidivism Among Sex Offenders

Measuring recidivism rates presents a challenge due to the fact that the criminal justice system is limited to the use of official arrest data. Offenses that are not reported to police, and reported offenses that do not result in an arrest, are not accounted for in reports of recidivism. This is particularly significant in the case of sex offenses, which are vastly underreported. A review of National Crime Victimization Surveys compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that only about 32 percent of sex offenses are reported to law enforcement (Bynum, Carter, Matson, and Onley 2001). A study by Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour (1992) found that 84 percent of 4,008 adult women rape victims did not report the crime to law enforcement (as cited in Bynum et al., 2001).

In part due to the limitations discussed above, studies of recidivism among convicted sex offenders have produced varying results. The Bureau of Justice Statistics compiled data on 9,691 male sex offenders that were released from prison in 1994. Of these offenders 5.3% were

convicted of a new sex offense within 3 years of being released from prison (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) completed a meta-analysis of 82 recidivism studies and found a sexual recidivism rate of 13.7% (p.1156). Craig, Browne, Beech, and Stringer (2006) collected data on 153 male offenders, of which 85 had been convicted of a sexual offense. They found sexual recidivism rates ranging from 7.1% (two-year follow-up) to 17.6% (ten-year follow-up). As evidenced by this last study, the length of the follow-up period used to measure recidivism affects the recidivism rate found (Bynum et al., 2001).

In their meta-analysis, Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) found sexual deviancy and antisocial orientation to be predictors of sexual recidivism. Combining this finding with Craig et al.'s (2006) finding that sex offenders are more likely to minimize the seriousness of their offending and negatively view treatment supports the notion that sex offenders pose a threat to the public that should not be overlooked.

Legislation and Sex Offender Registration

Some particular sex offenses that have been perpetrated against children over the past two decades have resulted in public outcry that has served as the catalyst for the creation of legislation in the area of sex offender registration. A review of the circumstances of these offenses and the resulting legislation is presented here.

Jacob Wetterling was 11 years old when a man abducted him at gunpoint near his home in Minnesota. At that time Minnesota did not have a comprehensive list of sex offenders to aid law enforcement in their investigation into Jacob's disappearance (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2006). Citizens who were concerned about the issue of missing children developed the Jacob Wetterling Foundation in order to bring more national attention to this issue (Doble Research Associates, 2000). This group was instrumental in the passage of a

sex offender registration act in Minnesota. In 1994, the Wetterling Act became part of the 1994 Federal Omnibus Crime Bill requiring all states to establish a sex offender registry (IACP, 2006). This bill was the first significant piece of legislation in terms of requirements for sex offender registration and it has been amended several times to include additional requirements for offender registration.

In 1994, Megan Kanka was a 7 year-old girl residing with her parents in the quiet suburban Hamilton Township in New Jersey. Megan was lured into a neighbor's home with the promise of seeing his puppy. She was then raped and murdered by this man, who had previously served time in prison for the aggravated assault and attempted sexual assault of another child. Megan's parents had been unaware that the neighbor was a convicted sex offender. Public outcry over this incident resulted in the passage of Megan's Law by the New Jersey Legislature (Megan Nicole Kanka Foundation, 2009). Megan's Law was also passed as an amendment to the Wetterling Act requiring public notification of a sex offender's release into the community, as well as mandating public access to information regarding the location of certain sex offenders in their communities (IACP, 2006).

Adam Walsh was 6 years-old when he was abducted from a department store in Florida where he had been shopping with his mother in 1981. Adam's body was located sixteen days later. His parents John and Reve Walsh went on to found the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The organization has served as an instrument for parents, family members, and citizens to become involved in the fight against the abduction and exploitation of children. The passage of the Adam Walsh Protection and Safety Act of 2006 (Adam Walsh Act) marked the most significant piece of legislation governing the registration of convicted sex offenders since the Wetterling Act.

In addition to the legislation discussed above, more than 100 laws governing sex offenders were passed by state legislatures in 2005, and as of 2006 the pace had not slowed (IACP, 2006). As evidenced by this increased legislative activity regarding sex offenders, it is not likely that this issue will be removed from the spotlight in the foreseeable future.

SORNA Guidelines

Title I of the Adam Walsh Act is named the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA). In 2008, the United States Department of Justice published the National Guidelines for Sex Offender Registration and Notification. In part, SORNA mandates the following changes: Creation of a standardized national sex offender registry available to law enforcement; made failing to register a felony offense; required in person registration in states where offenders live, work, and go to school; and, expanded registration requirements to include juveniles convicted of certain sex offenses (IACP, 2006). In addition, for the first time registration requirements were made retroactive to include sex offenders who were convicted prior to the implementation of the registration requirements in the state in which they reside. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of this requirement in *Smith v. Doe* (2003), stating that it did not create an ex post facto problem because the registration requirements are “intended to be non-punitive, regulatory measures adopted for public safety purposes” (as cited in U.S. Department of Justice, 2008, p.7).

