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Abstract

The purpose of this review was to better understand the impact of community notification, known as “Megan’s Law,” on sex offenders’ reintegration into the community. Eight quantitative studies that examined the social and psychological impact of community notification on adult sex offenders ($N = 1,503$) were reviewed. The pattern of results across studies showed considerable similarities despite marked variability in the populations examined, survey methods used, and response rates obtained. Sex offenders rarely reported being the target of vigilante attacks. Substantial minorities reported exclusion from residence and job loss as social consequences of being publicly identified as sex offenders in their communities. The majority of offenders reported negative psychological consequences of notification but also identified benefits of knowing that others were monitoring their behavior. More intrusive notification strategies were associated with higher rates of socially destabilizing consequences. Results are discussed in terms of their policy and research implications.

Keywords

sex offender, community notification, Megan’s Law, offender reintegration, SORNA

The public has long known that sex offenders have lived among them. For decades, formal and informal information sources have alerted citizens about sex offenders who could be considered a potential threat. Information sources have included newspaper

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articles; television reports; court logs; and disclosures by criminal justice professionals, social service providers, victims, and other community members. About two decades ago, lawmakers in the United States began passing legislation prescribing how and about whom disclosures concerning convicted sex offenders should be made. The laws are premised 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). In 1994, the United States Congress passed the Jacob Wetterling Act 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 previously convicted sex offender in New Jersey, President Clinton signed what became known as Megan's Law, an amendment to the Wetterling Act that required states to implement community notification procedures. Most recently, in 2006, President Bush signed into law the Adam Walsh Act. Title 1 of this act, the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), set penalties for states that do not meet a minimum standard of registration and community notification.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia now have some type of registration and community notification laws but methods used among them vary markedly. Registration refers to the process of filing sex offenders' identifying information with local law enforcement (e.g., picture, sexual offending history, and home address). Notification refers to how this information is released to the public. Notification methods can include media releases, mailed or posted flyers, Internet websites, door-to-door contacts, and community meetings. In some states, the level of notification is matched to the offender's risk level and in others the same notification approach is used with all offenders (Center for Sex Offender Management, 2008).

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, sex offenders' family members, and sex offenders themselves perceive these laws.

Community Safety Impact

How well community notification laws have met the goal of reducing crime is a critical public policy and community safety issue and the topic of several studies and reviews (Drake & Aos, 2009; Socia & Stamatel, 2010; Welchans, 2005). Overall, these studies indicate that registration and community notification appears to have little if any effect on sex offender recidivism. Welchans (2005) reviewed the original empirical foundations of community notification policies and the two earliest studies

to examine its impact on sexual recidivism (Petrosino & Petrosino, 1999; Schram & Milloy, 1995), neither of which provided support for the effectiveness of the law.

Drake and Aos (2009) identified 18 studies that examined the relationship between registration and community notification and crime rates and conducted quantitative analyses on the nine studies that they judged were "rigorous" evaluations. Seven of these nine studies focused on the laws' "specific" deterrence effect. That is, did the laws appear to deter convicted sex offenders from reoffending. Their meta-analysis of these seven studies found no statistically significant effects on recidivism rates. In contrast, their analyses of the two other studies found indications of a "general" deterrence effect. That is, the law was associated with slight reductions in sexual offending among the public at large. Drake and Aos concluded that because of problems such as small sample sizes and variability among the studies, additional research in this area was necessary to inform public policy.

More recently, Socia and Stamatel (2010) conducted a narrative review of eight studies, six of which were included in the Drake and Aos (2009) review. They reached conclusions similar to those of Drake and Aos about the paucity of evidence for the effectiveness of these laws in reducing sexual reoffense rates and the methodological limitations inherent in this literature.

Since publication of these three reviews (Drake & Aos, 2009; Socia & Stamatel, 2010; Welchans, 2005), Letourneau, Levenson, Brandyptheadhyay, Armstrong, and Sinha (2010) found support for a general deterrence effect for registration and community notification in South Carolina as did two studies of other jurisdictions in Drake and Aos' review (Prescott & Rockoff, 2008; Shao & Li, 2006). Two other recent studies examined the specific deterrence effect of community notification, one in New Jersey (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010) and the other in Iowa (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010), and neither found evidence of a significant intervention effect.

The two community notification studies examined in this literature that found specific deterrence effects both examined a tier system in which only higher risk offenders were subjected to enhanced community notification (Barnoski, 2005; Duwe & Donnay, 2008). These findings have led Duwe and Donnay to recommend against community notification with moderate- and low-risk sex offenders.

