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Attitudes towards Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEGAN'S LAW AND JUVENILE SEX OFFENDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Attitudes Towards Megan's Law and Juvenile Sex Offenders

by

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Sex offender registration laws are very controversial. All fifty states require adult sex offenders to register. Twenty-eight states have extended registration and community notification requirements to juveniles (Hiller, 1998). These states seem to have failed to look at the uniqueness of juvenile sex offending. Juveniles have a very low recidivism rate and complex issues of culpability from age-of-consent laws.

Applying Megan's Law to juveniles could have considerable negative consequences for juveniles' social development, particularly because one of the main stipulations of the law requires the juvenile to notify their school. Rehabilitation is a key factor of the juvenile justice system and by applying Megan's Law to juveniles it requires them to notify their school upon arrival, which adds to the juveniles' reputation, causes social isolation, and labels offenders as a sexual predator (Lowe, 1997). School is an important part of a child's development as they experience social interaction as well as basic learning skills. Therefore this type of notification is damaging the juveniles' chance to rehabilitate.

This research study focused on general knowledge of and attitudes toward Megan's Law and its application to juvenile sex offenders among students currently attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Participants' attitudes were compared to

the underlying tenets conveyed in current legislation known as Megan's Law and recently enacted Adam Walsh Act of 2006.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States struggles with how to best protect potential victims of sex crimes while balancing the rights of the offenders. Many states have proposed changes to expand restrictive sex offender registration requirements to include juveniles these assumptions are based on that all offenders should be treated the same. Far more research has been conducted on adult sex offenders than on juveniles. Before 1980, research on juvenile sex offenders was limited in part by cultural standards of tolerance. For example attitudes such as “boys will be boys” characterized sexual misconduct as merely curiosity, or experimentation (Smith, Wampler, and Reifman, 2005).

The trouble with this deficiency in research on juvenile offenders is that the legislators who are changing the sex offender registration laws are passing laws that treat juvenile offenders the same as adult offenders. The inclusion of juveniles in this broad-reaching registration legislation violates the very purpose of the juvenile court system, which is to protect the child from harm. These newly expanded laws have a significant impact on juvenile sex offenders’ lives because one of their primary requirements is the registration of sex offenders with local law enforcement and schools in the area.

All fifty states have sex offender registration requirements but the standards vary greatly from state to state. Only eight states have not taken the national Megan’s Law guidelines and expanded them to require juveniles to register as sex offenders (Szymanski, 2009). Nevada has not specifically expanded its registration requirements to include juveniles, but the recent attempted amendments through Senate Bill-471 were vague as to whether juveniles should be included or not.

It is important to consider the potential impact of expanding registration laws to include juveniles. Previous research has argued that the enforcement of Megan's Law registration requirements on juveniles could result in more harm than good (Avila, 1998, cited in Trivits and Reppucci, 2002). School is a critical place for children to develop the social skills they need in life and by excluding them from this environment may lead to emotional and social distress, which may exacerbate to the risk of recidivism. When a juvenile's criminal history is available to classmates they tend to be harassed both physically and emotionally, thus hindering the juvenile's education. In some cases these students were forced to transfer to another school or to be home schooled (Trivits and Reppucci, 2002).

The purpose of this research project is to begin to understand whether people comprehend the broad goals behind Megan's Law and approve of stricter treatment of juvenile offenders. No research to date has measured public attitudes towards increased restrictions on juvenile sex offenders, yet new laws are constantly being accepted as measures designed to meet public demand. Measuring the attitudes of Criminal Justice students is a good starting point as many of these students will be criminal justice professionals tasked with managing and treating juvenile sex offenders.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

History of Sex Offender Registries

Prior to 1994 only five states required convicted sex offenders to register their addresses with local law enforcement. As an acknowledgment of the growing problem, President Clinton passed the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Act¹ also known as “Wetterling Act,” which required state implementation of a sex offender registration program.

New Jersey was one of the first states to pass a community notification requirement for convicted sex offenders (Hindman, 1997). The law was named after seven-year-old Megan Kanka who was raped and murdered by a paroled sex offender. Her parents and the community were outraged that they were not informed that a twice-convicted sex offender was living in their neighborhood. This started the movement resulting in the passage of “Megan’s Law” (Petrosino and Petrosino, 1999).

In 1996 Congress passed a federal law mandating state community notification programs. Megan’s Law is an amendment to this federal law allowing each state to make the guidelines for sex offender registration (Grubestic, Mack, and Murray, 2007). Megan’s Law, section (e) of the Wetterling Act, required all states to conduct community notification, but did not specify any specific forms and methods, other than requiring the state to design an internet site containing state sex-offender information. Beyond that requirement, states were given broad discretion in creating their own policies (Center for Sex Offender Management, 1997).

¹ 42 U.S.C. §§14071

After the passing of the federal version of Megan's Law, all states were encouraged by the federal government to implement a state version of the law. Any states that hesitated to implement a notification and registration law in three years received 10% less from the federal crime control fund or anti-drug grant. With federal financial incentives and the increase in community concern about sex offenders, all fifty states implemented registration laws and forty-seven states expanded their notification laws (Center for Sex Offender Management, 1997).

Megan's Law requires all convicted adult sex offenders to register with local law enforcement agencies for the remainder of their lives. All fifty states have sex offender registration but the standards vary from state to state. Only eight states do not require juveniles to register as a sex offender. Whereas, thirty-nine states require juveniles adjudicated for a sex offense to register as sex offenders and four states require juveniles convicted in criminal court (Szymanski, 2009). The different state standards for juvenile offenders are presented in Table 1.

More recently, the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act was enacted in 2006 and attempted to simplify some registry requirements. One of the most important components of this bill was that it established the basis for a national sex offender registry to be available on the Internet. This should integrate state sex offender registries throughout the nation and be available to law enforcement regardless of location.