The SORNA guidelines address many issues relevant to sex offender registration. These include, but are not limited to, a three-tier classification system based on an offender’s risk of recidivating, initial registration requirements, required registration information, disclosure of registration information, where registration is required, keeping the registration current, verification requirements, duration of registration, and enforcement of requirements. A few of

these issues are particularly germane in the implementation of a sex offender verification program by a local law enforcement agency. These will be discussed using information from The National Guidelines for Sex Offender Registration and Notification (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

Determining that a sex offender is required to register in their jurisdiction (hereafter referred to as “State” for simplicity, but includes the 50 States, District of Columbia, five principal U.S. territories, and Indian tribes) is the first step for a law enforcement agency. The SORNA guidelines provide that an offender is required to register in the State of conviction, residence, employment, and school. Registration in the State of conviction is normally handled by the prison from which the offender is released, or by the probation officer if the offender is not sentenced to a prison term. Therefore, law enforcement agencies will be responsible for offenders residing, working, or attending school within their State. Registration must occur within three business days of the offender establishing residency, employment, or school attendance within a State. It is possible that an offender will be required to maintain a current registry in three different States at the same time.

Registrants are required to provide specific information to the registry, which must be collected by the agency responsible for updating the registry. The minimum information required under SORNA is the offender’s name, aliases, date of birth, address, telephone numbers, social security number, passport or immigration documents, employer name and address, professional licenses, school (if attending), vehicle information, internet identifiers and addresses (e.g., email addresses), physical description, registration offense, criminal history, current photograph, fingerprints and palm prints, DNA, and driver’s license or identification

card. Some of the required information only needs to be collected at the initial registration, as it will not change.

The task faced by law enforcement agencies that are responsible for maintaining current information on registrants in their State is verifying that the information contained in the registry is accurate. SORNA addresses this issue by requiring a registrant, who has changed his or her name, residence, employment, or student status, to report in person in at least one State to notify them of any changes in the information required for the registry. In addition to in person visits to report a change in registry information, offenders are required to appear in person for a current photograph and to verify registry information every three, six, or twelve months, depending on the offender's tier classification as determined based on the offender's risk of recidivating.

Under SORNA, States are required to meet the minimum requirements discussed above. States are not prohibited from implementing more stringent requirements of offenders within their jurisdiction. As will be evidenced by the case studies presented in section IV of this paper, States have implemented the SORNA guidelines to different degrees.

The SORNA guidelines require States to implement the guidelines within three years of the date of enactment, which is July 27, 2006. Two one-year extensions may be granted upon request. A State's failure to comply with implementation requirements may result in the loss of 10% of federal justice assistance provided under the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). Due to the fact that the three-year deadline has not yet passed, it is unknown how many States may lose funding as a result of a failure to implement the SORNA guidelines.

Overview of Sex Offender Management

Under the guidance of laws and the SORNA guidelines, and based on their own successes and failures in maintaining a sex offender registry, State's have enacted a range of laws governing sex offender registration. A few of the past and present practices implemented within the United States are reviewed here.

Probation and parole agencies have historically been responsible for the supervision of sex offenders. Prior to the creation of sex offender registries, no means existed of protecting the community from offenders once they were released from supervision. Offenders who were on probation or parole were generally supervised through scheduled office visits and phone contacts. As the issue of sex offenses was brought into the national spotlight through highly publicized sex crimes, and the ensuing responses by the legislature, probation and parole agencies realized that the use of traditional supervision methods for sex offenders was not serving as an adequate form of protection for the community (Talbot et al., 2002).

Leaders within the criminal justice system have come to the realization that an effective approach to sex offender management requires the cooperation of numerous agencies. Interagency cooperation appears to be the most logical approach to managing sex offenders as they transition from incarceration to community supervision to ensure compliance with registration requirements (IACP, 2007). This research gives focus to the role local law enforcement agencies play in managing sex offenders.

Following the lead of a few trailblazers in the 1980's and 1990's, many local law enforcement agencies have implemented verification programs that are designed to assist their State in maintaining a current and accurate sex offender registry. The backbone of a verification program is the compliance (or verification) check. Compliance checks serve to verify the

offender's registry information, and to allow the officer conducting the check to observe the offender. The observation portion of a check may allow the officer to detect changes in behavior, and assess the offender for changes in the risk of recidivating, that would go undetected without the face-to-face contact (IACP, 2007).

As States continue to solicit, or even mandate, the assistance of local law enforcement agencies in achieving the goal of maintaining a current and accurate registry, there are some concerns that have to be addressed. It is likely that the most significant concern on the part of the local agencies is an inadequate level of budgetary resources and staffing required to take on the additional task of implementing a verification program (IACP, 2006). Local law enforcement agencies may be required to find innovative and efficient ways to implement verification programs with very limited resources.

Compliance with Registry Requirements

In order to be considered compliant with registry requirements, an offender who has been ordered to register must meet all of the criteria established by the State(s) in which he or she resides, works, or attends school. The increased mobility of our society has allowed an unknown number of sex offenders to fail to comply with registry requirements without being detected as they may move from State to State, or community to community (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2007b). This presents a significant challenge in determining state or national compliance rates. Sex Offender Registration Specialist X of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections provides a national compliance rate of approximately 75 percent (personal communication, February, 2007).

The thought that 1 in 4 convicted sex offenders is failing to comply with registration requirements may provide the impetus for local law enforcement agencies to implement

verification programs with practices that provide the best chance for improving compliance among offenders required to register. The goal of this research is to identify which practices are most likely to achieve increased compliance. The following review of rational choice theory and deterrence theory will create the theoretical framework to identify promising practices within sex offender verification programs.