The effectiveness of these policies of course depends on providing the public accurate information, and this is often a problem. For example, sex offenders report that information listed about them on registries is often inaccurate (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2002). Registrants' addresses can become quickly out of date as Turley and Hutzler (2001) found in West Virginia, where almost 40% of registered sex offenders had changed addresses since they first registered. In an examination of the Kentucky registry, Tewksbury found that approximately a quarter of registrants' addresses were invalid. In Vermont, state auditors found what they considered to be critical or significant errors in three quarters of a sample of 57 registrants' registry records, including a small number of sex offenders who were incorrectly omitted, added, retained, or deleted from the registry (Salmon, 2010).

Perspective of the Public

Despite the questionable deterrence effect of community notification laws, considerable public support for them exists. A national Gallop telephone survey found that 94% of Americans favor laws requiring child molesters to register (Saad, 2005). In a Florida survey, 76% of respondents indicated that all sex offenders, regardless of their risk, should be subject to community notification and 83% said they believed community notification was effective in reducing sexual offending (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). In recent telephone surveys in Washington State (Lieb & Nunlist, 2008) and Nebraska (Anderson & Sample, 2008), 78% and 80% of respondents, respectively, indicated that they felt safer knowing about sex offenders living in their communities.

Nevertheless, only a minority of community members appear to access publically available information about sex offenders in their locales. Saad (2005) reported that only about a third (38%) of respondents to a national Gallop poll were aware that their state had a sex offender registry. Of those respondents, only 39% reported that they viewed the registry. Similarly, of residents responding to a Nebraska and a Michigan telephone survey, only about a third reported that they had accessed information on the registry, 35% in Nebraska (Anderson & Sample, 2008) and 37% in Michigan (Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009).

Overall, only a marginal association appears to exist between community notification and protective actions by the public against sexual offenses (Anderson & Sample, 2008; Caputo & Brodsky, 2004; Socia & Stamatel, 2010). In an Ohio study, those who were more likely to take precautionary measures and engage in community reporting behaviors were those who were already motivated enough to attend public community notification meetings (Beck & Travis, 2004).

Perspective of Law Enforcement, Corrections, and Mental Health Professionals

Among professionals charged with managing sex offenders, law enforcement officials have shown the most support for community notification, believing it leads to improved community surveillance of sex offenders and deters them from reoffending (Farkas & Zevitz, 2000; Gaines, 2006; Redlich, 2001). Law enforcement agencies, however, can incur substantial labor and capital costs implementing and carrying out notification activities (Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro, & Veysey, 2008). High costs, the potential for public overreaction, and harassment of offenders are common concerns of law enforcement (Gaines, 2006).

Surveys of probation and parole officers also have highlighted resource concerns. In Wisconsin, for example, officers reported needing markedly more time assisting offenders who were subject to community notification in securing housing and employment than those who were not (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a).

Mental health professions appear to be the most skeptical about the benefits of community notification. In a recent nationwide survey of 499 sex offender treatment providers, only 36% reported that they thought community notification increased community safety, whereas 40% said that it had no effect and 24% said it reduced community safety (McGrath, Cumming, Burchard, Zeoli, & Ellerby, 2010). In two other treatment provider surveys, Malesky and Keim (2001) reported 70% of respondents felt community notification gave the public a false sense of security, as did 74% of respondents in a survey by Levenson, Fortney, and Baker (2010). Levenson et al. found that a greater percentage of victim services professionals than offender services professionals supported notification laws (45% vs. 31%).

Perspective of Family Members

Community notification appears to have considerable negative impact on the family members of sex offenders (Farkas & Miller, 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). The arguably most comprehensive of these studies analyzed the results of a national online survey of 584 family members of registered sex offenders (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009). Among the respondents, 82% reported financial hardship, 44% reported being harassed, and 7% reported being physically assaulted or injured as a result of their relationship with the offender. Of the 95 children of the registered sex offenders referenced in this study, the nonoffending parent reported that 80% of the children experienced anger, 77% suffered from depression, 65% felt left out with other children, and 47% experienced harassment (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). Adult participants also endorsed experiencing several psychological consequences that they attributed to notification, such as stress (68%), feeling alone and isolated (55%), shame and embarrassment (49%), loss of friends or a close relationship (36%), and fear for one's safety (33%) (Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009).

Experiences of Sex Offenders

As is detailed further in the Results and Discussion sections of this article, multiple surveys indicate that sex offenders report several social and psychological consequences of community notification (Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009; Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008; Robbers, 2009; Tewksbury, 2005; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). These studies indicate that slightly less than 1/10th of offenders report being the target of vigilante attacks, but almost 1/3rd report job loss. Exclusion from residence and harassment were also common concerns. The subset of these studies that examined the psychological impact of notification found that about 50% or more of offenders reported negative consequences such as stress, shame,

hopelessness, and loss of social supports (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007; McGrath et al., 2009; Mercado et al., 2008). Conversely, these same studies also found that many offenders reported being more motivated to control their behavior knowing that others were monitoring them.