Under the Adam Walsh Act Title 1, also known as Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA),² an offender will be assigned to one of three tiers. This act requires stricter prison sentences for offenders who fail to register or keep their

² 42 U.S.C. §16911 et. seq

Table 1

Individual State Requirements

State	Juvenile Requirement
Georgia, Hawaii, Nebraska, New York, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming	Juveniles do not have to register.
Alabama, Arizona, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Washington	All adjudicated juveniles must register.
Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin	All adjudicated juveniles must register and possibility of lifetime registration for specified serious sex offenses.
Alaska, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia	Juveniles convicted in Criminal Court
South Dakota	Juveniles fifteen-years-old or older
Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma	Juvenile is fourteen-years-old or older
Maryland, Virginia	Age requirement under SORNA
North Carolina	Juvenile is thirteen-years-old or older
Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Texas	Juveniles eleven-years-old or older
Massachusetts	Juveniles eight-years-old or older
Alabama, Illinois, Kansas, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington	Juveniles seven-years-old or older
	Termination of registration requirement by time limit. A specified number of years from the date of release from custody. Allow petition of relief after specified years.
Arizona, Idaho, Oklahoma, North Carolina	Termination of registration by age limit. AZ age 25, ID and OK age 21, NC age 18

information current. It also eliminated the statute of limitations for prosecutions of child abduction and felony sex offenses against children (McPherson, 2007).

Nevada was one of the first states to adopt the federal Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 or SORNA. Nevada's legislature adopted SORNA into law during the 2007 Session under two separate Bills, the Assembly Bill 579³ and the Senate Bill 471⁴ (Eissman, Chisel, and Hoffecker, 2008).

SORNA does require that certain juveniles register as sex offenders. The federal requirements apply only to juveniles convicted as adults and juveniles adjudicated as a delinquent in juvenile court, only if the juvenile is 14 years of age or older and is convicted of an offense similar to or more serious than the federal aggravated sexual assault statute⁵. In addition to offenses such as forcible rape, this statute covers any offense involving a sex act with a victim under the age of 12. There are no provisions for a risk assessment hearing in the case of any juvenile adjudicated as delinquent and subject to registration under SORNA. There are no exceptions for intra-familial cases of sexual abuse. The only exception is the so-called "Romeo and Juliet" clause, whereby the law makes clear that jurisdictions will not be required to register persons convicted of sex offenses involving "consensual" sexual activity between a victim who is at least 13 years old and an offender not more than four years older than the victim.⁶ Nevada did not adopt the same criteria as the federal SORNA criteria for juveniles.

One final registration act that may relate to juveniles is the college registration system. College campuses fall under a sex offender registration act known as the Campus

³ Chapter 485, *Statutes of Nevada*

⁴ Chapter 528, *Statutes of Nevada*

⁵ 18 U.S.C. §2241

⁶ 18 U.S.C. §16911(5)(c).

Sex Crimes Prevention Act⁷ this was implemented in October of 2000. Most college registries contain the same information as state registries the only difference is that they specifically identify the offender with their affiliation with the school such as if they are an employee or student.

Nevada Revised Statutes

Requirements for sex offender registration in Nevada are specified in the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS). The statutes are somewhat confusing at the moment because major SORNA changes passed by the Nevada legislature came into effect on July 1, 2008 but were then suspended due to multiple constitutional challenges. There are two versions of many of the registration sections available concurrently – those that were to be in effect until June 30, 2008 and those that should have taken effect on July 1, 2008. For example, there are two versions of NRS 179D.490 (duration of duty to register) appearing side by side. Normally the old version would be deleted and replaced by the new section. This paper will consider the requirements that took effect on July 1, 2008 and are still on the statutes despite their current uncertain status. According to the 2008 revisions, all sex offenders and offenders convicted of a crime against a child should be subject to community notification regardless of their designated level. There are three Tier levels established for registration and community notification these levels are Tiers are known as Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III. To determine which tier level an offender is assigned is based on the specific crime committed by the offender⁸.

- *Tier I*—Offenders convicted of a crime against a child or a sex offender that is not otherwise categorized as a Tier II or Tier III offender.

⁷ Section 1601 of PL 106-386

⁸ see NRS 179D.113, 179D.115, and 179D.117

- *Tier II*—Offenders convicted of a crime against a child whose crime is punishable by imprisonment for more than 1 year, or a sex offender whose offense constitutes: (a) luring a child; (b) sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child; (c) an offense involving pandering or prostitution; (d) pornography of a minor; or (e) any sexual offense against a child after the person becomes a Tier I offender.
- *Tier III*—Offenders convicted of a crime against a child or a sex offender who has been convicted of: (a) first degree murder committed in the perpetration of a sexual assault, abuse, or molestation of a child under age 14; (b) sexual assault; (c) battery with intent to commit sexual assault; (d) child abuse involving sexual abuse or exploitation of a child under age 13; (e) kidnapping of someone under age 18; or (f) any sexual offense against a child after the person becomes a Tier II offender.

Tier II and III offenders also include those involved in an attempt or conspiracy to commit one of these offenses, an offense that is comparable to or more severe than the offenses described in the federal sex offender registration and notification provisions of the Adam Walsh Act, and those whose offenses were committed in another jurisdiction but whose offense would be an offense in Nevada if it had been committed here.

On July 1, 2008 Assembly Bill 579⁹ set the federal guidelines and procedures for sex offender registration and community notification requirements by using these three Tier levels. These guidelines stipulate a Tier III offender must personally register before local law enforcement every 90 days, a Tier II offender must register before 180 days, and a Tier I offender must register every year. If the offender is not imprisoned they must register before being released from prison or within three days after sentencing. As stated in Sections 16-30 of this bill it expanded the types of personal information provided through the community notification website and includes certain juveniles under these offender registration and notification requirements.