SECTION III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Why do individuals engage in criminal behavior? A substantial amount of theory has been developed in an attempt to understand what causes an individual to commit a criminal act. There are also many theories that attempt to answer this question by identifying what factors serve to prevent an individual from engaging in criminal behavior. This research will discuss deterrence theory and rational choice theory as they have been applied to criminal behavior. This discussion will be followed by the application of these theories to the act of failing to comply with sex offender registration requirements in order to provide theoretical support for the assertion that sex offender registry verification programs have the potential to increase offender compliance with registration requirements.

Rational Choice Theory

The Oxford dictionary (2001) defines the term rational as “of or based on reason” (p.690). It logically follows that a rational choice would be a choice that is based on reason. Ward, Stafford, and Gray (2006) state that theorists have interpreted the term rational in different ways, such as “[implying] conscious and deliberate calculations about the consequences of crime, while others deny that mental calculations of any kind are involved necessarily” (p. 571). Ward et al. provide that there is also debate among rational choice theorists regarding the role of free will and determinism in an individual’s decision to commit a criminal act.

Derek Cornish and Ronald Clarke were among the first to use the rational choice perspective to examine criminal behavior. Cornish and Clarke (2003) expressed their view of rational choice theory as being based on the following assumption:

that offenders seek to benefit themselves by their criminal behavior; that this involves the making of decisions and of choices, however rudimentary on occasion these processes

might be; and that these processes exhibit a measure of rationality, albeit constrained by limits of time and ability and the availability of relevant information (p. 279-280)

The assumption that an offender views criminal behavior as benefiting him/herself provides the motivation for criminal behavior. It is important to note that this theory does not explore whether or not a legitimate means of obtaining the same benefit exists for a particular offender. The connection of rationality to the decision making process is qualified by the assumption that the offender's reasoning is limited by the time available to the offender, the ability of the offender to commit a particular crime, and the information available to the offender at the time.

Akers (1990) posits that rational choice theory can be applied to any action taken by an individual, and it is not specific to a criminal act. Akers states that the main assertion of rational choice theory is that an individual will engage in actions that have the greatest benefits and least costs associated with them. Therefore, an individual is more likely to engage in behavior that will result in monetary gain, material gain, or other benefits, and at the same time is not likely to result in significant punishment in the form of decreased social status or formal (legal) sanctions. The offender's perception of potential benefits and costs of an action influences the decision making process. Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, and Paternoster (2004) state that offenders may attempt to decrease the potential costs of a criminal act by selecting targets that minimize risk.

Using an approach different than Cornish and Clarke's (2003) assumption, Akers (1990) asserts, "rational choice theory does not assume that all or even most criminal acts result from well-informed calculated choices" (p. 665). According to Akers (1990), rational choice theory, as well as deterrence theory, are closely related to the idea of differential reinforcement, which is the basis of social learning theory. Differential reinforcement is defined by Akers (1990) as "the overall balance of rewards and punishments for behavior" (p. 655). Rewards and punishments

are not viewed independently; rather, an individual views both rewards and punishments and weighs them against each other to determine whether a particular action is likely to be beneficial.

Guerette, Stenius, and McGloin (2005) used the rational choice perspective to examine offense specialization. Guerete et al. started with the assumption that an offender decides to commit a crime for a specific purpose (benefit), and that the decision-making process used by an offender varied based on the type of crime committed. An offender that is motivated to commit a particular crime, in response to a perceived need, will evaluate potential targets for their potential to fulfill the perceived need. This evaluation includes the weighing of potential benefits against potential costs associated with selecting a particular target. Using Guerette et al.'s approach, as long as an offender has the same need he will commit crimes that are similar to each other.

Deterrence Theory

Conklin (2004) defines deterrence as “the inhibition of criminal activity by state-imposed penalties” (p. 368). Akers (1990) presents a more clearly stated definition of deterrence stating that it refers to an individual refraining from or curtailing a contemplated criminal act due to a fear of the perceived legal punishment for that act.

Supporters of deterrence theory believe that punishment is the appropriate means to prevent crime. An important feature of deterrence theory is that it assumes free will (Conklin, 2004). There are two types of deterrence under this model: general deterrence and specific deterrence. General deterrence is achieved when the general public is deterred from engaging in criminal behavior as a result of the punishment of others who have committed crime. Seeing others punished is enough to convince an individual that criminal behavior is not beneficial. Specific deterrence occurs when a particular individual is prevented from committing additional

crimes due to the punishment that individual received for a past crime. Conklin states that offenders who have been punished have reassessed the risks and rewards of crime and are more likely to view the risks of crime as greater than the rewards. Stafford and Warr (2003) emphasize that a punished offender is likely to experience both specific and general deterrence. A punished offender not only experiences direct punishment, but also it is likely that during the course of his punishment he is exposed to other offenders who have been punished for similar crimes.

Wright et al. (2004) examined whether the deterrent effect of threatened punishment varies among individuals based on their “level of motivation or propensity to commit crime” (p. 182). They found that individuals with low self-control and high self-perceived criminality were more likely to be deterred from engaging in criminal behavior that they viewed as costly in terms of threatened punishment. In addition, Wright et al. found that individuals with low levels of criminal propensity may not be deterred by threatened punishments at all. They assert that this does not mean that these individuals will engage in criminal behavior; rather, strong moral beliefs are enough to deter them from committing crime making threatened punishment irrelevant.

Akers (1990) provides an interpretation of deterrence theory that is narrow in scope. He asserts that the effect of the actual or perceived risk of punishment is the only factor that is relevant in deterrence theory. Akers states that the consideration of other factors, such as the weighing of rewards against punishments, or the inclusion of informal social sanctions as a factor, is more consistent with the application of rational choice theory or social learning theory.