Overall, however, sex offenders commonly report that community notification laws are unfair (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; McGrath et al., 2009; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007). Surveys conducted in Florida (Levenson & Cotter, 2005) and Vermont (McGrath et al., 2009), for example, found that 49% and 57% of offenders, respectively, said it was "unfair" to publically post their pictures, and 47% and 65% responded that it was "unfair" to post their home address. Offenders' perceptions of fairness are important because strong relationships have been found between offenders' views of the legitimacy of criminal sanctions and compliance with those sanctions (Makkai & Braithwaite, 1994; Sherman, 1993). That is, offenders are less likely to comply with laws they view as unfair.

Research examining sex offenders' experiences of community notification has focused almost exclusively on male offenders. Tewksbury (2004), however, found that female sex offenders in Kentucky and Indiana have reported similar rates of negative social consequences to those of males in the previously cited studies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present review was to summarize the quantitative literature on the social and psychological impact of community notification on sex offenders themselves. Other purposes of the review were to examine the differential effects of community notification among jurisdictions and, where they exist, attempt to account for these differences. To our knowledge, this type of quantitative examination of this literature has not been conducted. It was hoped that the review's findings would provide useful information to policy makers in weighing the potential benefits and disadvantages of this type of legislation.

Method

Selection of Studies

Research reports selected for this review were those that used the same or similar survey questions that formed the foundation for the first published quantitative studies in this area (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Tewksbury, 2005; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b). Survey questions in these exemplar studies examined the social and psychological impact of community notification on adult male sex offenders.

To locate studies comparable to the exemplar studies cited above, computer searches of PsycLIT, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, National Criminal Justice Reference System, and Google Scholar were conducted using the following key terms: *sex* offend**,

community notification, registration, SORNA, and Megan's Law. Additional research reports, published before a cut-off date of December 31, 2009, were sought through a review of articles and conference programs in this area, and inquiries of colleagues. Eight studies composed of 10 data sets met criteria for inclusion in this review (see Table 1). All studies located were from the United States.

Data Analysis

Each study was considered a case for data analysis purposes. The McGrath et al. (2009) Vermont study contained two data sets but they were reported as one study because the samples did not overlap and evidenced few between-group differences. The Levenson, D'Amora, and Hern (2007) study also contained two data sets, one from Connecticut and Indiana each, and they were analyzed and reported as separate studies where data from the published report made this possible.

Data from each study was coded using frequencies and percentages derived from the published reports listed in Table 1. As would be expected, the type and wording of survey questions used among studies showed some variability. Only questions that the authors and an independent expert (Georgia Cumming) all agreed were substantially equivalent were compared between studies (see Table 2). For example, studies that examined the impact of notification on housing used survey questions with slightly different wording such as, "Forced to leave residence?" and "Loss of home?" but the meaning of these variations was considered equivalent. On the other hand, the broad question "Threatened or harassed?" was not considered equivalent to questions that specified that "neighbors" perpetrated the threats or harassments. Thus, response rates to these variations of questions about threats and harassment were examined separately.

Four studies used several of the exact same Likert-type 5-point scale questions that Levenson and Cotter (2005) used to examine the psychological consequences of notification on offenders (see Table 5). Following these authors, answers to these questions were coded and reported as dichotomous categories. That is, the percentage responding *agree* or *strongly agree* were compared to those responding *I don't know*, *strongly disagree*, or *disagree*.

Descriptive statistics were used to examine demographic characteristics among studies. Omnibus chi-square analyses were conducted to identify main effects across studies. Where main effects were evident, individual chi-square analyses were conducted to illustrate specific between-group differences. Because a large number of descriptive analyses were conducted, alpha was set at .01 to address concerns about inflation of Type I error. Where social and psychological consequences items evidenced significant between-group differences, linear regression analyses were conducted using notification strategies as independent variables to examine causal relationships. The scope of inferential analyses was restricted to the significant differences found in the descriptive analyses. Consequently, these analyses were not at the same risk of Type I error inflation and alpha was set at .05.

