

Closing Observations

“One year of intensive supervision and treatment in the community can range in cost between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per offender, depending on treatment modality. The average cost for incarcerating an offender is significantly higher, approximately \$22,000 per year, excluding treatment costs.” (Lottke, E., “Sex Offenders: Does Treatment Work?” *Corrections Compendium* 21 (1996))

“Restrictions are not uniform from one community to the next, yet lawmakers expect those affected by these individual community laws to be in compliance with what many call feel-good legislation that does nothing to actually protect anyone.” (A registry-compliant person)

“We’ve worked all the Minnesota cases [involving sexual crimes] backwards from 2007 to see if any residency restrictions would have prevented one crime. Not one. The crimes are happening because they are connected to relationships. They are people you trust, so you go off with them to your house, their house, to the park or wherever.” (Nancy Sabine, director of the Jacob Wetterling Research Center)

“U.S. District Court judge Gary Lancaster said the residency restrictions in Allegheny County conflict with the state's obligation to rehabilitate offenders and return them to society. Isolating them keeps them from the jobs, family support and psychological counseling they need, he said.” (Patriot News, April 8, 2009)

The rate of noncompliance with the sex offender registry has doubled each year since the Green Bay Residency Restriction Ordinance passed in 2006. Fourteen names were submitted as noncompliant in 2007, thirty-one in 2008. (Tom Smith, Wisconsin Sex Offender Registration Specialist for Brown County)

For further information or questions,
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Note: This report is in no way meant to minimize the incalculable harm brought to children who are the victims of child molestation. Every child has the right to experience the joy of childhood and be protected from those who would in any way jeopardize that joy.

It would be an error to define all sex offenders as child molesters yet individuals arrested and convicted for a variety of sex-related offenses find themselves on sex offender registries. It would also be an error to consider all child molesters to be pedophiles.

SEVEN SEX OFFENDER MYTHS

Myth 1: Most sex offenders commit another offense

Fact: According to an in-depth study of released prisoners by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) published in 2003 (which included nearly 10,000 sex offenders) the reconviction rates for new sex offenses by those offenders over a three year period were:

Rape	3.2%	Statutory rape	3.6%
Child molestation	3.5%	Sexual assault	3.7%
All sex offenders	3.5%		

Myth 2: Child molesters spontaneously attack when they see a vulnerable potential victim

Fact: Many child molesters and pedophiles spend years positioning themselves into a place of authority and trust within the community and can spend a long time “grooming” one child. (Sinclair’s commentary as cited in Schiff, ¶18)

Myth 3: Sex offense rates are on the rise

Fact: Despite the increase in publicity about sexual crimes, the actual rate of reported sexual assault has decreased in recent years. The arrest rate for *all* sexual offenses (including forcible rape but excluding prostitution) dropped 16% between 1993 and 1998. (FBI Investigations, 1997 and 1998)

- “Megan’s Law (requiring public notification of sex offender information) is riding the coattails of the

natural downward trend,” says Kristen Zgoba, a NJ Corrections Department researcher studying the effects of community notification. In other words, the decline in sexual offenses cannot be considered a direct effect of Megan’s Law.

Myth 4: Strangers assault children

Fact: Although incidents of assaults by strangers are widely reported on the news, 86% of reported assaults are either by family members or acquaintances. (BJS, 2000)

Myth 5: Treatment for sex offenders does not work

Fact: Several studies have shown significantly lower rates of repeat sex offenses for those offenders who successfully completed treatment goals, compared to those who did not (Gallagher, Harris, Marques, Murphy, Quinsey, & Soto, 2002). Treatment can be successful if it is geared toward the type of abuse and the reasons behind it (Alexander, 1999).

Myth 6: Residency restriction laws reduce offenses

Fact: Residency restrictions are fairly recent, and it is unclear if they make communities safer or not. A study in Minnesota attempted to track whether sex offenders contacted their victims near their homes or not. The study concluded that none of the 224 offenses examined would have been prevented by residency restrictions (Duwe, Donnay & Tewksbury, 2008).

Myth 7: News media is impartial to reporting sex offense crimes

Fact: Child molestation cases are often sensationalized in a manner that sometimes suggests an attempt to draw reader attention. Additionally, local crimes of this nature are often carried regionally and even nationally (unlike the reporting of other crimes). Some trends:

- News coverage of sex offenses increased 128% from 1991 to 1998 although the incidence of sexual

assaults dropped during this same time frame (Sample & Kadleck, 2006).

- Over 3,600 news articles on sex offenders in just three Midwestern newspapers from 1991 to 1998 (Sample & Kadleck, 2006).
- A Google News search for the keyword “sex offender” in US news articles for one day yielded nearly 4,500 hits

A later 2008 study by Sample & Kadleck showed that the news media encourages myths already described in this report such as:

- Themes of high recidivism rates were consistently apparent throughout the articles.
- Portrayals of sex offenders as persistent in their behavior despite punishment and rehabilitation
- A trend showing an increase in news accounts of sexually-motivated homicide which could well support public perceptions that sex offending is often synonymous with murder
- Most politicians described sex offenders as “sick,” commonly characterizing them as compulsive, persistent, and irredeemable, and none thought that rehabilitation was possible
- When asked how they customarily obtained knowledge regarding sex offenders, politicians cited the media as by far their primary source

The media plays a leading role in shaping opinion both among politicians and the public. A fear level is created, resulting in legislation to cope with that fear—an illusion of safety rather than actual protection.

References

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