Since the literature on deterrence theory focuses on the risk of punishment as the means of inhibiting criminal behavior, it is important to discuss the three elements that contribute to the

risk of punishment. The three elements of punishment found in the literature are the probability of arrest, probability of conviction, and severity (and swiftness) of punishment (Mendes, 2004; Kleck, Sever, Li, and Gertz, 2005). Mendes (2004) states that many deterrence theorists have found that each of these elements are assigned different weights when evaluated by would be or actual offenders. Mendes asserts that, based on the fact that offenders must be arrested in order to be convicted and punished, policymakers have responded by dedicating resources to increase the probability of arrest. Due to the fact that resources are limited within the criminal justice system, this approach has resulted in a decrease in the probability of conviction and level of severity of punishment (Mendes, 2004). Mendes states that potential offenders combine the three elements of punishment in their assessment of the risk of punishment, and that the allocation of resources within the criminal justice system determines the probability of arrest, and that the perceived probability of conviction and severity of punishment are directly tied to the probability of arrest.

Kleck et al. (2005) completed a study on the link between perceived and actual punishment. In this study the actual certainty, severity, and swiftness of punishment in fifty-four urban counties was determined through the use of data found in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (crimes and arrests) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Judicial Reporting Program (convictions and sentences). A representative sample of adult residents in the same counties was used to measure the perceived risk of punishment. Kleck et al. found that none of the measures of punishment consistently showed the actual level of punishment to have an effect on the perceived level of punishment. These results do not imply that actual punishment does not have a deterrent effect, however, Kleck et al. did conclude

that an increase or decrease in punishment levels is not likely to result in a similar change in perceived punishment levels.

Theoretical Implications for Sex Offender Verification Programs

Much of the sex offender legislation, including sex offender registration laws, has been based on the principles of deterrence theory (Meloy, 2005). However, Meloy (2005) points out that there has been very little research that has evaluated the impact of sex offender legislation on deterrence or recidivism. Similarly, there is a lack of research that has focused on the evaluation of sex offender verification programs. This research is not designed to fill that void in the literature. Instead, the goal of sex offender verification programs will be examined using deterrence theory and rational choice theory in order to provide a theoretical basis for the belief that these programs will serve to increase compliance with sex offender registration laws.

Convicted sex offenders, who have been ordered to register with their State's sex offender registry, must comply with all of the requirements set forth in their respective State's sex offender registry law. A failure to comply with even a single requirement constitutes a felony offense in every State (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008). An offender's decision to not comply with the registry requirements may be based on a variety of factors.

Using a rational choice theory perspective to view the act of non-compliance means that an offender has evaluated the benefits and costs of not complying, and has determined that the benefits outweigh the costs. The potential benefits of non-compliance likely differ from offender to offender. Some may view the act of updating the registry with changes as troublesome. Others may not want their current information available to others residing in their neighborhood. An offender may fear being ostracized or being subjected to acts of retaliation by citizens or police that know their whereabouts. For some, keeping knowledge of their whereabouts from the

authorities and neighbors may be an avenue to commit additional sex crimes without detection. This list is not all-inclusive, but these are some of the benefits that offenders may believe are associated with not complying with registry requirements.

The cost of non-compliance is the possibility of arrest, conviction, and punishment for a felony offense. This cost of non-compliance appears to be relatively straightforward, but it is the offender's perception of the likelihood of being subjected to this punishment that is considered in the evaluation of benefits and costs that leads to the decision to not comply with registry requirements. It is at this point that rational choice theory often becomes intertwined with deterrence theory.

Using deterrence theory, the threat of arrest, conviction, and incarceration for the felony offense of failing to comply with registry requirements is enough to prevent a registrant from becoming non-compliant. The offender's perception of the likelihood of punishment and the offender's fear of that punishment are the determining factors in whether he or she will become non-compliant. The cost, or punishment, associated with non-compliance is prevalent in both rational choice theory and deterrence theory.

The primary goal of sex offender verification programs is to increase compliance with registry requirements. Using the above theories, the means of achieving increased compliance is to ensure that registrants perceive the statutory punishment as the unavoidable consequence of non-compliance. There are certainly registrants who view the benefits of non-compliance as outweighing the potential costs. There are also registrants that do not view the risk of punishment as sufficient to prevent them from becoming non-compliant. Sex offender verification programs implement various strategies to instill a belief within registrants that there is a clear expectation that they will comply with registry requirements, that they will be

monitored to ensure compliance, and that the cost or punishment of non-compliance is real and unavoidable. Strategies that have been implemented by three police departments will be examined in the next section to see how the theory discussed here has been put into practice in real world situations.

SECTION IV. CURRENT SEX OFFENDER VERIFICATION PROGRAMS

Reaves (2007) provides an overview of the census of local law enforcement agencies. As of 2004, there were 17,876 State and local law enforcement agencies in the United States that employed the equivalent of at least one full-time officer. Local police departments employed over half of all sworn officers, while Sheriff's departments employed about one quarter of sworn officers. The remaining sworn officers were employed by State agencies and special jurisdiction agencies. Approximately 55% of local law enforcement agencies employed fewer than 10 full-time officers, accounting for approximately 6% of all officers. Approximately 5% of agencies employed at least 100 full-time officers and accounted for 60% percent of all officers.