Table 1. Characteristics of Studies

Study	McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009	Levenson, D'Amora, & Herr, 2007	Levenson & Cotter, 2005	Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007	Robbers, 2009	Tewksbury, 2005	Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008	Zeivit & Farkas, 2000b
State	Vermont	Connecticut and Indiana	Florida	Florida	Virginia	Kentucky	New Jersey	Wisconsin
Designation	VT	CT & IN	FL '05	FL '07	VA	KY	NJ	WI
n	515	239	183	125	153	121	137	30
% of N	34	16	12	8	10	8	9	2
Jurisdiction	Statewide	Six cities	Two cities	One county	Four counties	Statewide	Statewide	Statewide
Sample type	Convenience	Convenience	Convenience	Convenience	Random	Random	Exhaustive	Nonrandom
Participants	Clients in treatment	Clients in treatment	Clients in treatment	Clients in treatment	Offenders on internet	Offenders on internet	High risk registrants	High risk probationers
Survey method	Questionnaire in treatment	Questionnaire in treatment	Questionnaire in treatment	Questionnaire in treatment	Questionnaire mailed ^a	Questionnaire mailed	Questionnaire mailed	Face-to-face interview
Response rate (%)	67	82	85	—	42	15	10	68
Age 25-64 ^b	80	85	86	—	—	—	81	—
Married (%)	25	28	25	—	25	—	30	—
Race ^c (%)								
White	90	65	72	75	60	89	59	70
Black	1	22	13	10	—	9	28	17
Hispanic	2	9	11	4	7	—	12	10
Victim type ^d (%)								
Male only	8	6	15	—	—	12	18	—
Female only	76	84	75	74	—	61	75	—
Child only	73	71	78	75	—	64	82	—
Adult only	22	13	10	9	—	—	19	—
Family	63	54	64	63	—	—	13	—
Nonfamily	28	31	19	26	—	20	72	—

a. Of the 153 respondents, 30 were also interviewed by telephone and 9 sent an anonymous letter.

b. Mean ages for FL '07, VA, KY, and WI were provided and were 40, 46, 44, and 40 years, respectively.

c. Less than 100% representation indicates presence of other minorities.

d. Less than 100% representation indicates offenses in both categories.

Table 2. Social Consequences by Percent Responding "Yes"

	VT	IN	CT	FL '05	FL '07	VA	KY	NJ	WI	M	χ^2
<i>n</i>	515	148	91	183	125	153	121	137	30		
Employment											
Lost a job	20	19	23	27	31	49	43	52	57	30	48.336**
Accommodation											
Had to move out of a home or apartment because a landlord found out	6	5	18	20	–	–	–	24	–	12	20.219**
Forced to leave residence	8	–	–	–	12	27	45	–	83	19	106.457**
Social supports											
Family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damaged	9	18	14	19	–	18	–	34	–	16	18.821*
Safety											
Threatened or harassed by a neighbor	–	–	–	–	30	–	47	48	77	44	22.594**
Threatened or harassed	14	20	22	33	–	22	–	–	–	20	8.505
Property damaged	6	17	20	21	–	–	–	27	–	14	13.121
Physically assaulted or injured	4	8	12	5	13	–	16	11	–	8	11.653

Note: VT = McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009 (Vermont); IN = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Indiana); CT = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Connecticut); FL '05 = Levenson & Cotter, 2005 (Florida); FL '07 = Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007 (Florida); VA = Robbers, 2009 (Virginia); KY = Tewksbury, 2005 (Kentucky); NJ = Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008 (New Jersey); WI = Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b (Wisconsin).
* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Results

Characteristics of Studies

Characteristics of the studies are detailed in Table 1. To facilitate comparison of results between studies, especially those reported in the chi-square matrices in studies are listed in all the tables in order from those reporting the overall lowest frequency of negative consequences to the highest frequency.

Table 3. Social Stability Consequences by Percentage Responding Yes and Between-State χ^2 Statistics (*df* = 1)

	VT	IN	CT	FL '05	FL '07	VA	KY	NJ	WI
<i>n</i>	515	148	91	183	125	153	121	137	30
"Lost a job"									
%Yes	20	19	23	27	31	29	43	52	57
VT	–	0.04	0.18	0.98	2.28	11.99**	8.05*	14.01**	17.54**
IN		–	0.38	1.39	2.88	13.24**	9.10*	15.34**	19.00**
CT			–	0.32	1.19	9.39*	5.91	11.21**	14.45**
FL '05				–	0.28	6.37	3.54	7.91*	10.71*
FL '07					–	4.05	1.86	5.31	7.68*
VA						–	0.43	0.09	0.60
KY							–	0.91	2.05
NJ								–	0.23
WI									–
"Threatened or harassed by a neighbor"									
%Yes	14	20	22	33	30	22	47	48	77
VT	–	1.26	2.04	8.18*	6.26	2.12	18.55**	19.35**	44.56**
IN		–	0.10	3.19	2.00	0.12	10.88**	11.53**	33.50**
CT			–	2.20	1.23	0.01	9.06*	9.66*	30.56**
FL '05				–	0.14	2.11	2.45	2.78	17.60**
FL '07					–	1.17	3.75	4.15	20.65**
VA						–	8.89*	9.48*	30.27**
KY							–	0.01	7.53*
NJ								–	6.73*
WI									–
"Family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damaged"									
%Yes	8	18	14	19	–	18	–	37	–
VT	–	3.32	1.29	3.92	–	3.50	–	15.15**	–
IN		–	0.50	0.03	–	0.01	–	4.92	–
CT			–	0.76	–	0.57	–	8.33*	–
FL '05				–	–	0.01	–	4.25	–
FL '07					–	–	–	–	–
VA						–	–	4.71	–
KY							–	–	–
NJ								–	–
WI									–
"Had to move out of a home or apartment because a landlord found out"									
%Yes	6	5	18	20	–	–	–	24	–
VT	–	0.09	6.00	7.54*	–	–	–	10.80*	–
IN		–	7.35*	9.00*	–	–	–	12.45**	–
CT			–	0.11	–	–	–	0.86	–

