

**Impact of Community Notification  
on Sex Offender Reintegration in Vermont  
Before and After Passage of a Megan's Law  
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# **Impact of Community Notification on Sex Offender Reintegration in Vermont Before and After Passage of a Megan's Law**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact of community notification, known as "Megan's Law," on sex offenders' reintegration into the community. A sample of 276 male sex offenders was surveyed before Vermont passed a Megan's law and began posting pictures of high risk sex offenders on a publicly accessible Internet website. Their responses were compared with those of 239 sex offenders surveyed four years after the implementation of the law. Both groups reported experiencing multiple negative consequences of community notification. Few group differences, however, were found between participants surveyed before versus after implementation of the law or, among the latter group, between those whose pictures were posted on the Internet versus those who were not. The results are discussed in terms of their policy and research implications.

## **Introduction**

All 50 states now have laws, commonly called Megan's Laws, which mandate public officials to alert citizens about sex offenders who should be considered a potential threat. These laws are based on the belief that an informed public can better protect itself and its children (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2001).

The State of Washington passed the first community notification law in the United States in 1990 following a series of highly publicized sex crimes. It authorized state officials to notify the public when dangerous sex offenders were released back into the community (Lieb & Nunlist, 2008). Soon thereafter, the United States Congress passed the Jacob Wetterling Act (Jacob Wetterling Act, 1994) requiring released sex offenders to register with local law enforcement and authorizing discretionary community notification. In 1996, after the murder of Megan Kanka by a sex offender in New Jersey, President Clinton signed what became known as Megan's Law (1996), an amendment to the Wetterling Act which required states to implement community notification procedures. Most recently, President Bush signed into law the Adam Walsh Act (2006) which has set penalties for states who do not meet a minimum standard of community notification.

## **Impact of Community Notification Laws**

Researchers have examined the impact of community notification on community safety as well as how the public, professionals who manage sex offenders, family members of sex offenders and sex offenders themselves perceive these laws.

Most states have had community notification laws in place for over a decade and several have examined their effect on rates of sexual offending. Two studies in Washington State compared the sexual recidivism rates of sex offenders released from prison before and after implementation of community notification legislation. One found no statistically significant difference in sexual reoffense rates between pre- and post-implementation groups (Schram & Milloy, 1995) whereas the other did (Barnoski, 2005). The author of this second study however could not determine whether the slightly lower sexual recidivism rate among the post-implementation group was attributable to notification, an increase in the state's incarceration

rate, a decrease in the overall crime rate in the state, or a combination of factors. In Wisconsin, Zevitz (2006) found that sex offenders subjected to aggressive notification did not sexually reoffend at significantly different rates than those who were not. Recently in New Jersey, Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro and Veysey (2008) concluded that Megan's Law had no effect on sexual recidivism rates. They opined that the lack of demonstrated effects did not justify the considerable costs of implementing and maintaining the law. Similarly, Sandler, Freeman and Socia (2008) found no support for the effectiveness of New York State's registration and notification legislation. In contrast, Duwe and Donnay (2008) found that community notification in Minnesota significantly reduced the sexual recidivism rates among high risk sex offenders but did not recommend this approach with moderate and low risk sex offenders.

In a multi-state study, Vasquez, Madden and Walker (2008) examined the combined deterrent effect of sex offender registration and community notification in ten states and found no overall impact on the incidence rates of sexual offending. Prescott and Rockoff (2008) analyzed National Incident Based Reporting system data among fifteen states and found community notification was associated with a decrease in the incidence of sex crimes committed by individuals not known to have previously sexually offended. However, they found a slight increase in sexual recidivism by known sex offenders and hypothesized that this was due to the socially destabilizing impact of notification on this group. Overall, these studies do not provide much support for a significant deterrence effect of community notification.

Despite the questionable deterrence effect of community notification laws, considerable public awareness and support for them exist. In state surveys, typically about 80 percent of community members said that they felt safer knowing about sex offenders living in their communities (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Lieb & Nunlist, 2008). Considerable support for these laws also exists among law enforcement officials (Gaines, 2006, Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). However, mental health professionals who treat sexual offenders appear to rather skeptical about the benefits of community notification. (Maletsky & Keim, 2001; McGrath, Cumming, Burchard, Zeoli & Ellerby, in press; Levenson, Fortney & Baker, in press).