The above statistics reveal that the majority of local police departments that may implement a sex offender verification program will have to do so with limited personnel who are assigned to other duties such as patrol. Local police departments employing at least 100 full-time officers are more likely to have the resources and personnel available to create a position(s) that focuses specifically on the task of sex offender registration and verification.

As previously stated, a primary goal of sex offender verification programs is to increase offender compliance with registry requirements, while holding non-compliant offenders accountable by pursuing convictions for failure to register violations. To date there exists a significant void in the literature regarding empirical research on the impact of sex offender verification programs. However, research does exist that is particularly relevant in the context of the goals of such programs. Barnoski (2006) conducted a study to examine the impact of a failure to register conviction on subsequent recidivism. He found that the percentage of sex offenders in Washington State who were convicted of a failure to register violation increased from 5 percent in 1990 to 18 percent in 1999 (Barnoski, 2006, p. 2). Barnoski also examined

recidivism rates among sex offenders, and found offenders with at least one failure to register conviction were 50 percent more likely to recidivate than those without a failure to register conviction when measuring subsequent felony, violent felony, and felony sex convictions (2006, p.1). These findings support the notion that sex offender verification programs that are designed and serve to increase compliance will also serve to decrease recidivism rates among convicted sex offenders.

This section focuses on case studies of sex offender verification programs that have been implemented by three police departments in the United States. The Fort Worth, TX Police Department and the Spokane, WA Police Department serve cities with large populations and a significant number of sex offender registrants. The Watertown, WI Police Department serves a city with a smaller population and significantly fewer registrants. A brief overview of each department will be accompanied by an in-depth look at their respective sex offender verification program.

Fort Worth, TX Police Department

The City of Fort Worth is located in North Central Texas and is home to approximately 703,000 residents. The Fort Worth Police Department employs 1,541 sworn personnel and 432 non-sworn personnel. In 1996, the Sex Crimes Registration Apprehension and Monitoring (SCRAM) Unit was formed. The SCRAM Unit is assigned to the Violent Personal Crimes section of the Criminal Investigation Division. The SCRAM Unit was started with one sergeant, one detective, and four officers. Today it is comprised of one sergeant (unit supervisor), five detectives, four officers, and one office assistant.

The SCRAM Unit's responsibilities include: the registration of all sex offenders residing in Fort Worth who are required to register; the monitoring of registrants to verify compliance

with registration and/or probation or parole requirements; initiating reports, conducting investigations, and filing cases for registrants who are found to be non-compliant; investigating new sex offenses with adult victims; maintaining a current database on registrants; working with probation and parole to monitor registrants under community supervision; using the registered sex offender database to assist other law enforcement officers in the investigation of crimes (Standard Operating Procedures, 2002). The information for this case study is primarily the result of a telephone interview with Officer Y, who has been assigned to the SCRAM Unit since its inception (personal communication, January 8, 2009).

The SCRAM Unit monitors an estimated 1,375 registered sex offenders at any given time, although this number fluctuates on a daily basis as registrants move into and out of Fort Worth. The four officers assigned to the SCRAM Unit have the responsibility of monitoring all of the registrants in Fort Worth. Detectives assigned to the unit are responsible for the investigation of new sex offenses and the office assistant handles the initial registration of sex offenders. Officers monitor registrants for compliance with registry requirements through in-person verifications at the offender's residence 2-3 times per year. If a specific complaint is made about an offender that leads an officer to believe that the offender may become non-compliant, more frequent verifications can be conducted. In addition to the verifications conducted by officers, offenders are required to report to the Fort Worth Police Department in person every 30 days, 90 days, or annually, depending on the nature of the sex offense resulting in conviction and any prior violations of registry requirements. Offenders are also required to notify the SCRAM Unit seven days prior to an anticipated address change, or immediately after an address change that was not anticipated.

An offender is found to be non-compliant if he or she fails to report an anticipated address change seven days in advance, or fails to report in person to the Fort Worth Police Department as scheduled. An officer who believes that an offender is non-compliant will establish probable cause through an interview of the offender, interviews of available witnesses, and the officer's personal observations. An officer that has established probable cause to believe that an offender has violated registry requirements will prepare a written report and issue a warrant for the offender's arrest through the circuit court. The thorough investigations that lead to the issuance of an arrest warrant, combined with the willingness of the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office to vigorously pursue prosecution of registry violations, has resulted in conviction rates above 90% and significant incarceration times for offenders found to be non-compliant.

Officer Y estimated a 90% compliance rate among registered sex offenders residing in Fort Worth at the time of the inception of the SCRAM Unit. A compliance rate of 90-92% is currently observed. The current compliance rate is attributed to the thorough investigation of suspected violations of registry requirements combined with the high conviction rate and significant incarceration times for those found to be non-compliant.

Spokane, WA Police Department

The City of Spokane is located in the Eastern Washington State and is home to approximately 195,500 residents. The Spokane Police Department employs 300 sworn officers and 108 non-sworn employees. The Spokane Police Department began registering and tracking convicted sex offenders in 1991. There are currently an estimated 920 registered sex offenders residing in the City of Spokane. Patrol officers were responsible for conducting address verifications from 1991-2002. In 2002, the Sexual Exploitation Unit was formed as part of the

Sexual Assault Unit. The three full-time detectives assigned to the Sexual Exploitation Unit are responsible for tracking registered sex offenders, creating internet stings to locate and arrest offenders who use the internet to facilitate sex crimes, and locating child pornography on computers seized from suspected sex offenders. The information for this case study is primarily the result of a telephone interview with Detective Z, who has been assigned to the Sexual Exploitation Unit since its inception (personal communication, January 7, 2009).

