An Analysis of SORNA Compliance and Attitudes Among Florida Sex Offenders

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Abstract

Registered sex offenders can find sex offender registration and notification (SORN) requirements disruptive to finding employment, housing, and cultivating social stigmatization that causes other difficulties. To further unpack these issues, the scope of challenges and reasons why certain registered individuals fail to comply with SORN standards were investigated. Toward this end, a survey was sent to the email addresses of registered sex offenders in Florida, yielding 967 respondents. The survey assessed their opinions of and compliance with SORN requirements. In addition to holding unfavorable views of sex offender public registries, results indicated that most respondents experienced difficulties due to SORN, such as finding jobs, obtaining an education, and locating housing. Notably, the most common reason for failure to comply with SORN standards was forgetting to meet some SORN obligation obligations. The second most reported reason for compliance failure was not understanding the SORN requirements. It is recommended that registering agencies periodically notify registered individuals of upcoming registration deadlines and other requirements. Registering agencies should also establish orientations for newly registered individuals to provide essential information pertaining to SORN requirements and resources available to registered individuals.

Keywords: SORNA, sex offender registration, compliance

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The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) was implemented with the passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 by the Federal government (The United States Department of Justice, 2020) to strengthen sex offender registration systems nationwide. However, the requirement for sex offenders to register and registries being made public in the United States began in the 1990s with the passage of policies such as the Wetterling Act and Megan's Law. In concert with such legislation, individuals convicted of sex offenses in the United States are generally placed on sex offender public registries. This occurs even if the individual's adjudication is withheld. In addition, sex offenders have to abide by their state's sex offender registration and notification requirements. Presently, all U.S. states and territories have public registries of sex offenders and requirements for sex offenders to register. However, many states and territories have not yet substantially implemented SORNA (The United States Department of Justice, 2020).

While it is unrealistic to expect sex offenders to embrace laws that limit their mobility and increase stigmatization, it is critical to understand stressors caused by and the impediments to compliance with sex offender registration requirements. Stress is a known driver of recidivistic behavior among sex offenders (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). In addition, compliance failure unnecessarily burdens criminal justice system resources. Given these considerations, the present study seeks to vet registered sex offenders concerning their opinions of sex offender registration and notification (SORN) requirements and impediments to successful compliance. Toward this end, after a thorough IRB review and cooperation with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), information concerning registered sex offender attitudes and compliance was culled from a survey sent out by email to

967 registered offenders in Florida. Before presenting findings and recommendations, background information is presented.

<div align="center">**Background**</div>

Evolution of Sex Offender Registries

The Wetterling Act was enacted in 1993 by the Federal government after the 1989 abduction and murder of 11-year-old Jacob Wetterling in Minnesota, who was missing for 27 years until his remains were found in 2016. The Wetterling Act requires U.S. states and territories to form registries of sex offenders in the U.S. for use by law enforcement with the option of making the registries available to the public. However, Megan's Law, a federal law passed in 1996, requires all U.S. states and territories to make sex offender registries public. It was passed after the abduction, sexual assault, and murder of seven-year-old Megan Kanka in New Jersey in 1994 by Jesse K. Timmendequas, a neighbor from across the street who, unbeknownst to Megan's parents, had been previously convicted for sexually assaulting minors (Legal Information Institute, 2020). The law gave U.S. states and territories some discretion in how the sex offender registry was disseminated to the public and what information was made public.

The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act was passed in 2006 at the Federal level, which was named after the abduction and murder of Adam Walsh in Florida in 1981. The law aims to strengthen the nation's sex offender registration system by creating greater conformity among the states' public registries and notification requirements. The act contains the SORN provision, which sets minimum standards that the states must follow, including the types of information that must be collected from registered sex offenders and made public, when and

how frequently sex offenders must register to keep the registration current, and the criminal punishments to be prescribed to sex offenders that fail to comply with SORN requirements.