Several studies have documented the considerable negative impact that community notification appears to have on the family members of sex offenders (Farkas & Miller, 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 1995; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). Common consequences include financial hardship and harassment.

Several studies, including the present one, have described the self-reported impact of notification on sex offenders themselves (Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora & Hern, 2007; Mercado, Alvarez & Levenson, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a, 2000b). These studies, discussed further in the Conclusion section, indicate that offenders rarely report being the target of vigilante attacks, but about a quarter report job loss and exclusion from residence. About one-half or more typically report psychosocial consequences such as stress, shame, hopelessness and loss of social supports.

## **Background**

The present study took place in Vermont, a state of small cities, towns and rural areas. Vermont's initial version of Megan's Law went into effect on July 1, 1996. It required individuals to register with the state if they had been convicted of a sexual offense or were released from

confinement after having been convicted of a sex offense on or after that date. The law's community notification provision required members of the public to contact the sex offender registry office by phone and express a specific concern about their own safety or the safety of others before they were provided information about an offender on the registry. Few citizens accessed registry information under this system.

In 2004, as a result of public demand for greater access to registry information, Vermont passed a new Megan's Law. Effective March 1, 2005, the Vermont Sex Offender Registry began posting on a public Internet website pictures and personal information about all sex offenders on the registry who were designated as having a "Heightened Notification Level." Offenders so designated met at least one of the following criteria: (1) had been convicted of kidnapping or sexual assault of a child, aggravated sexual assault, or sexual activity with a vulnerable adult, (2) had a prior conviction for a sexual offense, (3) were wanted for a violation of the registry, (4) refused to comply with community treatment, (5) used a weapon during a sexual offense, or (6) scored high risk on either one of two actuarial risk instruments, namely, a 6 or greater on the Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 2000) or a 4 or greater on the RRASOR (Hanson, 1997). Information about sex offenders who were not designated as having a "Heightened Notification Level" was maintained on the restricted phone accessible registry previously described.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study examined the impact of community notification and Vermont's Internet-based Megan's Law on sex offenders' adjustment and reintegration into the community. Three hypotheses were tested. First, it was expected that sex offenders would report experiencing negative effects of community notification, regardless of whether legislative mandate, probation or parole officers or other individuals initiated notifications. Second, the percentage of sex offenders reporting negative experiences would increase following implementation of Vermont's law that created a publicly accessible sex offender Internet registry. Third, following passage of the law, offenders who were posted on the Internet would experience more negative consequences than those who were not. It was hoped that the study findings would provide useful information to policy makers in weighing the potential benefits and disadvantages of this type of legislation and to service providers in helping offenders reintegrate into society.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The sample was composed of 515 adult male sex offenders who attended counseling in one of the Vermont's 13 community sex offender treatment programs during one of two data collection periods. The first group (hereafter referred to as the 2004 group) was surveyed during October 2004, shortly before passage of Vermont's Internet Law. Of the 400 clients in treatment at that time, 276 returned a survey for a response rate 69.0%. The second group (hereafter referred to as the October 2008 group) was surveyed in October 2008, about four years following passage of the Internet law. Of the 370 clients in treatment at that time, 239 returned a survey for a response rate of 64.6%. Thus, the overall response rate among the two groups was 66.9%.

Participant characteristics are detailed in Table 1. The only significant between-group differences on these characteristics were that the 2008 group was slightly more racially diverse than the 2004 group (94.1% versus 86.0% White),  $\chi^2(1, N = 507) = 9.62, p < .01$ , and also had a lower percentage of participants who were employed full time (65.5% versus 73.9%) and a higher percentage who were unemployed (25.2% versus 16.3%),  $\chi^2(2, N = 514) = 6.28, p < .05$ .

## Measures

The survey was used with permission and modified slightly from a previous study (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). It elicited data about participants' demographic and offense characteristic variables reported in Table 1. Questions about clients' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences regarding community notification were dichotomous (yes/no) or used a Likert five-point scale (strongly disagree/disagree/I don't know/agree/strongly agree). Questions were asked as they appear in Tables 2 through 4.

### Procedure

Treatment providers provided informed consent to clients during regularly scheduled group therapy sessions and invited them to complete the survey. Providers instructed clients not to write their names on either the informed consent or survey document and to place the documents in an unmarked sealed envelope that providers sent to the researchers. Participants' submission of the survey was considered consent to participate in the project.