⁹ Chapter 485, *Statutes of Nevada 2007*

Senate Bill 471¹⁰ requires that an offender register, before being released from prison, with the law enforcement agency of the jurisdiction in which he will reside upon release. The offender must provide a biological specimen at the time of registration. Certain offenders are subject to electronic monitoring as deemed appropriate by the Division of Parole and Probation of the Department of Public Safety, the cost of which must be paid by the offender to the extent he is able to pay. A person convicted of sexual assault against a child under 16 years of age must serve time in prison before being eligible for parole, and the length of parole was increased from 20 years to 35 years. This bill changed certain provisions prohibiting certain Tier III offenders from living within 1,000 feet of locations commonly used by children. Some offenders are further restricted from intentionally being within 500 feet of locations commonly used by children. Tier III offenders under lifetime supervision who violate the conditions of their supervision are guilty of a category B felony.

Other legislation passed in 2007 includes requiring that any facility with four or more sex offenders cohabitating must be a facility for transitional living with a licensed from the State¹¹ which prohibits the assignment of certain convicted sex offenders to minimum security facilities¹² and on condition that offender commits the crime of “luring a child” when he or she consciously contacts or communicates with, or attempts to contact or communicate with, a person believed to be a child under the age of 16 and at least five years younger than the person with the intent to persuade or lure that child to engage in sexual conduct¹³.

¹⁰ Chapter 528, *Statutes of Nevada 2007*

¹¹ S.B. 354, Chapter 418, *Statutes of Nevada*

¹² A.B. 510, Chapter 525, *Statutes of Nevada*

¹³ A.B. 72, Chapter 66, *Statutes of Nevada*

Nevada Juvenile Sex Offender Registration Requirements

Currently, certain juveniles must register with local law enforcement under the federal law SORNA. However, when a child who is an adjudicated delinquent for certain sexual offenses or a sexually motivated act reaches 21 years of age, the juvenile court must hold a hearing to determine whether to deem the child an adult sex offender for the purposes of registration and community notification. This hearing is not required if the child has been relieved of being subject to the community notification laws before reaching the age of 21 years.

Following the passing of Bills 579 and 471, the juvenile court system was forced to address the question of whether the new registration requirements would apply to juveniles. On April 15, 2008, the Honorable William O. Voy, Eighth District Court, Family Division- Juvenile, declared the provisions of Assembly Bill 579 and Senate Bill 471 to be unconstitutional when applied to juvenile sex offenders. This was one of multiple constitutional challenges to the bills. With three appeals pending on the constitutionality of the amendments, Nevada's sex offender law remains unchanged and these provisions are not being implemented nor enforced by law enforcement agencies. It is expected that the Nevada Legislature will revisit these issues in the future.

Under Chapter 62F.120 of NRS, a juvenile is required to notify their school of any sex offenses. Juveniles adjudicated as a delinquent of one of the acts identified in NRS 62F.200, acts that would be considered a crime if an adult at time of the act. Community notification is also required for certain acts that are determined by the court to be sexually motivated. As of July 1, 2008, the juvenile court must notify the Central Repository of the child's adjudication accordance to Chapter 179D of NRS. The

juvenile's records must not be sealed as long as he is required to registration and community notification as a juvenile sex offender¹⁴.

Effects of Sex Offender Registries on Offenders

Since the passing of registration and notification laws, harassment of sex offenders has become a concern. In an attempt to prevent harassment all notifications information comes with a warning label. These warnings inform the community that any parties responsible for harassment of a sex offender will face legal action and could lead to the reversal of the law for vigilantism (Matson and Lieb, 1997).

According to Hiller's 1998 findings public notification of juvenile sex offenders hinders rehabilitation efforts in many ways. By requiring notification to an offender's school this public outing could lead to peer harassment causing social isolation, emotional and physical harm (Lowe, 1997). Parents of other students often complained about an offender attending the school and demanding their removal. These types of situations disrupt the offender's rehabilitation and if placed in an alternate educational setting may downgrade his level of education.

For example, a nine-year-old boy convicted of raping a younger boy was adjudicated and spent three years in a detention center. Seven years later the family moved to Missouri to get away from the constant public attention and persecution. The boy was now sixteen and had never committed another sex offense. The residents of Missouri found out about the boy's past criminal history. Following the notification to the school he lost his privacy, all his friends, and his right to attend school. The school claimed they feared for the safety of other students and suggested the family tutor him at home (Avila, 1998).

¹⁴ NRS 62F.260

Another example of the disruption due to registration was described in Moore's *USA Today* article (2006). Leah DuBuc, age twenty-two, and a resident of Michigan, was adjudicated at the age of ten for sexual experimentation. DuBuc and her two stepbrothers age eight and five were caught flashing each other and pretending to have sex with their clothes on. Two years later DuBuc plead guilty to first and second degree sexual conduct and was sentenced to eighteen months in a residential treatment program and was required to register as sex offender for twenty-five years. DuBuc's youthful mistake has made it difficult for her to find or keep a reasonable job; she suffers from community harassment, and has been refused financial aid, thus limiting her education level. DuBuc petitioned to be added to the non-public registry instead of the public registry but she was denied because she was more than five years older than one victim at the time of the offense. DuBuc claimed the court had poor mathematical skills because her stepbrother was five and she was ten at the time of the offense (Moore, 2006).

Levenson and Cotter (2005) conducted a study on sex offenders living in Florida and Kentucky. From one-third to half of the participants reported experiencing some type of adverse effect from registration laws such as loss of employment, loss of housing, harassment, threats, or property damage. Some participants reported that family members or roommates (19%) suffered from some type of physical assault.