The sex offender policies were passed with the goal of reducing recidivism among sex offenders. While the sex offender policies are popular among the public (Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007; Phillips, 1998; Proctor, Badzinski, & Johnson, 2002), there is a lack of convincing evidence that sex offender policies substantially reduce sex offender recidivism (Caputo & Brodsky, 2004; Prescott & Rockoff, 2008; Welchans, 2005). For instance, studies that evaluated SORN policies in Arkansas (Maddan, 2008), New York (Sandler, Freeman, & Socia, 2008), Iowa (Adkins, Huff, Stageberg, Prell, & Musel, 2000); (Tewksbury & Jennings, 2010), Massachusetts (Petrosino & Petrosino, 1999), New Jersey (Tewksbury, Jennings, & Zgoba, 2012; Zgoba, Witt, Dalessandro, & Veysey, 2008), and Washington (Schram & Milloy, 1995) found that the policies had no measurable effects on recidivism (Connor & Tewksbury, 2017). Caldwell and Dickinson (2009) also found that SORN requirements did not lower the risk of recidivism among juvenile offenders.

The lack of empirical evidence has not stopped SORN policies from being popular among the public. In a study by Phillips (1998), 80% of sampled Washington residents believed that public notification of sex offenders is important. More than 75% of the 193 Melbourne residents surveyed believed that SORN requirements for all types of sex offenders is appropriate (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). Harris and Socia (2016) found that 76% of the participants in the experimental group believed that the identity of sex offenders should be available to the public on the internet.

Perspectives and Experiences of Registered Sex Offenders

SORN policies are unpopular among registered sex offenders, and it is common for registered individuals to feel frustrated at SORN requirements (e.g., Levinson et al., 2007). Registered individuals can find SORN requirements to be disruptive, cause difficulties in finding and maintaining employment, produce social stigmatization, make it difficult to find housing, result in harassment from others, and create other issues (e.g., Tewskbury, 2005). For example, Levenson et al. (2007) surveyed 125 registered sex offenders, and 70% believed that SORN requirements are unfair or somewhat unfair. Other research indicates that very few sex offenders believed that registration and notification laws dissuaded registrants from re-offending; Rather, of most registrants believed SORN rules had little deterrent effect (Zevitz & Farkas, 2000). Moreover, it is not uncommon for sex offenders to believe that much of the information displayed on public registries is unfair such as workplace addresses, workplace telephone numbers, and license plate numbers (Levenson & Cotter, 2005). Such findings are not exclusive by gender, as female sex offenders have reported being unfairly punished due to the registry (Tewksbury, 2004).

SORN policies have resulted in collateral consequences for registered sex offenders. Sex offenders have alleged that they experienced social stigmatization, loss of relationships, employment, and housing as noted, and both verbal and physical assaults due to sex offender registration policies (Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Levenson (2008) interviewed 109 registered sex offenders residing in Broward County, FL. Some registered offenders have reported that residency restrictions had resulted in them experiencing "decreased housing availability, increased homelessness and transience, and financial hardship. Residence

restrictions forced them to live farther away from employment opportunities, treatment services, and public transportation," (Levenson, 2008, p. 3).

In concert with the above, sex offenders harbor negative sentiments because of their view that SORN requirements make it more difficult for them to reintegrate back into society and that public notification results in social stigmatization (Conner & Tewksbury, 2017). Studies have also demonstrated that attitudes about SORNA and the collateral consequences of registration such as unemployment decrease sex offenders' willingness to comply with SORN requirements (Bowen, Frenzel, & Spraitz, 2016).

The Current Study

More information about barriers to successful compliance among registered sex offenders is needed. While registered sex offenders find SORN requirements frustrating and cause great difficulties in many areas of life, there is a dearth of research exploring compliance issues among this population. To address this void, the present study examines the extent of complications that registered individuals confront and, importantly the reasons that some registered individuals fail to comply with SORN requirements. Information was gleaned from a survey emailed to registered sex offenders in Florida. Email addresses were obtained through cooperation from the FDLE after obtaining approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB), as was necessary for the present work given the sensitive population under scrutiny. Approval was granted by the Human and Non-Human Animal Subjects Research Committee of Southwestern College in Kansas' IRB on October 23, 2020.

Data

The survey utilized for this study was constructed using an online survey generator, i.e., SurveyMonkey.com, that enabled a survey to be created and a link to the survey generated to be shared with the subject population.

The email addresses were obtained through a public record request made to the FDLE, who then furnished 45,213 email addresses. In Florida, registered sex offenders have to register all email addresses and internet identifiers within 48 hours after using them. Therefore, multiple email addresses could belong to a single registered individual. This could have resulted in some registered individuals having taken the survey multiple times. There was no definitive way to prevent this from occurring while keeping the survey anonymous and confidential. Additionally, ever since the *Delgado v. Swearingen* (N.D. Fla. 2018) court ruling, the FDLE is prohibited from disclosing the identity of individuals linked with specific email addresses and internet identifiers. For those reasons, it was impossible to identify if multiple email addresses belonged to a single registered individual.