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	VT	IN	CT	FL '05	FL '07	VA	KY	NJ	WI
FL '05				–	–	–	–	0.36	–
FL '07					–	–	–	–	–
VA						–	–	–	–
KY							–	–	–
NJ								–	–
WI									–
"Forced to leave residence"									
% Yes	10	–	–	–	12	27	45	–	83
VT	–	–	–	–	0.24	8.44*	23.04**	–	57.96**
IN		–	–	–	0.33	3.63	15.23**	–	47.18**
CT			–	–	2.94	0.12	3.11	–	24.86**
FL '05				–	–	–	–	–	–
FL '07					–	6.02	19.35**	–	53.06**
VA						–	4.41	–	28.00**
KY							–	–	11.08**
NJ								–	–
WI									–

Note: VT = McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009 (Vermont); IN = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Indiana); CT = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Connecticut); FL '05 = Levenson & Cotter, 2005 (Florida); FL '07 = Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007 (Florida); VA = Robbers, 2009 (Virginia); KY = Tewksbury, 2005 (Kentucky);

NJ = Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008 (New Jersey); WI = Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b (Wisconsin).

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

The total sample of eight studies was composed of 1,503 adult sex offenders. Almost all participants were male (99.7%). The vast majority were White and between the ages of 25 and 64 years. Mean ages were reported in the Brannon et al. (2007), Zevitz and Farkas (2000b), Tewksbury (2005), and Robbers (2009) samples and respectively were 40, 40, 44, and 46 years.

Based on available data, victim characteristics between studies were very similar. Most victims were children and female. Among the study variables in Table 1, a significant between-group difference was evident only for the percentage of individuals who offended against family members, $\chi^2(5, n = 1229) = 60.102, p < .0001$. This difference appears to be attributable to the New Jersey outlier sample (Mercado et al., 2008) in which a comparatively large number of participants offended against non-family members, which is a risk factor that is considered in placing offenders on their high-risk registry.

As shown in Table 2, of the eight social consequence items examined, five showed statistically significant between-groups differences. These were for "lost a job," "had to move out of a home or apartment because a landlord found out," "forced to leave residence," "family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damage," "threatened or harassed by a neighbor," and "threatened or harassed." Table 3

Table 4. Psychological Consequences by Percent Responding Agree or Strongly Agree

	VT	CT & IN	FL '05	NJ	M	χ^2
<i>n</i>	515	239	183	137		
Negative consequences						
Lost friends or a close relationship because of Megan's Law.	46	50	52	61	51	5.34
Interferes with my recovery by causing more stress in my life.	50	62	71	78	60	6.53
Feel alone and isolated because of Megan's Law.	38	54	64	63	49	7.68
Afraid for my safety because of Megan's Law.	32	46	46	55	40	5.81
Shame and embarrassment due to Megan's Law keep me from engaging in activities.	49	58	67	69	57	4.04
Sometimes Megan's Law makes me feel hopeless—"No one believes I can change so why even try?"	30	44	49	47	38	5.45
Less hope for the future now that I will be a registered sex offender for life.	42	55	72	56	52	8.32
Positive consequences						
I agree that communities are safer when they know where sex offenders live.	45	35	32	26	37	5.39
I am more willing to manage my risk factors because I know my neighbors are watching me.	31	31	36	—	32	0.49
I am more motivated to prevent reoffense so that I can prove to others that I am not a bad person.	80	74	66	—	74	1.35
I think that registration and notification help me to prevent offending.	43	22	22	—	27	3.52
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.	28	20	22	—	24	1.52
Megan's Law has helped me to be more honest with people.	43	32	26	—	35	4.21
I find that most people who know that I am a sex offender are supportive of my recovery.	72	58	52	—	62	3.58

Note: No omnibus χ^2 statistics were significant at $p < .01$. VT = McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009 (Vermont); CT & IN = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Connecticut and Indiana); FL '05 = Levenson & Cotter, 2005 (Florida); NJ = Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008 (New Jersey).