When Tewksbury and Lees (2006) surveyed registered sex offenders living on campus their findings showed only one-third of the offenders knew their university retained a sex offender registry that listed their name. Some effects of campus registry include difficulties in student housing, employment, maintaining social relationships, harassment, feelings of doubt and fear. The vast majority (79%) of student sex offenders

were denied employment. Half of the offenders were treated rudely by the public and experienced losing a friend after they learned of their status as a register sex offender, 15.8% lost a significant other. Approximately 5.3% of offenders were assaulted on and off campus. Student offenders (15.3%) reported receiving harassing mail or phone calls. Little under half (47.4%) reported being evicted or being denied campus housing. Only 26.3% admitted a decline in their academic performance.

It is important for public officials to consider all of the effects of expanding registration requirements to juveniles because it may exacerbate the very risk factors for recidivism such as unstable lifestyle, negative attitude, and lack of any positive support system may be exacerbated or created by public identification (Hanson and Harris, 1998, 2001). Successful rehabilitation is dependent on finding housing, social acceptance, and job security. Using Megan's Law to require juveniles to register creates obstacles for sex offenders preventing reintegration and defeating the primary goal of the law, which is to protect the community (Andrews and Bonta, 2007).

Public Perceptions of Sex Offender Registries

The public's perception of registration laws is important because legislators often use that as the impetus for changing or implement a particular law. Levenson and colleagues (2007) surveyed 193 Florida residents. Results showed most participants were familiar with Megan's Law and believed it assisted with public safety. The majority of participants believed that most sex offenders would re-offend eventually and the community should be notified. Some data suggested public notification aids in a community feeling safer. Other research found notification increased the anxiety of a community if a sex offender was living in their neighborhood (Caputo, 2001) and

participants believed notification laws created a false sense of security for parents (Malesky and Keim, 2001.)

When comparing Kentucky and Ohio in regards to notification laws and public awareness Beck and Travis (2006) found the law assumes that public notification is linked to public protective behaviors. For example, when a community is aware a sex offender is living in the neighborhood they become more cautious. Ohio's notification process was assessed to be more effective in informing the community of local sex offenders through distributing written notifications to all persons in geographical area. Kentucky's notification process was less effective because notification is limited to the Kentucky State Police website and a sex offender alert line. Ohio residents (77.2%) were significantly more likely to be aware of sex offenders in neighborhood compared to Kentucky residents (25.6%). This study argued that having only a website to notify the community of sex offenders was not adequate and other states should follow Ohio's example.

When surveying a group of criminal sexual psychopaths, Petrosino and Petrosino (1999) found that 27% were eligible for notification requirement prior to recent arrests and after they were released two-thirds committed offenses against family member, friends, or acquaintances. Who the victims are is relevant, as most individuals do not look at the sex offender registry for someone they trust or know. The majority of participants admitted to only committing an offense after they have gained the trust of both the child and the guardian.

O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) argued that the more a person pays attention to crime in the media the more their fear and concern increases, therefore making them

more attentive to the issue. A study conducted by Proctor and colleagues (2002) on media and Megan's Law demonstrates this phenomenon. Their findings showed a pattern in how the media portrays Megan's Law and how it affected public perceptions. The results indicated that exposure to the all types of media and the positive attention given to Megan's Law was strongly connected to the participant's knowledge and acceptance of the law. Results revealed participants that pay attention to crime and the media were more likely to support criminal justice policies and in this particular study the participants were highly supportive of Megan's Law.

Proctor and colleagues (2002) similarly found that Massachusetts's community notification law increased the level of specific knowledge concerning the issues of Megan's Law but did not improve the general knowledge of the law. Findings suggested that news media reinforces the public's perception of Megan's Law and their positive belief that it deters victimization. The media coverage also appeared to sway them to ignore the shortcoming of the law such as its inability to reduce sex offenses and reduction in support for developing more effective ways to rehabilitate sex offenders (Schram and Milloy, 1995).

There is no way a parent can be guaranteed that their children will be safe, even if they possess a current list of sex offenders living in their neighborhood. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000) these lists do not capture sexual predators that fail to register or have no prior convictions. The lists focus on stranger abuse and largely ignore the fact that 93% of victims know their attacker. This research revealed the majority of perpetrators (58.7%) were acquaintances of the victim or the family, a little over a third (34.2%) are a family member, and only 7% are strangers to their victims.

According to the National Victimization Survey only 50% of sex crimes are reported to law enforcement for various reasons, such as shame, the victim knew the offender, and fear. So until more reliable figures on sex crimes are available, studies can only depend on the sex offender's personal history after they confess to additional sex crimes during their incarceration that were never reported (Zevitz and Farkas, 1993).

When comparing recidivism rates between high-level and low-level notification sex offenders in Wisconsin, Zevitz (2006) found no statistically significant difference between each group and recidivism rate. Recidivism rates for high-risk sex offenders remained high in both groups. Approximately half of the sex offenders in the low-level notification re-offended within four years, but only one out of eight was for a new sex crime. All but one of the high-level notification offenders were arrested for new sex crimes they committed in same area notification occurred. None were a stranger-predatory sex offense, which means no public warnings could have prevented victimization.

Offender Perceptions of Sex Offender Registries

Another area of research has been looking at offenders' perceptions of registration laws. Levenson and Cotter (2005) surveyed 183 sex offenders in Florida and their opinions of registration laws. When comparing the offenders' perceptions of their own risk and the public's perceptions of the offenders' risk, the results showed only 18% of the sex offenders strongly believed they would re-offend. About a fourth of the offenders believed it were fair for the community to know their risk level. More than half the offenders reported the personal information on the registry was incorrect or outdated. The vast majority (88-89%) of participants believed that giving home telephone number

and work address were very unfair. A slight majority (49-68%) believed that fingerprints, photographs, and vehicle description seemed slightly unfair. A vast majority (82%) was unaware that flyers were sent home with children from school to inform guardians. Only 5% of the participant experienced some type of physical assault or injury. There was a moderate (27%) relationship between registration laws and loss of employment. The majority (72%) of offenders believed registration laws interfered with their recovery and had lost hope for the future because they are required to register for the rest of their life. A sizable minority (42%) of offenders fear for their safety and a little more than half (52%) of the offenders experienced loss of personal friendships or a close relationships.