**Table 1. Description of sample**

		2004 Group ( <i>n</i> = 276)		2008 Group ( <i>n</i> = 239)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 515)	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Age	Under 25	45	16.5	50	20.9	95	18.6
	25-49	179	65.6	142	59.4	321	62.7
	50-64	46	16.8	41	17.2	87	17.0
	Over 65	3	1.1	6	2.5	9	1.8
Education	Less than 12 years	73	26.7	67	28.0	140	27.3
	12 years or GED	149	54.6	136	56.9	285	55.6
	More than 12 years	51	18.7	36	15.1	87	17.0
Marital status	Currently married	72	26.3	56	23.8	128	25.1
	Not currently married	202	73.7	179	76.2	381	74.9
Racial Background ***	White	256	94.1	202	86.0	458	90.3
	Minority	16	5.9	33	14.0	49	9.7
Employment *	Full-time	204	73.0	156	65.5	360	70.0
	Part-time	27	9.8	22	9.2	49	9.5
	Unemployed	45	16.3	60	25.2	105	20.4
Relationship to victims	All inside family	73	27.4	67	29.0	140	28.2
	All outside family	171	64.3	141	61.0	312	62.8
	Both inside and outside family	22	8.3	23	10.0	45	9.1
Offense/victim types <sup>a</sup>	Female age 15 or younger	175	64.1	161	68.2	336	54.8
	Female age 16 or older	59	21.6	51	21.6	110	17.9
	Male age 15 or younger	36	13.2	25	10.6	61	10.0
	Male age 16 or older	2	0.7	5	2.1	7	1.1
	Exhibitionism or voyeurism	44	16.1	27	11.4	71	11.6
	Child pornography use	14	5.1	14	5.9	28	4.6

a. Percentages total more than 100% due to multiple responses permitted.

\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## Data Analysis

Analytic techniques employed descriptive statistics to examine demographic characteristics. Chi-square analyses were used to compare group differences between the 2004 and 2008

groups (see Tables 1-4) and, among the 2008 group, those who were known to have been posted on the Internet versus those that were not (see text for significant differences). To compare the present results with other studies that used the same or similar survey questions (e.g., Levenson & Cotter; 2005), the same reporting conventions were used. Notably, responses to questions using the five-point Likert scale were grouped into dichotomous categories, that is, percent responding “agree” or “strongly agree” versus all other responses.

## Results

Of the 276 participants that comprised the 2004 group, none were posted on the Internet because they were surveyed before implementation of the new Internet law. Of the 239 participants that comprised the 2008 post-Internet legislation group, 56 (23.4%) reported that their picture had been posted on the publicly accessible Internet sex offender registry website, 95 (39.7%) reported that they had not been posted on this website, 87 (36.4%) reported they did not know whether they had or had not, and one (0.4%) did not respond to this question.

Participants' probation and parole officers, as shown in Table 2, often disclosed or made participants disclose their status as sex offenders to their neighbors (20.0%), landlords (56.0%), and employers (70.8%). It was uncommon for participants to report being aware of other notification procedures (see Table 2). No significant differences were found between the 2004 and 2008 groups on these community methods, but individuals in the 2008 group who were on the Internet, compared to those who were not, were more likely to have had someone post flyers about them (5.5% versus 0%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 5.29, p < .05$ , and had someone do a door-to-door notification (21.4% versus 4.3%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 10.86, p < .001$ , but less likely to be the subject of a press release (2.0% versus 8.5%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 149) = 4.12, p < .05$ .

As shown in Table 3, the most common negative practical consequences reported by participants of being identified as sex offenders were harassment by neighbors (13.5%) and job loss (20.2%). No between-group differences were found for any of the negative practical consequences listed in this table.

Table 3 also shows that between one-third and one-half of participants attributed experiencing various negative psychosocial effects to community notification. In terms of between-group differences, more individuals in the 2008 group than the 2004 group reported, “I feel alone and isolated because people know I am a sex offender,” (43.7% versus 33.7%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 515) = 5.63, p < .05$ , as did more individuals in the 2008 group that were posted on the Internet versus those that were not (54.5% versus 36.73%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 4.45, p < .05$ .