The link to the survey was sent to 44,922 email addresses that belonged to registered sex offenders. Of the email invitations that were sent, 6,271 of them bounced. This resulted in 38,651 email invitations reaching their destination. A total of 967 individuals voluntarily took the survey resulting in a 2.5% response rate, but the response rate varies by survey item. While the response rate is seemingly low due to the nature of the population being studied, it is consistent with previous studies involving sex offenders (e.g., Tewksbury, 2004; Tewksbury & Lees, 2007; Bowen, Frenzel, & Spraitz, 2016). The survey consists of 50 items, the majority featuring Likert-Scale responses. Information procured from the survey instrument included demographic variables, the jurisdiction of registration, offense location, whether reminders concerning

registration requirements were sent, attitudinal variables concerning the offender's orientation, and beliefs about sex offender registration, among other items.

Measures

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used for the analysis measures sex offender compliance with SORN. It was produced from an item on the survey that asked respondents, "How many times have you failed to comply with sex offender registration and notification requirements?" The variable was dichotomized, with subjects indicating compliance coded as 1, and those indicating at least one infraction coded as 0. Approximately 15% of subjects indicated that they failed to comply with SORN at least once, See Table 1.

Potential Barriers to SORN Compliance

Several variables that potentially affected registered individuals' compliance with SORN requirements were derived from the survey instrument. Items included beliefs about the effectiveness of SORNA in benefiting public safety, preventing recidivism, and with rehabilitation. Other items included the effect of SORNA on the registered individuals' employment, residency, mental and emotional health, and lives.

Felony conviction was measured as a dichotomous variable, with the respondents' sex offense having had resulted in a felony conviction being coded as 1, and the sex offense having had not resulted in a felony conviction being coded as 0 (comparison group). Approximately 85% of the sample had received a felony conviction due to their sex offense. In like way, the variable *Reminders* was measured as a binary variable, with respondents having had received periodic reminders about SORN requirements being coded as 1, and respondents not having had received periodic reminders about SORN requirements being coded as 0 (reference group).

About 24% of the sample had received periodic reminders. Whether a respondent believed that SORNA *Prevents sex offenses* was measured as a dichotomous variable. The item addressed agreement/disagreement with the statement that "SORN requirements are effective at preventing sex offenses." Agreement is coded as 1, and not agreeing with the statement was coded as 0 (comparison group). Only about 4% of the sample believed that SORN requirements prevent sex offenses. *Rehabilitation* was also measured as a binary variable, with agreement with the statement "SORN requirements helped to rehabilitate me" coded as 1, and not agreeing with the statement used as the reference group coded as 0. Only about 3% of the sample reported that SORN requirements helped rehabilitate them. Whether a sex offender believed SORNA *Punishment* [was] *too severe* was measured as a dichotomous variable. Agreement with the statement "The punishment for failing to comply with SORN requirements is too severe" was coded as 1 (78%), and not agreeing with the statement (reference category) was coded as 0. In addition, respondents believing SORNA *Benefits public safety* was measured as a binary variable. Respondents in agreement with the statement "SORN requirements benefit public safety" were coded as 1 and represent about 14% of subjects, and not agreeing with the statement represented the reference category and was coded as 0.

Other variables in the model included the impact of COVID19, (*COVID19*) whether sex offenders believe their status hinders gaining housing (*Residency*), and employment (*Employment*). *COVID19* was measured as a dichotomous variable. Agreement with the statement "COVID19 Made SORN Compliance Difficult" was coded as 1 (33% agree) and disagreeing with the statement coded as 0 is the reference group. *Residency* was measured as a binary variable and agreement with the statement "My sex offender status made it difficult to find or keep a place of residence" was coded as 1, which represented about 84% of the sample.

Those not in agreement with the statement served as the comparison group and were coded as 0.

Employment was measured as a dichotomous variable, where agreement with the statement

"Finding or keeping a job was made difficult by my sex offender status" was coded as 1, and not

agreeing with the statement being coded as 0 (reference category). Approximately 91% of the

sample believe that finding or keeping a job was made difficult by their sex offender status.