Convicted sex offenders who reside in the City of Spokane upon their release from supervision by the Department of Corrections are evaluated and classified as a level I, level II, or level III offender. Detective Z explains the evaluation consists of a review of the crime for which the offender was convicted, a psychological profile, and a 22-part form used to determine the potential risk the offender may pose to the community (personal communication, March 20, 2009). An offender may apply for a change in classification three years after release from community supervision with the completion of a sex offender treatment program, or five years after release from community supervision without completion of the program, if the offender is compliant with the registry requirements and has not been convicted of a new crime. The Spokane County Sheriff's Department completes the initial registration for all sex offenders in the county, and level II and III offenders are required to check in with the Spokane County Sheriff's Department every 90 days in person. Registrants are required to provide current information as required by the Washington State's registry (e.g., name, date of birth, address, employment, current photo, etc.) at these times.

The three detectives assigned to the Sexual Exploitation Unit conduct address verifications on level I offenders once per year, on level II offenders every six months, and on level III offenders every three months. Prior to the addition of the third detective to the unit in

2008, address verifications were completed in person, by telephone, by mail, or through the offender's community corrections officer. Since the addition of the third detective, all address verifications are conducted in person at the offender's residence. The address verification is used solely to verify that the offender is residing at the location provided to the Washington State Sex Offender Registry. A detective contacts each offender who is found to be non-compliant with the requirement of maintaining a current address with the registry. The offender is asked why he or she has not updated the registry, and the detective advises the offender that if he or she immediately reports to the Spokane County Sheriff's Department to update the registry a warrant will not be issued for Failure to Register. If the offender does not immediately register, a warrant will be requested for a charge of failure to register.

In 2006, the State of Washington revised its law for failure to register, which increased the minimum period of incarceration for this offense from 30 days to one year. Detective Z states that the change in the penalty for failure to register has resulted in a noticeable change in how the Spokane County District Attorney's Office handles these cases (personal communication, March 20, 2009). The newfound proactive approach to the prosecution of failure to register cases has resulted in an estimated 92-95% conviction rate for these cases.

Detective Z states that a compliance rate among registered sex offenders of approximately 65% was observed prior to the creation of the Sexual Exploitation Unit in 2002. The compliance rate has increased significantly over the past seven years to its current rate of 92% (personal communication, March 20, 2009). Detective Z states that the increase in compliance rate has primarily been the result of increasing the frequency of in-person verifications and the creation of stiffer penalties for failure to register in Washington State.

Watertown, WI Police Department

The City of Watertown is located in Southeastern Wisconsin and is home to approximately 23,000 residents. The Watertown Police Department employs 38 full-time sworn officers and 15 non-sworn personnel. There are currently 67 registered sex offenders residing in the City of Watertown. The Watertown Police Department created the Sex Offender Accountability Program (SOAP) in 2007. Registered sex offenders residing, working, or attending school in Wisconsin are managed by Sex Offender Specialists who are employed by the Department of Corrections. The SOAP program was developed to assist the Sex Offender Specialist in verifying that registered offenders are compliant with registry requirements. The information provided in this case study is the result of the author's knowledge as an officer with the Watertown Police Department, who has participated in each of the verification processes since the program's inception, and the Watertown Police Department's General Order governing the SOAP (General Order 42.1.7, 2007).

On a semi-annual basis the Operations Bureau Commander will contact the Sex Offender Specialist to obtain a current list of registered sex offenders residing in the City of Watertown. A complete sex offender record for each offender is provided to the Watertown Police Department. The record includes the offender's photograph, physical description, address, probation/parole status, employment information, and any school of attendance. The offender has ten days to report changes to the information on the sex offender record to the Department of Corrections. The records are dispersed among the 16 patrol officers and supervisors assigned to Watch I and II and the four detectives assigned to the Investigations Division. Each officer receives training on the Department of Corrections Sex Offender Registry Program and is responsible for 3-4 offenders. It is a common practice to assign officers to the same offender for subsequent

verifications in an effort to create a familiarity or working relationship between the officer and the offender. Officers are then allowed approximately two weeks to verify the offender's registry information.

Verification is completed in person at the offender's residence. Officers will continue attempts to contact the offender at his or her residence, and at times will make telephone contact with the offender to arrange for an in person verification at the offender's residence. Upon making contact with the offender, the officer will verify that all of the information contained on the sex offender record is current. Any changes in information are recorded on the address verification report created for each offender. All address verification reports are turned in to the Operations Bureau Commander. During the first verification for an offender the officer provides the offender with literature produced by the Department of Corrections. The literature covers restrictions for certain offenders from working with children and general information for the registered sex offender regarding registration requirements.

Offenders who have failed to report changes of the information on the sex offender record within ten days are considered non-compliant. An offender is also considered non-compliant if he or she refuses to cooperate with the officer completing the verification, or if the officer is unable to contact the offender after repeated attempts. The officer assigned to a non-compliant offender will complete a written report documenting the specific circumstances relating to the offender's non-compliance and forward the report to the Investigations Division. Officers are discouraged from taking the non-compliant offender into custody unless exigent circumstances exist that necessitate an immediate arrest. The Investigative Division Sergeant will contact the Sex Offender Specialist to see if compliance has been met through the Department of Corrections. Completed reports on non-compliant offenders are forwarded to the

Sex Offender Specialist with a recommendation to refer the offender to the appropriate District Attorney's office for criminal prosecution. Referral for criminal prosecution is at the discretion of the Sex Offender Specialist.