Participants also noted several positive effects of community notification (see Table 4). In terms of group differences, participants in the 2008 group were more likely than those in the 2004 group to agree with the statement, “I am more motivated to prevent reoffense so that I can prove to others that I am not a bad person,” (85.5% versus 75.5%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 515) = 6.92, p < .01$ . Among the 2008 group, a higher percentage of participants who were posted on the Internet, versus those who were not, agreed with the statements in Table 4 indicating that having informed neighbors reduced their access to potential victims (37.7% versus 20.4%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 149) = 4.23, p < .05$ , and that it was fair for the community to know about their offending (62.3% versus 37.9%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 151) = 8.56, p < .01$ .

**Table 2. Type of community notification**

	2004 Group ( <i>n</i> = 276)		2008 Group ( <i>n</i> = 239)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 515)	
	<i>n</i>	% yes	<i>n</i>	% yes	<i>n</i>	% yes
Someone has posted flyers about you in your neighborhood.	273	2.6	237	2.1	510	2.4
Someone has gone door-to-door to inform neighbors about you.	271	9.6	237	8.7	508	9.2
A community meeting has been held to inform neighbors about you.	271	2.6	238	3.8	509	3.1
A flyer has been sent home with school children.	269	0.0	237	0.0	506	0.0
Your probation/parole officer has told or made you tell your employer.	275	67.6	238	74.4	513	70.8
Your probation/parole officer has told or made you tell your neighbors.	274	19.3	239	20.1	513	20.0
Your probation/parole officer has told or made you tell your landlord.	271	52.8	236	60.1	507	56.0
Other than the time of your arrest, conviction, and sentencing, the local newspaper has published an article saying you are at risk.	270	7.8	235	12.3	505	10.0

**Table 3. Negative consequences**

Practical consequence	2004 Group ( <i>n</i> = 276)		2008 Group ( <i>n</i> = 239)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 515)	
	<i>n</i>	% yes	<i>n</i>	% yes	<i>n</i>	% yes
Lost a job because your boss or co-workers found out.	275	18.5	239	20.9	514	20.2
Had to move out of a home or apartment because a landlord found out.	275	6.2	238	5.5	513	5.8
Had to move out of a home or apartment because neighbors found out.	272	3.7	239	4.2	511	3.9
Have been threatened/harassed by neighbors because they found out.	272	15.4	239	11.3	511	13.5
Have been physically assaulted or injured because someone found out.	274	4.4	239	2.9	513	3.7
Have had property damaged because someone found out.	274	7.3	239	5.4	513	6.4
Had a person living with me threatened, harassed, assaulted, injured, or suffered property damage because someone found out.	273	10.3	239	6.7	512	8.6
		% agree or strongly agree		% agree or strongly agree		% agree or strongly agree
Psychosocial consequence	<i>n</i>		<i>n</i>		<i>n</i>	
Community notification interferes with my recovery by causing more stress in my life.	272	51.1	238	49.6	510	50.4
I feel alone and isolated because people know I am a sex offender. *	273	33.7	238	43.7	511	38.4
I have lost friends or a close relationship because people have found out I am a sex offender.	275	43.7	239	47.7	514	45.5
I am afraid for my safety because of the community notification law.	274	31.7	239	33.1	513	32.4
Shame and embarrassment due to community notification keeps me from engaging in activities.	274	45.0	237	53.2	511	49.3
I have less hope for the future now that I will have to register as a sex offender for a long time.	274	38.0	237	45.6	511	41.5
Sometimes community notification makes me feel hopeless. "No one believes I can change so why even try."	274	29.2	239	30.1	513	29.6

\*  $p < 0.05$

**Table 4. Positive consequences**

	2004 Group ( <i>n</i> = 276)		2008 Group ( <i>n</i> = 239)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 515)	
	<i>n</i>	% agree or strongly agree	<i>n</i>	% agree or strongly agree	<i>n</i>	% agree or strongly agree
I am more willing to manage my risk factors because I know my neighbors are watching me.	275	29.5	238	23.2	513	31.2
I am more motivated to prevent reoffense so that I can prove to others that I am not a bad person. **	273	75.5	236	85.2	509	80.0
I think that community notification helps me prevent offending.	275	32.4	239	35.1	514	33.7
Because my neighbors know that I am a sex offender, I have less access to potential victims because people keep their children (or other potential victims) away from me.	272	29.7	237	26.2	509	28.1
Community notification has helped me to be more honest with people.	275	41.4	239	45.0	514	42.6
I find that most people who know that I am a sex offender are supportive of my recovery.	274	70.1	239	74.9	513	72.3
I agree that communities are safer when they know where sex offenders live.	274	43.1	239	46.8	513	44.8
I believe that it is fair for the community to know that I am a sex offender.	274	42.7	239	45.7	513	43.7