Some offenders mentioned the positive effects of registration laws such as willing to manage their risk factors, it made them more motivated not to re-offend, believed registration and notification helped prevent them from reoffending, it gave them less access to potential victims, made them a more honest person, found community supportive of recovery, and believed a community is safer by knowing where sex offenders live. A clear majority (66%) of offenders admitted to being more motivated to keep away from offending so that they can prove to others they are not a bad person.

Slightly more than half (52%) of the offenders believed that most people know they are sex offenders and are supportive to their recovery. Only 22% believed registration laws limited their access to potential victims because parents keep children away from me. Only 32% believed the community was safer when they knew where a sex offender lives (Levenson and Cotter, 2005).

Juvenile vs. Adult Sex Offenders

When comparing juvenile offenders to adult offenders it is important to remember that they are not interchangeable but that there are differences between the two. The rising issue is whether or not juveniles should be treated the same as adults. This question has gained increasing importance with the passage of Megan's Law. Many have suggested this law has a significant impact on a sex offenders' life because one of the main components requires all convicted sex offenders to notify local law enforcement agency that they have arrived in the area.

Thus far, only thirty-nine states require juveniles to register as a sex offender (Szymanski, 2009). It will be argued here that the enforcement of registration requirements for juveniles could result in more harm than good. Rehabilitation is a key factor of the juvenile justice system and by applying registration requirements to juveniles it requires them to notify their school upon arrival, which adds to the juveniles' stigma and causes social isolation (Lowe, 1997). According to Zimring (2002) the states that require juvenile registration and community notification for life eliminate the safe guards that were made to protect children from public scrutiny. In some cases juveniles avoid incarceration by plea-bargaining and getting probation without realizing by pleading guilty triggers Megan's Law registration requirements.

By using less restrictive treatment programs Rasmussen (1999) found juveniles were more successful in rehabilitation. These programs allowed juveniles to communicate with family and attend school. Registration and notification laws prevent juveniles from a normal school environment because one of the requirements is to notify their school of their sex offenses. This transforms the most needed resource of

rehabilitation into a place of hostility, loneliness, and all types of abuse. Some noticeable characteristics of a juvenile sex offender are poor social skills and feelings of isolation. By requiring them to notify their school they become alienated from their peers and community, which could lead to recidivism (Barbaree and Cortoni, 1993).

In re Registrant J.G. (1996) is a case that involved a ten-year-old boy named J.G. who was caught by his sister exposing his penis to his eight-year-old cousin. J.G. was convicted of first-degree sexual conduct and under New Jersey's Megan's Law. J.G. was required to register as a sex offender for life. Concerned with the permanent affects of having to register for life the New Jersey Supreme Court held that J.G. would not have to register and recommended revising the tier classifications when applied to juveniles. J.G.'s case is a perfect example of how the New Jersey Supreme Court realized that juveniles shouldn't be treated the same as adults.

Research has suggested that juvenile sex offenders differ significantly from adults in several ways. Juveniles exhibit their own patterns of sexual behavior (Hagan and Gust-Brey, 2000; Kahn and Chambers, 1991; Prentky et al., 2000; Rasmussen, 1999,) they are more responsive to treatment, and seldom re-offend when provided the proper treatment (Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, 2000).

Schram and Milloy (1995) found that among adults 19% of registered sex offenders and 22% of unregistered sex offenders commit another sex offense, showing no significant difference between the two groups and notification laws. Alexander (1999) found recidivism rates for juveniles that received proper treatment was relatively low at 7.1%. According to the University of Oklahoma's Director of the National Center on Sexual Behavior of Youth (2006) the typical juvenile sex offender rate of recidivism

ranges from 5% to 15%, compared to adult recidivism rates of 20% to 25%. Further, if a juvenile is given the proper rehabilitation they are less likely to commit another sex offense (Moore, 2006).

When comparing juveniles and adult registered sex offenders in Texas Craun and Kernsmith (2006) found that juveniles were more likely to commit offenses against male victims than adult offenders. Based on risk classifications juveniles required to register were labeled a higher risk to the community than adult offenders. Other research has claimed juvenile sex offenders use more force (Miranda and Corcoran, 2000), which could effect the “moderate” risk classification contributing to the higher percentage of juveniles committing aggravated sex assault. Furthermore, juveniles were found to have committed more sex crimes per offender compared to adults. When it comes to specific type of offenses committed by adults and juveniles three are significantly different. Adults are more likely to commit some kind of indecency with a child (36%), while juveniles are more likely to commit aggravated sexual assault against a child (40%) (Craun and Kernsmith, 2006). Stahl (2001) estimated less than one percent of all cases in juvenile court were for forcible rape or other violent sex offense. The Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report (2004) stated that individuals under the age of eighteen accounted for 16.2% of all forcible rape cases in the United States.

Alfred Kinsey shocked the nation over fifty years ago with his study on human sexual behavior when he found that childhood sexual activity is unusually common and even infants exhibited signs of sexual response. Kinsey’s (1953) results showed that before the age of thirteen 40% of preadolescent boys admitted to engaging in heterosexual acts and 60% admitted to homosexual acts (Garfinkle, 2003).

More recent studies conducted by several researchers exhibited normal sexual activity among juveniles. Research by Okami (1997) demonstrated that 46% of children engaged in some type of sex play prior to the age of six this percentage increased to 77% after adding masturbation. Masters and colleagues (1995) found that 61% of college students reported some sort of sexual experience by the age of thirteen, and 17% admitted to some sort of sex play with a sibling. An evaluation of 758 eighth graders in several rural areas of Maryland, Alexander and colleagues (1989) revealed that 61% of the boys and 47% of the girls admitted to have experienced sexual intercourse. Nationally, 32.8% of ninth graders and 64.6% of twelfth graders admitted to being sexually active (Center for Disease Control, 2007.) According to Sonenstein and colleagues (1989), the average sexually active fifteen-year-old has been with at least four different partners. All of these studies reveal a pattern in juvenile sexual development and the normal parameters of their acts.