Other variables are as follows. *Whether Life* [was] *made difficult* by SORN requirements

was measured as a binary variable. Agreement with the statement "My life was made difficult by

my sex offender status" was coded as 1 (approximately 97% agree) and disagreeing with the

statement was coded as 0 and is the reference group. Whether the survey respondent agrees that

SORN requirements *Deters recidivism* was also measured as a dichotomous variable. Agreement

with the statement "SORN requirements deter me from committing sex offenses" was coded as 1

(about 9% agreement), and not agreeing with the statement was coded as 0. *Social stigma* was

measured as a binary variable, with agreement with the statement "I was socially stigmatized due

to my sex offender status" and was coded as 1 (about 93% agree), and not agreeing with the

statement was coded as 0 as the reference category. *No mental/emotional issues* was a binary

variable measuring agreement with the statement "My sex offender status did not impact my

mental and/or emotional health." Agreement was coded as 1 and represented only about 8% of

the sample. Not agreeing with the statement was coded as 0 and served as the comparison group.

Victimization was measured as a binary variable. Agreement with the statement "My sex

offender status resulted in me becoming victimized (such as being physically assaulted, property

being vandalized, being stalked)" was coded as 1, and disagreeing with the statement was coded

as 0. About 59% of the sample reported being victimized due to their sex offender status.

Demographic Controls

Demographic data were collected as a part of the survey instrument for informational purposes and used as controls in the analysis. Items included age, sex, race, education, and income. Age is grouped into multiple categories, with each category measured as a dichotomous variable. These age categories are 18-25, 26-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and over. The 18-25 age category was not included in the regression analysis. This was due to no observations being available for the sample used for the regression analysis. The 26-34 age group accounted for about 7%, the 35-49 age group accounted for about 33%, the 50-64 age group accounted for about 41%, and the 65 and over age group accounted for about 18% of the sample and is used as the comparison group for the analysis.

Sex was measured as a dichotomous variable, with males coded as 1 and females at the reference group coded 0. Males accounted for about 96% of the sample. Race was measured as a binary variable for this study representing White = 1 or member of a minority group = 0 (comparison group). Approximately 89% of respondents indicated that they were White. Education was also measured as a binary variable with college-educated coded as 1 and no college assigned 0 (comparison group); Roughly 44% of subjects indicated they had a college degree. Annual household income was a measure of poverty for this study. Those reporting a household income less than $15,000 were coded as 1 and considered to be living in poverty. Those having a household income of that and greater were coded as 0 (comparison group). Poverty measured in this way impacted about 17% of survey respondents. Descriptive information for all variables used in the analysis is housed in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of Variables Used in the Analysis

Variables	Proportion (# of Observations/ % of Total Observations)	Definition
Complied with SORN	(796/85.04%)	Never failed to comply with SORN requirements=1, Failed to comply with SORN requirements at least one time =0
Age 18-25	(0/0%)	18—25 years of age=1, Not 18-25 years of age=0
Age 26-34	(70/7.48%)	26—34 years of age=1, Not 26-34 years of age=0
Age 35-49	(313/33.44%)	35-49 years of age=1, Not 35-49 years of age=0
Age 50-64	(382/40.81%)	50—64 years of age=1, Not 50-64 years of age=0
Age 65+	(167/17.84%)	65 years of age or over=1, Not 65 years of age or over=0
Male	(897/95.83%)	Male=1, Female=0
White	(829/88.57%)	White=1, Minority=0
College Degree	(416/44.44%)	Have a college degree=1, No college degree=0
Income < $15,000	(156/16.67%)	Annual household income less than $15,000=1, Annual household income greater than $15,000=0
Felony Conviction	(791/84.51%)	Sex offense resulted in felony conviction=1, Sex offense resulted in no felony conviction=0
Reminders	(228/24.36%)	Agree with the statement "Was sent periodical reminders about SORN requirements"= 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Prevents Sex Offenses	(41/4.38%)	Agree with the statement "SORN requirements are effective at preventing sex offenses" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Rehabilitation	(32/3.42%)	Agree with the statement "SORN requirements helped to rehabilitate me" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0