Table 5. Community Notification Strategies Used by Percent Responding "Yes"

	CT									M	χ^2
	VT	& IN	IN only	FL '05	FL '07	VA	KY	NJ	WI		
<i>n</i>	515	239	148	183	125	153	121	137	30		
Personal information posted on the internet	11 ^a	–	100	100	83	100	100	100	–	73	2.48
Flyers posted in your neighborhood	3	3	–	30	–	–	–	–	–	8	42.12**
Door-to-door notification	9	8	–	28	–	–	–	–	–	12	16.70**
Community meeting held	3	5	–	14	–	–	–	–	100 ^a	9	9.36*
Flyer sent home from school with children	0	–	–	12	–	–	–	–	–	3	12.00**
Media outlet has released information post-trial	10	10	–	18	–	–	–	–	–	12	3.37

Note: VT = McGrath, Cumming, & Lasher, 2009 (Vermont); CT & IN = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Connecticut and Indiana); IN only = Levenson, D'Amora, & Hern, 2007 (Indiana); FL '05 = Levenson & Cotter, 2005 (Florida); FL '07 = Brannon, Levenson, Fortney, & Baker, 2007 (Florida); VA = Robbers, 2009 (Virginia); KY = Tewksbury, 2005 (Kentucky); NJ = Mercado, Alvarez, & Levenson, 2008 (New Jersey); WI = Zevitz & Farkas, 2000b (Wisconsin).

a. To reduce Type I error, these two outliers were not included in the χ^2 analysis.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

shows matrices of chi-square statistics and individual sample responding rates for these five items.

Table 4 shows offenders' responses across four studies to a series of questions originally used by Levenson and Cotter (2005) about psychological consequences of notification. No significant differences were found.

Table 5 shows the percentage of participants in each study who were subject to various community notification strategies. Significant between-group differences were found for the items "flyers posted in your neighborhood," "door-to-door notification," and "flyer sent home from school with children." Statistically significant differences were also found for "community meeting held," $\chi^2(3, n = 967) = 213.41, p < .0001$. However, because the Wisconsin sample was made up completely of offenders subject to community meetings, the 100% reporting rate markedly inflated the risk of Type I error. Excluding data from the Wisconsin sample still showed a main effect, $\chi^2(2, n = 937) = 9.364, p = .009$. Significant differences found for "posted on the Internet," $\chi^2(6, n = 1382) = 77.835, p < .0001$, also were likely inflated as Vermont was an outlier

on this item. Excluding Vermont data from this analysis yielded no statistical significance, $\chi^2(5, n = 867) = 2.479, p = .780$.

In the final set of analyses, multiple linear regressions were conducted to establish whether the social consequences that demonstrated significant between-group differences were dependent on community notification strategies. A significant relationship was found between "community meeting held" and the two social consequences shown to have significant between-group differences: "lost a job," $R^2 = .995(3), p = .003$, and "family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damaged," $R^2 = .990(3), p = .005$.

Discussion

The present review summarizes a growing body of empirical literature that has examined the experiences and perceptions of adult male sex offenders subject to community notification. Across the eight studies reviewed, participants consistently reported experiencing a variety of negative as well as positive effects that they attribute to being publicly identified as sex offenders within their communities.

Reports of physical violence against offenders and their property were relatively rare and showed no statistically significant variation across studies. Overall, only 8% of all participants reported being "physically assaulted or injured" and 14% reported having their "property damaged." The other consequence showing no variation among studies was "threatened or harassed" (20%).

The means for the other five social consequence variables showed some variability among studies. Overall, however, almost a third (30%) reported job loss. In terms of accommodation, 12% reported that they had to move out of a home or apartment because a landlord found out and when the question was worded more broadly to include loss of housing for any reason, 19% responded affirmatively. With respect to safety issues, 16% reported that a family member or cohabitant was harassed, assaulted, or had property damaged and 44% reported being threatened or harassed by neighbors.

Significant between-study variations were found for these last five items in participants' response rates, and the variations showed a relatively consistent pattern. In general, participants in the Wisconsin, New Jersey, and Kentucky samples reported significantly higher rates of negative social consequences, whereas Vermont, Connecticut, and Indiana reported significantly lower rates (see Table 2). The Virginia and two Florida samples showed inconsistency in their relation to the higher and lower reporting rate groups, but generally showed relatively moderate reported rates of these social consequences.