The research suggests that childhood sex play is a normal stage of human development, which may not necessarily be psychologically harmful under average circumstances. However, much of the behavior described would make the children in these studies guilty of a sex offense. In many states engaging and being convicted for these types of acts would trigger sex offender registration requirements under Megan's Law.

The research has shown that there is a lack of information on how the public feels about the application of registration requirements to juvenile offenders. Since much of the sexual behavior captured under registration requirements may actually be developmentally appropriate for children, there is a contradiction between what we know

about childhood sexual activity and juveniles sexually offending. This study will address a gap in the literature and our understanding of public perceptions about juvenile sex offenders. The goals of this project are to see if the public comprehends and supports the goals behind Megan's Law and if they believe that these goals are appropriate for juvenile offenders.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
Research Questions

A research questionnaire was designed to survey current perceptions about Megan's Law and its application to juvenile sex offenders. The research questions for this study falls into three major areas including: do college students believe juvenile sex offenders should be required to register under Megan's Law; do college students believe Megan's Law is harmful or helpful; and, do students' general attitudes match the presumptions set forth by Megan's Law?

Materials

The author designed the questionnaire with assistance from Dr. Alexis Kennedy. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions assessing attitudes towards Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders, including demographic questions. Participants were polled as of their perceptions of Megan's Law through this tool. Their attitudes were measured in part by the assumptions expressed in Megan's Law of 1994 and the amendments pertaining to juveniles. The items were written by the author and evaluated by Criminal Justice researchers. The scale used can be found in its entirety in Appendix A. The questions ask the participants their attitudes towards applying Megan's Law to juvenile sex offenders. The questions attempt to measure participants' attitudes of Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders in Nevada. Participants were asked if they agreed with the verdict in true story scenarios and if they have any sex offenders living in their neighborhood. Some questions ask about knowledge of Megan's Law and if it is harmful or helpful to juvenile sex offenders. The majority of these questions were agreement and

knowledge items measured using a five-point scale. Some questions were “yes” or “no” and open-ended question were included as well.

Demographics information was collected through a series of questions in the survey tool. The personal characteristics of the participants completing the questionnaire were used to look at differences in attitudes. The independent variables used included gender and age. The dependent variables were the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of the participants.

To ensure that all students started with a common base understanding of sex offender registration, the following preamble was the first thing presented before the questions began,

***History of Megan’s Law:** In October 1994 New Jersey passed the toughest sex offender registration act in the United States, which is known as Megan’s Law (Hindman, 1997). The law was named after seven-year-old Megan Kanka who was raped and murdered by a paroled sex offender. Her parents and the community were outraged that they were not informed that a twice-convicted sex offender was living in their neighborhood. This started the movement that resulted in the passage of what came to be called “Megan’s Law” (Petrosino, 1999). In 1994, President Clinton signed the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Registration Act requiring each state to establish a system for sex offender registration (Center for Sex Offender Management, 1997). Megan’s Law was an amendment to this federal law allowing each state to write their own guidelines for sex offender registration (Grubestic, 2007). Megan’s Law requires all convicted sex offenders to register with local law enforcement agencies for the remainder of their lives. All 50 states have sex offender registration but the standards vary from state to state. Only 28 states require juveniles adjudicated (convicted) for a sex offense to register as sex offenders.*

Items asking about attitudes comprised 38 questions in total. The first section of 20 questions focused on attitudes about Megan’s Law and juvenile sex offenders. These questions asked various questions on Megan’s Law and should it apply to juvenile sex

offenders. Second, five dichotomous (yes/no) questions were included in section following true story scenarios. The third section of 13 questions focused on knowledge of Megan's Law and personal experiences with sex offenders. A five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) was used for the first and third sections of the survey. This research project was only able to analyze the first six questions in this section. The final seven questions were intended to poll the appropriateness of registration for different types of sex acts but the questions presented were vague, leading to suspect results. Participants could have misunderstood the questions to read did they know anyone personally who engaged in sexual activity at these specified ages rather than did they think it was a registrable offense. The final question on the survey was an open-ended question asking if there was anything the participant would like to add about Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders.

Protocol

The Human Subjects Protocol for this research project was approved by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Institutional Review Board on December 19, 2008 (OSP # 0810-2874). The consent form and the debriefing form were submitted and approved on the same date.

Procedure

Participants completed the research questionnaire in private or in small groups in the Legal and Social Issues laboratory. All participants were informed their involvement in the survey was completely voluntary.

No identifying information was collected with responses in order to keep answers confidential. Participants were told of the anonymity. Information was provided through

the informed consent form prior to filling out the questionnaire to inform participants of the harm and benefits of the study, which may be viewed in Appendix B. The consent form explained the study would be anonymous and also provided information regarding the study. For example, the consent form explicated that the study regarded about attitudes about Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders, as well as, the importance of such a study. Students were also informed that not completing the survey would not have any negative consequences on their grades. Participants completing the survey were made aware that they would receive credit even if they did not complete any or all of the questions that made them uncomfortable.

A debriefing form was also given to participants after completing the questionnaire. The debriefing form clarified the study's purpose. The phone number for the University Campus counseling center was provided in case participants felt they needed to discuss the content of the questionnaire with a counselor. A copy of the debriefing form may be viewed in Appendix C.