Punishment too severe	(733/78.31%)	Agree with the statement "The punishment for failing to comply with SORN requirements is too severe" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Benefits Public Safety	(127/13.57%)	Agree with the statement "SORN requirements benefit public safety" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
COVID19	(305/32.59%)	Agree with the statement "COVID19 Made SORN Compliance Difficult" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Residency	(784/83.76%)	Agree with the statement "My sex offender status made it difficult to find or keep a place of residence" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Employment	(855/91.35%)	Agree with the statement "Finding or keeping a job was made difficult by my sex offender status" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Life Made Difficult	(904/96.58%)	Agree with the statement "My life was made difficult by my sex offender status" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Deters Recidivism	(81/8.65%)	Agree with the statement "SORN requirements deter me from committing sex offenses" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Social Stigma	(871/93.06%)	Agree with the statement "I was socially stigmatized due to my sex offender status" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
No Mental/Emotional Issues	(78/8.33%)	Agree with the statement "My sex offender status did not impact my mental and/or emotional health" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0
Victimization	(548/58.55%)	Agree with the statement "My sex offender status resulted in me becoming victimized (such as being physically assaulted, property being vandalized, being stalked)" = 1, Don't agree with the statement=0

Analytic Strategy

Initially, the proportion of respondents indicating agreement to the survey questions was reviewed in the data section as it describes the data. However, the review was critical in depicting the issues present for registered sex offenders as well. To forego the redundancy, these results are not reiterated in the results section. To assess the factors that influence compliance with SORN requirements, logistic regression was utilized as the appropriate method because the dependent variable, compliance with SORN, is binary. In logistic regression, the conditional probability that the subject complies with SORN is expressed by a logistic link transformation logit(p). The assumption with the logistic model is that explanatory variables have linear effects on the log-odds of SORN compliance. The following formula was employed to facilitate a more intuitive interpretation: change in the odds ratio = $(e^{\beta} - 1) * 100$, which emphasizes the percent change in the dependent variable's odds of occurring.

An array of variables were used as predictors in the model and selected to assess for the most influential factors affecting SORN compliance, including attitudinal variables, situational factors, and policies. Several demographic controls were also included in the analysis. A total of 936 observations were utilized for the regression model. A .05 probability level is used to establish statistical significance in the model.

Results

As noted, a total of 936 observations were utilized for the logistic regression model. Multicollinearity was evaluated and not problematic for this model, e.g., all VIF scores were under 1.5. The logistic regression model is housed in Table 2.

Registered individuals' race, education level, age, and income level have a statistically significant relationship with SORN compliance. Individuals that are White, in the age group 26-

34, have a college degree, and are not in poverty have higher odds of complying with SORN requirements. Registered individuals who were white were 125% more likely to comply with SORN requirements than those who were minorities when holding all other predictors constant. Registered individuals that were in the age group 26-34 were 186% more likely to be compliant with SORN requirements when compared to those 65 and over. Registered individuals with a college degree were 81% more likely to comply with SORN requirements than registered individuals with no college degree when holding all other predictors constant. Registered individuals with an annual household income of less than 15 thousand dollars were 46% less likely to comply with SORN requirements than registered individuals with higher annual household incomes when holding all other predictors constant.

Table 2

Logistic Regression of SORN Compliance

Variables	Coefficient	S.E.	(Odds-Ratio)
Age 26-34	1.05*	.51	2.86
Age 35-49	.09	.30	1.10
Age 50-64	.11	.29	1.11
Male	-.33	.58	.65
White	.94***	.27	2.25
College Degree	.63**	.21	1.81
Income < $15,000	-.64**	.23	.54
Felony Conviction	-.35	.29	.69
Prevents Sex Offenses	.63**	.44	.31
Reminders	-.04	.23	.95
Rehabilitate	.14	.55	1.19
Punishment Too Severe	-1.03**	.30	.36
Benefits Public Safety	-.36	.31	.68
Covid19	.08	.21	1.06
Residency	-.49	.34	.64
Employment	.16	.41	1.24
Life Made Difficult	.47	.55	1.45
Deters Recidivism	-.33	.35	.78
Social Stigma	.23	.40	1.25
No Mental/Emotional Issues	-.20	.34	.80
Victimization	-.36	.22	.71
Intercept	2.15	.95	12.57

Note: Figures are rounded.

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001 (two-tailed tests).