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Respondents were also asked about types of personal information that they felt was fair for their neighbors to know (see Table 5). Most reported it somewhat or very fair to disclose a description of their sex crime (60.5%). However, about one-half or more believed it unfair to disclose their home address (48.2%), photograph (55.7%), vehicle description (65.4%), work address (71.8%), license plate number (73.3%), and home telephone (84.8%). No significant between-group differences were found on any of these items.

**Table 5. Perceptions of fairness**

Type of disclosure	2004 Group ( <i>n</i> = 276)		2008 Group ( <i>n</i> = 239)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 515)	
	<i>n</i>	% unfair	<i>n</i>	% unfair	<i>n</i>	% unfair
Home address	271	46.9	235	49.8	506	48.2
Home telephone	272	83.8	235	86.0	507	84.8
Work address	269	69.9	231	74.0	500	71.8
Description of your sex crimes	271	41.3	235	37.4	506	39.5
Vehicle description	270	64.1	233	67.0	503	65.4
License plate number	272	70.2	233	76.8	505	73.3
Photographs	271	57.2	232	53.9	503	55.7

## Discussion

The current study adds to a growing body of literature that has examined the impact of community notification on the lives of registered sex offenders. It is the first study, to our knowledge, to compare the impact of community notification on sex offenders before and after passage of an Internet Megan's Law.

The study findings support the first hypothesis and are consistent with the prior research cited earlier. That is, sex offenders report experiencing multiple negative effects of community notification. This is a particularly important issue because the quality of sex offenders' community adjustment is directly linked to their success in living offense free lives. Sex offenders who have problems maintaining stable employment, have poor social supports, and who experience marked emotional distress have been found to reoffend sexually at higher rates than those who do not evidence these problems (Hanson, Harris, Scott, & Helmus, 2007; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). These problems are the very ones that many of the sex offenders in this study reported experiencing as a result of community notification.

The second hypothesis was that the percentage of sex offenders reporting negative experiences would increase following implementation of Vermont's publicly accessible sex offender Internet registry and it was not supported. As previously noted, only two between-group differences were found and they arguably cancel each other out. On the one hand, participants surveyed after implementation of the law were more likely to have reported that they felt "alone and isolated," and on the other hand, they were more likely to have reported that they were "more motivated to prevent reoffense" because their neighbors knew about their offending.

The lack of group differences could be because there were few substantive changes for sex offenders in treatment programs in Vermont after passage of the law. Only about one-quarter of them (23.5%) were placed on the Internet. No changes in the frequency with which authorities employed the eight other notification strategies listed in Table 2 occurred. Before the law, probation and parole officers required most sex offenders in treatment to notify their employer and landlord of their status as sex offenders and the same was true after passage of the law.

The third hypothesis was that the subgroup of offenders who were posted on the Internet would experience more negative consequences than those who were not. This hypothesis also was not supported. As one might expect, authorities employed more aggressive types of community notification for higher versus lower risk offenders. Those designated as having a *Heightened Notification Level* and were posted on the Internet were, compared to those who were not, more likely to have had flyers posted about them and had someone do door-to-door notification, albeit still at relatively low rates, 5.5% and 21.4% respectively. These slightly elevated levels of community notification, however, did not translate into this group reporting any increased rates of negative practical consequences such as job loss or harassment. The only negative psychological consequence that the 2008 Internet group reported, compared to the 2008 non-Internet group, was, "I feel alone and isolated because people know I am a sex offender." Conversely, a higher percentage of the 2008 Internet group reported believing that having neighbors informed about their sexual offending histories reduced their access to potential victims and that it was "fair" for the community to know about their sexual offending.

## Limitations

The present findings must be considered in light of the study's limitations. These include the problems inherent in using self report survey data. Participants were provided confidentiality but

they still may not have been forthright in their responses. Participants in the study were enrolled in treatment and they may differ in important ways from sex offenders who are not. Sex offenders who refuse to comply with supervision and treatment, for example, are at increased risk to sexually reoffend (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005) and consequently are a group that warrants further study.