During the initial verification conducted in the Spring of 2007, reports for non-compliance on 12 offenders were forwarded to the Sex Offender Specialist. Of the 12 referrals, four were forwarded to the District Attorney's Office resulting in one conviction for failure to register. The remaining 8 referrals were either handled through warnings issued to the offender by the Sex Offender Specialist (3 offenders), or the offender was found to be in compliance (5 offenders). The second verification conducted in Fall of 2007 resulted in three referrals to the Sex Offender Specialist. All three were also referred to the District Attorney's Office with one offender being charged and convicted of an amended charge of Disorderly Conduct, and two offenders not being formally charged. The third verification in Spring of 2008 resulted in one referral to the Sex Offender Specialist. That offender was not formally charged. The fourth and most recent verification in Fall of 2008 resulted in three referrals to the Sex Offender Specialist. Charging data on those referrals is not yet available.

The initial compliance rate among registered offenders residing in the City of Watertown in the Spring of 2007 was 80% (49 of 61 offenders were compliant). After the initial verification, the compliance rate noticeably increased to a current level of 95% (64 of 67 offenders are compliant). It is important to note that jurisdictions with a lower number of registrants may see significant fluctuation in compliance rates with a change in the compliance status of only a few offenders.

This section has examined the sex offender verification programs that have been implemented by three police departments throughout the United States. There are similarities

observed among the three programs, as well as obvious differences in how each department approaches the task of verification. The next section of this paper will highlight three recommendations for police departments that are looking to implement a new sex offender verification program, or improve an existing program. Attention will be given to the difference in personnel resources available in police departments of different sizes.

SECTION V: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEX OFFENDER VERIFICATION PROGRAMS

In recent years local law enforcement agencies have begun to play a significant role in the sex offender registration process. These agencies are now tasked to ensure that the sex offender registry in their jurisdiction contains current data on convicted sex offenders, and that sex offenders are complying with the registry requirements. To date, there has been little or no guidance to local law enforcement agencies in how to best approach the successful completion of this task. States require the assistance of local law enforcement agencies, but do not provide additional funding, human resources, or model programs to assist the local agencies in establishing a sex offender verification program. This section of this research serves to provide three recommendations that can be implemented in a sex offender verification program in any department, regardless of the size of the community served, the number of sworn officers on the department, or the number of registered sex offenders residing within the community.

Risk Assessment

Section II of this research discussed the finding that a sex offender is more likely than a non-sexual offender to continue to offend throughout his or her lifetime. The finding of the Washington study discussed in Section IV that sex offenders who are convicted of a failure to register offense exhibit higher rates of recidivism for felony offenses is also important to consider. These findings make it particularly important to develop a system for assessing the risk of recidivism for sex offenders who are required to register, so that a sex offender verification program can be designed to treat each offender based on their risk of recidivism.

As discussed earlier, the SORNA guidelines require that each State develop a three-tier classification system based on the offender's risk of recidivism. The level of classification dictates how frequently the offender is required to update registry information. The

classification of a sex offender in one of the three tiers will occur at the State level, and will most likely be a task that is completed by the State's Department of Corrections. Local law enforcement agencies will benefit from using the classification system as a guide for the allocation of resources within a sex offender verification program. It will allow agencies to tailor their programs to the population of sex offenders within their community, by allowing the agency to expend more resources on those offenders who are more likely to become non-compliant. It is important that local agencies allow for the re-classification of offenders based on continuous compliance or non-compliance with the registry requirements, continued criminal behavior, or other observable factors that lead to the conclusion that the offender has either increased or decreased his risk of non-compliance.

The use of a classification system is observed in the Spokane Police Department's program, which varies the frequency of the verification checks based on the level of the offender. Using the cost versus benefit analysis from rational choice theory, a classification system allows local law enforcement agencies to vary the perceived costs of non-compliance to correspond with each offender's perceived benefits of non-compliance by increasing the frequency of verification checks for those offenders who are most likely to become non-compliant. According to rational choice theory, this change in perceived costs and benefits should result in a lower likelihood that an offender will become non-compliant.

In Person Verification Checks at the Offender's Residence

Each of the three programs examined in Section IV of this research utilize in person verification checks as the primary means of verifying that offenders are compliant with registry requirements. Each of the programs examined also have an observed compliance rate of at least 90 percent. It will take empirical research to establish whether there is a link between

compliance rates and the use of in person verification checks, but the observations of the programs discussed in this research are promising in light of an estimated compliance rate of 75 percent nationwide.

In most States non-compliance is viewed only as the result of an offender's failure to register with or update the registry within a specified time of a change of address. As discussed in Section II, there is a broad range of requirements for sex offender registries that have been established through the SORNA guidelines. In person verification checks allow law enforcement agencies to verify that the offender is not only residing at the reported address, but that he has not significantly changed his appearance, is not driving unreported vehicles, is not in violation of probation or parole restrictions, and that any required data for the registry is updated.