Variations in reported negative social consequences among studies may be related to variations in community notification strategies used in jurisdictions. A higher percentage of offenders being subject to "community meetings" appeared to account, at least in part, for the increased reported experiences of social consequences examined here. Although other community notification strategies showed no statistically significant

impact on social consequences as evidenced by the multiple linear regression analyses conducted here, this may be because many studies examined here did not report data on types of community notification to which offenders were subject. These findings suggest that the more intrusive the community notification strategies used, the more negative the social impact on the offender.

Rates of reported psychological consequences did not seem to be influenced by the type of notification strategies used. As shown in Table 4, depending on the item and the study, between roughly 40% and 60% of participants reported negative psychological consequences such as loss of friends, feeling lonely and isolated, embarrassment, and loss of hope. The highest overall rate of negative psychological consequences concerned the 60% of participants who reported that community notification interfered with their recovery. An explanation for the general homogeneity across groups is complicated by the fact that extensive data on psychological consequences was available for only four studies, and data on these items were obtained from studies with similar samples that used the same survey methods.

Many participants also acknowledged several positive outcomes of community notification. About one third (37%) of all participants agreed that communities are safer when they know where sex offenders live and almost three quarters (74%) opined that community notification made them more motivated to prevent themselves from reoffending.

Principles of Effective Correctional Intervention

The present findings also can be examined more broadly with respect to three core principles of effective correctional intervention: risk, need, and responsivity (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Hanson, Bourgon, Helmus, & Hodgson, 2009). We expect that application of these principles will prove to be key elements of community notification policies that are associated with reduced reoffense rates.

The risk principle is founded on research demonstrating that correctional interventions are more effective when they focus on offenders who are likely to reoffend (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Community notification plans that follow the risk principle would use a tier system in which more intensive notification would be reserved for higher risk offenders and minimal or no notification for lower risk offenders. Indeed, one could hypothesize that of the pre- to post-implementation studies previously reviewed, the two that found overall reductions in sexual reoffending rates did so because they employed a tier system (Barnoski, 2005; Duwe & Donnay, 2008) in which only higher risk offenders were subjected to enhanced community notification interventions. Another tenet of the risk principle is that delivering intensive services to lower risk offenders, such as intensive community notification, can actually increase rates of reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

In the present review, only two studies (New Jersey and Wisconsin, see Table 1) reported participants' risk level. Both of these studies were composed of high-risk offenders and, consistent with the risk principle, all participants in these studies were

subject to intrusive community notification strategies. Every participant in the Wisconsin sample was subject to a community meeting and every participant in the New Jersey sample was subject to an Internet posting of personal information. Participants in these two studies also reported some of the highest rates of negative social consequences (see Table 2). The unintended negative consequences of community notification to high-risk sex offenders may be justified for public safety reasons but are likely not justified for offenders who pose minimal risk to the community.

States unfortunately will be deterred from following the risk principle in developing community notification policies if the federal government requires them to implement Title 1 of the Adam Walsh Act (2006), the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA). SORNA, in theory, follows the risk principle by dividing sex offenders into one of three risk tiers and matching the offenders' registration and community notification period accordingly. It is doubtful, however, that the SORNA tier system correctly classifies sex offenders' risk to sexually reoffend because it is based solely on crime of conviction. In a study that examined the efficacy of the SORNA risk classification system, Freeman and Sandler (2010) found that sex offenders in New York State who were classified by SORNA guidelines as low risk actually sexually reoffended at higher rates than those classified as moderate or high risk. This is not a surprising result. Crime of conviction does not always reflect an offender's actual sex crime, as sex offense cases are often difficult to prosecute and plea bargaining to lesser offenses is common. An empirically supported risk assessment approach would be an actuarial one. Actuarial risk prediction has consistently outperformed other methods and is the preferred approach with sex offenders (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2007).

Jurisdictions employing community notification plans that follow the need principle would provide assistance to individuals who experience unintended consequences of notification that might increase their risk to reoffend. In the present review, these consequences included disruption of residence, job, and social supports. Because these problems are linked with increased rates of sexual reoffending (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2007), they are called criminogenic needs. These problem areas are the socially destabilizing impacts of notification that Prescott and Rockoff (2008) hypothesized resulted in a higher rate of sexual reoffending among known sex offenders in their recent multistate study.

Considerable evidence indicates that sex offenders who successfully address their criminogenic needs can reduce their risk to reoffend (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2006; Hanson et al., 2009; Lösel & Schmucker, 2005). Even among high-risk sex offenders, evidence exists that those with positive social supports reoffend at significantly lower rates than those who do not (Wilson, Cortoni, & McWhinnie, 2009).