An ideal experimental design would have ensured that everyone in the 2008 post-Internet legislation group would have been placed on the Internet versus none in the 2004 group. As a natural experiment, however, assignment was not able to be controlled and only 56 (23.4%) participants in the 2008 group were posted on the Internet. Despite this relative small sample size, it is still noteworthy that those posted on the Internet did not report any increased rates of negative practical consequences, compared to those who were not posted on the internet. The public had greater access to information about this sample of high risk sex offenders, but these offenders did not appear to suffer significant consequences. Of course, participants in the study were subject to multiple conditions of community placement, and this makes it difficult for participants and researchers to attribute accurately the influence of each.

A final caution concerns interpreting the significance of various consequences of community notification. In this and in similar studies cited, for example, job loss and residence disruption have been viewed as negative consequences of community notification. If, however, an individual's job or residence unduly increased an individual's risk to reoffend, such as increasing access to potential victims, then changing it could be a positive outcome of community notification. It was assumed that such a scenario in the present study was infrequent, but it was not examined. Other survey items similarly are subject to various interpretations and this is an area of further inquiry.

### **Comparisons Among Other States**

As of July 2009, seven data sets from six states were identified that used many of the same or similar questions on which the presented study was based. These studies examined community notification in Connecticut and Indiana (Levenson et al., 2007), Florida (Brannon et al., 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005), Kentucky (Tewksbury, 2005), New Jersey (Mercado et al., 2008) and Wisconsin (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a). Comparisons using omnibus chi-square analyses found no between-group differences for reported rates of physical assault or property damage among these seven studies and the present one. Between-group differences, however, were found among studies for other negative social consequences. These were "forced to leave residence,"  $\chi^2 (7, N = 1,350) = 119.144, p < .001$ ; "threatened or harassed,"  $\chi^2 (7, N = 1,350) = 81.197, p < .001$ ; "lost a job",  $\chi^2 (7, N = 1,350) = 44.814, p < .001$ ; and "family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damaged,"  $\chi^2 (5, N = 1,104) = 85.974, p < .001$ . In all cases, the percentage of Vermont respondents reporting these negative social consequences (see Table 3) was lower than in the other states for which similar data was available.

With respect to the negative psychosocial consequences of community notification listed in Table 3, no between-group differences were found among the five studies that have examined these issues; Connecticut, Florida (2005), Indiana, New Jersey and Vermont. Similarly, no between-group differences were found for any of the positive psychosocial consequences listed in Table 4 among the studies that examined these issues in four states; Connecticut, Florida (2005), Indiana and Vermont.

Different findings among these studies may be due to variations among survey methods, populations studied, community notification practices and regional views about offenders,

punishment and rehabilitation, each of being worthy of further study. The comparatively low rate of reported negative social consequences reported by participants in the present study may be related to the less aggressive and wide spread notification strategies reported being used in Vermont compared to some of the other states cited above. Strategies that might incite the public the most, such as flyers, door-to-door contacts, newspaper articles, and community meetings, were employed at comparatively low rates in Vermont, at 10% or less. Further, Vermont DOC policy generally dictated that each sex offender be supervised in the county in which he committed his crime. Since Vermont is a state of small cities, towns and rural areas comprised of a population with relative low transience rates, most offenders already were known to the communities in which they resided. Thus, fear of the unknown sex offender moving into town or the neighborhood was typically not a community concern. As well, all participants were under correctional supervision, and probation and parole officers often provided assurance to employers, landlords, and community members that they would closely supervise offenders.

### **Conclusions**

The public protection goal of legislatively mandated community notification is important but whether it is being achieved is questionable. In the present study, new community notification legislation, in the form of posting a relatively small group of higher risk sex offenders who were actively involved in treatment on a publicly accessible Internet website, did not appear to have a significant negative impact on participants. However, the entire sample of sex offenders in the study, consistent with other research findings in this area, reported substantial negative practical and psychosocial consequences of being publicly identified as sex offenders and some of these consequences have been linked to increased rates or reoffending. It is important for policy makers to balance public demand for notification with social policy that reduces sexual and other criminal offending. Such an approach may best focus community notification efforts on sex offenders who represent higher levels of risk and provide them services to address any unintended consequences that might increase their risk to reoffend.

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