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students currently attending UNLV and enrolled in Introduction to Criminal Justice (CRJ 104). They were invited through the Criminal Justice program to volunteer in exchange for course credit. The final sample included 531 students. Out of these participants 247 were male and 280 were female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45. The majority of participants were between the age of 18 and 20 (61.6%). The distribution of participants' ages can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Ages of Participants

Age	Percentage
18-20	61.6%
21-25	27.9%
26-30	4.7%
31-35	3.5%
36-45	1.9%

A slight majority of the participants were Caucasian (56.3%). Other ethnicities included African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and an “other” category. Those who chose more than one category for ethnicity were placed in their first choice and a note was made that they considered themselves other ethnicities as well. The ethnicity of the participants can be viewed in Table 3.

Table 3

Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnicity	%
African-American	9.6
Asian	10.96
Caucasian	56.3
Hispanic	13.2
Other	5.8

The participant's majors were very diverse with only 37.5% being criminal justice majors and 44.3% with other majors such as hotel management, theater, pre-med, art and dentistry just to name a few. This demographic question was an open-ended question with the intention of capturing all possible majors. If a participant was a dual major, a note was made, but participants were coded according to the first major that they indicated. The distribution of participants' ages can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Major of Participants

Major	%
Criminal Justice	37.5
Psychology	7.5
Counseling/Social Work	3.0
Communication	3.4
Other	44.3

A slight majority of the participants were Christian or Catholic (55.7%) followed by 31.8% of the participants claimed none as their religion. The religion of the participants can be viewed in Table 5. Other religions included Mormon, Islamic, Jewish, Catholic, and an “other” category.

Table 5

Religion of Participants

Religion	Percentage
None	31.8%
Christian/Catholic	55.7%
Mormon	3.0%
Islamic	.8%
Jewish	3.8%
Other	3.8%

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Results Section One: Attitudes

The first section asked participants about their attitudes and perceptions towards registration laws and juveniles sex offenders. The full breakdown of responses can be seen in Table 6.

The first question asked whether the participants believed Megan's Law should apply to juvenile sex offenders. The majority of participants agreed (38.8%) or strongly agreed (38.2%) that it should apply to juveniles. Only 9.2% thought that juveniles should not have to register. Participants were next asked if they believed that requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders could cause harm to their social development. The majority of participants agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (10.4%) that it could cause harm. Only 21.3% believed it is not harmful.

Participants strongly supported the constitutionality of states requiring juveniles to register as a sex offender with the majority of participants agreeing (44.1%) or strongly agreeing (19.8%) that it is constitutional. A little more than 10% believed it was a violation of a juvenile's rights. The majority of participants agreed (45.8%) or strongly agreed (23.7%) that the purpose of the juvenile court system is to act as a guardian for children in crisis. Only 12.9% did not believe that the juvenile court looks out for the best interest of the child. Next the participants were asked if Megan's Law violates the protective standards set forth by the juvenile court system. Out of the 531 respondents, 42.9% disagreed or 5.5% strongly disagreed that it is a violation. A significant portion

(30.9%) of participants chose neutral as their response to this question. Only 19.1% believed that it does violate the standards of the juvenile court.

When the participants were asked if they believed a juvenile sex offender can be rehabilitated the majority of participants agreed (44.6%) or strongly agreed (13.6%) that they can be rehabilitated. Only 14.1% did not believe they could be rehabilitated if given the chance. The vast majority of participants agreed (50.5%) or strongly agreed (24.1%) the police should monitor juvenile sex offenders regularly like parolees. Less than 10% did not believe they should be monitored.

Interestingly, the majority of participants agreed (49.2%) or strongly agreed (29.6%) that Megan's Law registration requirements can help prevent child sexual abuse. Only 8.6% did not believe it is helpful. The majority of participants agreed (45.4%) or strongly agreed (21.7%) that Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders. Less than 10% believed it is ineffective.

Next participants were asked if they believe a juvenile should have to inform their school of their sex offenses. The majority of participants agreed (45.4%) or strongly agreed (22.0%) they should. Only 14.1% disagreed/strongly disagreed that the juvenile should have to inform their school. However, when participants were asked if a juvenile should be required to register for their entire life even if it is their first offense the responses were very mixed. Out of the 531 respondents, 40.1% disagreed/strongly disagreed that juveniles should have to register, 26.4% of participants had no opinion and 33.4% agreed/strongly agreed that they should have to register for their entire life.

Participants were asked if they believe juveniles should be treated the same as adults if they commit sex offenses. The responses to this question showed little difference

Table 6

Section One-Attitudes

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Megan's Law should apply to juvenile sex offenders.	3.2%	6.0%	13.7%	38.8%	38.2%
2. Requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders could cause harm to their social development.	5.3	16.0	23.0	45.0	10.4
3. It is constitutional for states to require juvenile to register as sex offenders.	3.0	8.9	24.1	44.1	19.8
4. The juvenile court system should act as guardians to children in crisis (including those who have committed crimes), looking out for the best interests of the child.	1.7	11.1	16.9	45.8	23.7
5. Registration of juveniles under Megan's Law violates the protective standards (acting as guardians to children in crisis) set by the juvenile court system.	5.5	42.9	30.9	17.3	2.1
6. Juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated.	2.6	11.5	27.1	44.6	13.6
7. Juvenile sex offenders should be monitored regularly like parolees by the police.	1.5	7.5	16.4	50.5	24.1
8. Megan's Law registration requirements help prevent child sexual abuse.	1.7	6.8	12.2	49.2	29.6
9. Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders.	1.9	8.3	22.2	45.4	21.7
10. Juvenile sex offenders should have to inform the school that they attend of their sex offenses.	3.4	10.7	18.5	45.4	22.0