Belief in the effectiveness of SORN to prevent sex offenses (survey item 12) and belief

that the punishment for failing to comply with SORN is too severe (survey item 13) also have a

statistically significant relationship with compliance. The results indicate that individuals who

agreed that SORN effectively prevented sex offenses were 69% less likely to have been

compliant with SORN requirements than those who did not agree when holding all other

predictors constant. The results also indicate that individuals that agreed that the punishment for

failing to comply with SORN is too severe were 64% less likely to have been compliant with

SORN requirements than those who did not agree when holding all other predictors constant. These results are probably due to reverse causality. A number of individuals that agreed with these two statements were more likely to have experienced the effects of compliance failure. This experience probably resulted in them adopting the belief that SORN effectively prevents sex offenses and that the punishment for compliance failure is too severe.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to reveal the barriers experienced by sex offenders when trying to meet compliance with SORN and the extent of problems. It revealed important hindrances to sex offender compliance among a significant number of offenders. As indicated by the descriptive analysis, the survey results suggest that the majority of respondents experienced difficulties as a result of SORN. This is consistent with other research (e.g., Levenson, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). The majority of the respondents in this study faced difficulties finding or keeping jobs, finding or keeping places of residence, attaining an education, finding or maintaining an intimate relationship, finding or keeping friends, and obtaining forms of assistance. The majority of respondents reported having faced emotional and mental issues, harassment, social stigma, and victimization. These findings confirm with past studies that have demonstrated the adverse effects of SORN requirements on registered individuals.

It is unlikely that SORN requirements help rehabilitate registered individuals or reduce recidivism. The majority of the respondents do not believe that SORN requirements help rehabilitation or deterrence. It is possible that the difficulties associated with SORN requirements actually increase the likelihood of recidivism and reduce the chances of successful rehabilitation. SORN requirements may make it difficult for registered individuals to obtain support from the

community and instead result in registered individuals being ostracized by the community. Individuals are more likely to desist from delinquency and rehabilitate when connected to the community. Rehabilitation is less likely to occur when registered individuals experience social alienation.

The majority of the respondents in the study have complied with SORN requirements. Of the respondents who failed to comply with SORN requirements, the most frequent reason was due to forgetting to comply with some SORN requirements. To increase compliance, law enforcement and other entities involved with SORN could send reminders to registered individuals via mail, email, text messaging, phone calls, and other methods of communication. This is something that could be readily accomplished given that Florida and other states collect registered individuals' contact information. It is a process that could be automated, with reminders being sent before registry deadlines and messages being sent periodically about notification responsibilities. The majority of respondents had reported that they did not receive periodical reminders about SORN requirements. States should consider implementing periodical reminders to potentially increase compliance among registered individuals.

The second most reported reason for failing to comply with SORN requirements was not understanding the SORN requirements. Perhaps to remedy this issue, registered individuals could be given orientations about SORN requirements soon after becoming a registered individual. It may not be enough for registered individuals to be just handed documents and contracts stipulating their responsibilities. States should also create phone contacts and email addresses dedicated exclusively to providing assistance to sex offenders. In Florida, registered individuals can contact the Florida Department of Law Enforcement via phone contacts or email

addresses dedicated solely to sex offender matters. Additionally, sex offenders can contact their local law enforcement agencies for more information.

Compliance with SORN requirements is significantly dependent on race, education level, and household income level. Minorities are less likely to be compliant with SORN requirements. Racial bias could be present in the sex offender registry system. If so, it is plausible that the racial bias could make it harder for minorities to maintain compliance with SORN. An Ohio study found that African Americans were more likely to be over-classified in a risk classification system (Ticknor & Warner, 2018). This resulted in some African Americans experiencing increased supervision, oversight, and stringent requirements that would make it more challenging to remain compliant. Minorities are also more likely to live in socially disorganized communities. Socially disorganized communities make it difficult for their residents to attain education and prosper financially. The findings of this study demonstrate that education and income are integral to remaining compliant with SORN requirements. Additionally, socially disorganized communities have less social efficacy. Social efficacy is intrinsic to sex offenders maintaining compliance with SORN requirements by providing registered individuals access to resources and exposure to conventional social norms (Kubrin & Wo, 2016). In the absence of resources, more social avenues are needed beyond law enforcement.

Registered individuals who graduated with a college degree and those whose household income was greater than $15,000 were more likely to be compliant. Those with a college degree are probably more likely to comprehend the requirements of SORN and therefore are more likely to be compliant. Additionally, those with higher incomes and educational attainment have greater conformity with society since they are more likely to be gainfully employed. It has been observed that individuals with greater stakes in society are more likely to comply with the law

(Welch et al., 2008). Those gainfully employed have more to lose and therefore have a greater incentive to remain compliant with SORN requirements.