Since most of the subjects in the studies selected for this review were surveyed, residency restriction laws have become more common and this has increased the challenges sex offenders face in finding appropriate housing and employment and maintaining prosocial support networks (Chajewski & Mercado, 2009; Zandbergen & Hart, 2009; Zandbergen, Levenson, & Hart, 2010). Residency restriction laws prohibit sex offenders from living within close proximity to schools and locations

where children congregate. As a result, sex offenders are often restricted to living in less desirable neighborhoods (Chajewski & Mercado, 2009; Mustaine, Tewksbury, & Stengel, 2006a, 2006b; Tewksbury, 2007; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2008), regardless of whether these offenders have child victims (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2007). These accommodations are often distant from public transportation and population centers, thereby restricting access to important resources such as employment, treatment programs, and social services (Appelbaum, 2008; Barnes, Dukes, Tewksbury, & De Troye, 2009; Burchfield & Mingus, 2008; Mustaine et al., 2006b; Zgoba, Levenson, & McKee, 2009). As well, registered sex offenders are often prohibited from using the Internet (Cumming & McGrath, 2005) and this limits their ability use this technology to search for jobs and communicate with friends and family (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2010). Widespread expansion of residency restrictions on sex offenders is particularly concerning given that recent research has found no relationship between the distance from schools and day cares and reoffending (Duwe, Donnay, & Tewksbury, 2008; Levenson, Zgoba, & Tewksbury, 2007; Zandbergen et al., 2010).

Consideration of the responsivity principle in the present context concerns how community notification might affect offenders' responsiveness to rehabilitation efforts. By definition, community notification publicly labels sex offenders. Labeling theory posits that stigmatizing labels result in devaluation and discrimination and negatively shapes behavior, which may undermine individuals' motivation to change and engage in treatment (Rosenfield, 1997). Robbers (2009) found that less than 3% of sex offenders surveyed in Virginia felt that being labeled a sex offender provided motivation to understand and change their behavior. Sex offenders' responses in the present review lend some credibility to these concerns, although the reported positive psychological consequences may have moderated the negative impact to some degree (see Table 4). Consideration of these responsivity issues along with the risk principle would argue again for a tier system in which only higher risk offenders would be subject to community notification and lower risk offenders would avoid widespread negative labeling that could undermine successful rehabilitation.

Limitations

The present findings must be considered in light of the review's limitations. All of the studies in this review were based on self-report data. Although all participants were provided confidentiality, they still may not have been forthright in their responses. In addition, sex offenders in the studies reviewed were subject to various conditions of community placement, such as Internet posting; active community notification; residency restrictions; and multiple probation, parole, and community treatment requirements. It is difficult or impossible for participants and researchers to attribute the influence of each accurately.

The composition of the samples varied considerably. There were notable differences in how samples were obtained; in response rates; and the region, size, and population density of the jurisdictions sampled (see Table 1). Survey methods varied as

well. Missing data were also a concern. For instance, the samples in which participants reported the highest negative social impacts were the same ones that reported the least amount of data on psychological impact and community strategies used. Few studies reported data on offenders' risk levels. It is possible that important differences among studies in these domains may account for some of the variance reported in this review. Unfortunately, the amount and quality of data reported prohibited statistical analyses for all but the most straightforward comparisons.

Samples in this review showing the highest rates of negative impact (Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, and Wisconsin) were all obtained through some selection process using the entire pool of registered offenders in those states, as opposed to those showing generally lower rates of impact, of which all used convenience samples of sex offenders enrolled in group treatment (Vermont, Connecticut, Indiana, and two Florida studies). About two thirds of participants in the Virginia sample reported attending therapy programs but it is not known what percentage of sex offenders in the other higher negative impact studies were or had been enrolled in treatment. This is an important issue as treatment involvement can affect how offenders report the impact of being subject to community notification. Involvement in treatment can provide offenders social support and mitigate the impact of negative emotional appraisals (Drapeau, Körner, Brunet, & Granger, 2004). However, treatment participants' responses may have been biased based on the type of therapeutic relationship that they had with treatment providers.

Conclusion

Today in the United States the public is strongly in favor of community notification, and legislators—if judged on their voting records—are as well. The public protection goals of legislatively mandated community notification are laudable but whether they are being achieved requires more study. Sex offenders across the studies reviewed reported substantial negative practical and psychosocial consequences of being publicly identified as sex offenders. Evidence linking some of these consequences, such as loss of job, residence, and social supports, to increased rates of reoffending should not be ignored (Freeman & Sandler, 2010; Hanson et al., 2009). Implementation and maintenance costs of community notification policies also can result in considerable financial costs to tax payers (Zgoba et al., 2008).

It is important for policy makers to balance the public demand for notification with social policy that incorporates the principles of what works in reducing 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 social destabilization consequences that might increase their risk to reoffend.

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