Whether an agency has the resources to establish dedicated positions to a sex offender verification program, such as the programs implemented by the Spokane Police Department and Fort Worth Police Department, or an agency is simply using patrol officers to conduct verification checks, such as the Watertown Police Department's program, it is recommended that the same individual be assigned to a sex offender for subsequent verification checks. It is important to note that repeated contacts between an officer and an offender allows for each to become familiar with the other and encourages the development of rapport between the two parties. It may also allow the officer to identify any changes in the offender or his environment that may be cause for concern. In the context of rational choice theory, in person verification checks allow local law enforcement agencies to increase the offender's perceived costs of non-compliance by identifying a non-compliant offender and holding him accountable. This should result in the offender perceiving the costs of non-compliance as outweighing the perceived

benefits of non-compliance, which decreases the likelihood that the offender will become non-compliant.

Work with District Attorney

The first two recommendations serve as a means of effectively allocating resources to encourage compliance among sex offenders and to identify offenders who have become non-compliant. It is what is done with the non-compliant offenders that will determine how successful a sex offender verification program will be at increasing compliance among sex offenders. As evidenced by the earlier discussion on deterrence theory, offenders who observe others being punished for non-compliance will be less likely to become non-compliant themselves (general deterrence). According to deterrence theory, offenders who have been punished for non-compliance will be less likely to remain non-compliant (specific deterrence).

Section II of this research discusses that it is difficult to establish an accurate measurement of the number of sex offenses that are perpetrated due to the finding that sex offenses are vastly underreported and often do not result in the arrest of the offender. There is no reason that non-compliant offenders should be as difficult to identify and hold accountable. Combining the recommendations of performing a risk assessment on each offender with conducting in person verification checks should result in identifying each offender that is non-compliant with registry requirements. This final recommendation completes the process by holding non-compliant offenders accountable through the prosecution of these offenses in cooperation with the District Attorney's Office.

Developing a positive working relationship between the local law enforcement agency and the District Attorney's Office is an essential part of a sex offender verification program. The head of the local agency's sex offender verification program, along with any officer involved in a

prosecutable case, must work closely with the District Attorney's Office to make sure that failure to register offenses are viewed as a priority and that violators are prosecuted promptly and without exception. As discussed in Section IV of this research, the Spokane Police Department's Sexual Exploitation Unit has been able to establish a close working relationship with the Spokane County District Attorney's Office. Their cooperative effort has resulted in a 92-95% conviction rate for non-compliant offenders, which has increased the observed compliance rate from 65% to the current rate of 92% in Spokane, WA. This result demonstrates the potential impact of a close working relationship between a department's sex offender verification program and the local District Attorney's Office.

Recommendations for Future Research

A common theme throughout this research has been that there is a noticeable void in the literature as it relates to empirical research on sex offender verification programs. With the federal government's issuance of the SORNA guidelines, a mandate has been placed on the State's to develop a system of maintaining a current and accurate sex offender registry. State's have responded by placing the burden of the verification of information provided to the sex offender registry on local law enforcement agencies. The resulting increase in the number of local law enforcement agencies that have developed and implemented sex offender verification programs has provided researchers with a substantial opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of current programs, develop recommendations for improving programs, and provide a comprehensive set of recommendations for agencies looking to implement a new program.

In recent years the public has placed a spotlight on the issue of the management of sex offenders. The evaluation of current methods of managing sex offenders is critical in order to move forward in the process of developing the most effective approach to sex offender

management. Currently, sex offender verification programs are a large part of the national effort of sex offender management, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs should be undertaken without further hesitation.

SECTION VI: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In recent years the topic of sex offender management has come to the forefront in the criminal justice system. This is in large part due to public sentiment regarding the role of the criminal justice system in protecting the community from sex offenders (Doble Research Associates, 2000). Each State now has a sex offender registry that is designed to provide citizens and law enforcement with access to information regarding the whereabouts and identifying information of convicted sex offenders. Citizens may use the information in the registry to identify convicted sex offenders who may be residing, working, or attending school within their community, so that they may protect themselves and their children from potential victimization. Law enforcement may use the information to assist in the investigations of new sex crimes.

In order for sex offender registries to serve the purposes mentioned above, the information provided to the registry must be accurate. Many States are depending on local law enforcement agencies to verify that the information contained in the registries is accurate. Local law enforcement agencies have responded by implementing sex offender verification programs. This research provides case studies on three sex offender verification programs that have been implemented. Each of the programs varies from the others.

Based on the case studies in this research and the information found in the literature regarding sex offender registries and sex offender verification programs, this research has provided three recommended practices for sex offender verification programs. The recommendations are based on the principles of deterrence theory and rational choice theory as they are applied to an offender's non-compliance with registry requirements. The recommended practices include completing a risk assessment on each offender to guide how frequent verification or compliance checks will be conducted, conducting face-to-face verification checks

with each offender at his or her residence at a frequency determined by the risk assessment, and establishing a close working relationship with the local District Attorney's Office in order to ensure aggressive prosecution of sex offenders who are found to be non-compliant with registry requirements.

Through the completion of this research it was discovered that there is a significant void in the research concerning the effectiveness of sex offender verification programs in increasing compliance rates among sex offenders who are required to register. It is recommended that future research examine these programs. Such research could provide empirical evidence to be used to determine whether sex offender verification programs are effective, how such programs could be improved, and what practices are recommended for implementation in sex offender verification programs.

It is safe to assume that sex offender registries are here to stay for the foreseeable future. The goal then is to make registries as effective as possible. The implementation of sex offender verification programs at the local law enforcement agency level, including the practices recommended in this research, may be the most effective means of accomplishing this goal.

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