Policymakers should assess some of the SORN requirements and their effects on rehabilitation and compliance behavior. Residency restrictions, for instance, are not effective in reducing recidivism among registered sex offenders (Tewksbury & Levenson, 2007). The implementation of residency restrictions could impede rehabilitation and compliance with other SORN requirements by producing stress, social alienation, additional life challenges, and feelings of antagonism towards the sex offender public registry. Seven (4.93%) of the respondents that failed to comply with SORN requirements in this study failed due to wanting to circumvent residency restrictions.

Fees that some jurisdictions require sex offenders to pay when registering is another example of a SORN requirement that should be assessed. Failure to pay can result in already financially burdened individuals facing more financial challenges. The failure to pay registration fees can result in arrests and felony convictions. Ten (7.04%) of the respondents that failed to comply with SORN requirements in this study failed due to being unable to afford the registry fees. If possible, registration should not impose fees on the registered individuals. If fees are necessary to financially maintain sex offender public registries, then sanctions for failing to pay should be less punitive. Registered individuals should also be given the option to register first and then pay the associated fees at a later date or to pay the fees in installments. Fees should not be so burdensome that it affects the rehabilitation and compliance behavior of registered sex offenders.

Law enforcement and other registering agencies can take a more active duty in ensuring that sex offenders remain compliant beyond just administering sanctions. Registering agencies

should provide orientations for sex offenders that are new to the public registry, provide information about available resources in the community such as counseling and housing, send reminders of approaching registry deadlines, and set up communication lines dedicated exclusively to providing assistance to sex offenders. These efforts should be especially aimed at populations least likely to comply, such as minority groups, those with no college education, and those with low incomes. The majority of registered individuals want to be compliant with SORN requirements. How successful registered individuals are in being compliant is significantly dependent on how motivated registering agencies are in wanting registered individuals to be law-abiding, using measures that are not exclusively punitive.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that need to be mentioned. The survey used for this study most likely included little to no absconders. Absconders are individuals that willfully choose to be noncompliant with SORN and with whom registering agencies have difficulty locating. Absconders would be the least likely to comply and also, therefore the least likely to have provided an up-to-date email address to registering agencies. Many absconders are transient sex offenders. Transient offenders are individuals without a physical home address and are typically homeless. Transients are more likely than non-transients to have a history of failing to register (Levenson et al., 2016). Transients are required to register more often than non-transient individuals. Transients have to register every thirty days in the state of Florida whereas non-transients have to register every three or six months. This stricter requirement in conjunction with having fewer resources and a lack of transportation to reach registering agencies explains the higher prevalence of failure to register among transients. It is likely that transient offenders are underrepresented in this study due to being more likely to abscond and having limited access

to email. Without including absconders, this limits this study's conclusions about SORN compliance.

This study also had an absence of participants that were younger than 26. This is problematic since young adults and adolescents are the age groups most likely to engage in delinquent behavior. This group would likely have been the least likely to comply with SORN requirements. With the lack of participants younger than 26, this study's conclusions about SORN compliance are limited.

As with most self-reported surveys, the possibility exists that the responses provided on the survey may not be accurate. Unreliable memory and intentional dishonesty are always a concern for self-reported surveys. Some of the participants may have lied, especially on items concerning compliance behavior, out of fear that their responses could be seized by law enforcement and used against them. It is also possible that some of the participants may have taken the survey multiple times. The survey may also have been taken by individuals for which the survey was not intended (i.e., individuals who were not registered sex offenders). Caution, therefore, is warranted with the results of this study.

Future studies should attempt to interview absconders, transient offenders, and youth about SORN compliance. Absconders are the ultimate non-compliant group that can give unique insight into the factors that affect compliance with SORN requirements. This is the group that policy-makers desire to learn more about to prevent their absconding. Locating absconders will be a challenge for future researchers. Additionally, future studies should take measures to reassure sex offender participants that their replies will remain anonymous and that their participation could ultimately be beneficial to the sex offender community. Many sex offenders are concerned that their participation in a study will be adversely used against them. Sex

offenders as a group may be less trusting of others. If researchers can alleviate such concerns, the participation rate will increase.

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