Table 6 cont.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Juveniles should have to register as sex offenders for their entire life even if it is for their first offenses.	9.0	31.1	26.4	23.0	10.4
12. Juveniles should be treated the same as adults if they commit sex offenses.	6.8	25.2	27.3	29.6	11.1
13. Juveniles should have to register as a sex offender even if they are under the age of 14 when they commit the act.	10.5	33.3	25.2	23.9	6.8
14. Megan's Law can help eliminate sexually motivated abductions.	4.5	12.8	17.9	49.2	15.6
15. Megan's Law is an important tool in fighting sex crimes.	0.9	3.4	13.2	53.5	29.0
16. It is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law.	7.2	20.2	13.7	44.3	14.3
17. The community has the right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in the neighborhood.	1.1	5.5	11.9	35.8	45.8
18. Nevada should require juveniles to register as sex offenders.	2.4	8.5	24.9	44.3	19.8
19. There should be only one standardized national sex offender registry website that lists all offenders.	1.9	16.2	21.1	35.6	25.2
20. Notifying a community every time a sex offender moves into a neighborhood should be a mandatory provision under Megan's Law.	0.8	8.3	12.8	39.9	38.2

29.6% agreed that juveniles should be treated the same as adults when they commit sex offenses, 27.3% of participants had no opinion and 25.2% disagreed that they should be treated like an adult. On the other hand, when participants were asked if they believe juveniles should have to register as a sex offender even if they are under the age of fourteen when they commit the act. A slight minority of the participants 43.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed that juveniles should have to register under the age of fourteen, 25.2% of participants had no opinion and 30.7% agreed/strongly agreed that they should have to register despite their age.

Participants were asked if they believe that Megan's Law helps eliminate sexually motivated abductions. To my surprise, the majority of participants agreed (49.2%) or strongly agreed (15.6%) that it did. Only 17.3% disagreed/strongly disagreed that it did not. The vast majority of participants agreed (53.5%) or strongly agreed (29.0%) that Megan's Law is an important tool in fighting sex crimes. Less than 5% disagreed/strongly disagreed that it prevents sex crimes.

Next participants were asked if they believe it is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law. The majority of participants agreed (44.3%) or strongly agreed (14.3%) that each state have their own guidelines. A little more than a quarter of the participants believed it is unacceptable that each state should have its own guidelines.

Participants were asked if they believe the community has the right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in the neighborhood. The vast majority of participants strongly agreed (45.8%) or agreed (35.8%) that the community has the right to know. Only 6.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed that the community should be notified. The

majority of participants agreed (44.3%) or strongly agreed (19.8%) that Nevada should require juveniles to register. A little more than 10% did not believe they should have to register at all.

Participants were asked if they believe there should be only one standardized national sex offender registry website that lists all offenders. The vast majority of participants agreed (35.6%) or strongly agreed (25.2%) that one standardized national sex offender registry website is a good idea. Only 18.2% disagreed/strongly disagreed in one standardized registry. The majority of participants agreed (39.9%) or strongly agreed (38.2%) the community should be notified each time a sex offender moves into their neighborhood. Less than 9% disagreed/strongly disagreed with notification.

Results Section Two: True Stories

The questions in section two asked participants their opinions about true story scenarios of juveniles who have been required to register under the current sex offender registration law in their state.

The first scenario was about a girl in detention who put her arm around another girl while declaring herself as a lesbian. Because of this single act she was moved to the sex offender unit and is required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of her life. The vast majority of participants (97.2%) did not believe that the girl should have to register for life for this minor incident.

The second scenario was the story of a boy who had consensual sex with his girlfriend who was one year younger than him. After they broke up her parents reported him for statutory rape. The vast majority of participants (95.9%) did not believe that he should have to register as a sex offender.

Third was a story of a ten-year-old girl who was caught flashing and pretending to have sex while fully clothed with her two stepbrothers (ages eight and five) and because of her actions she is required to register as a sex offender for twenty-five years.

Participants were asked if they agree with the courts decision was fair considering her age at the time of the offense. A clear majority of participants (76.6%) believed the court decision was unfair. When participants were asked if she should have to register for twenty-five years the vast majority of participants (86.3%) believed she should not have to register.

The last was a story of a fourteen-year-old boy who sexually assaulted an eight-year-old girl. This particular offender had been arrested three times prior for sexual misconduct. Participants were asked if this boy should have to register as a sex offender. The vast majority of participants (86.4%) believed this offender should have to register.

Results Section Three: Knowledge Questions

The questions in section three asked participants about their knowledge of current sex offender laws and information. The responses given are presented in Table 7.

The first question in this section asked participants if they understood the purpose of Megan's Law prior to taking the survey. The majority of participants either agreed (37.1%) or strongly agreed (17.1%) that they understood the purpose of Megan's Law before taking the survey. Only 23.9% of participants responded they did not understand Megan's Law prior to survey. Next participants were asked if they know how to find if there is a sex offender in their neighborhood. The majority of participants agreed (43.1%) or strongly agreed (24.7%) that they know how to find if a sex offender was

Table 7

Section Three- Knowledge Questions

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Prior to this survey, you understood the purpose of Megan's Law	8.9%	23.9%	11.5%	37.1%	17.1%
2. You know where to find out if you have any sex offenders in your neighborhood	5.8	18.6	7.0	43.1	24.7
3. You know if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	13.7	35.0	10.7	25.8	13.4
4. Have you ever been accused of sexual misconduct?	84.9	11.3	0.9	1.9	0.2
5. You have looked online to see if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	21.5	23.2	4.5	27.1	22.8
6. You personally know someone who is a registered sex offender	65.5	20.3	2.8	6.0	4.5

living in their community. Only 18.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew where to find sex offender information.

Participants were asked if they know any sex offenders living in their neighborhood. Slightly less than half disagreed (35.0%) or strongly disagreed (13.7%) that they knew a sex offender was living in their community. A moderate portion of the participants agreed (25.8%) or strongly agreed (13.4%) that they knew a sex offender is living their neighborhood. When asking participants if they have looked online to see if any sex offenders are living in your neighborhood a slight majority agreed (27.1%) or strongly agreed (22.8%) that they have looked online. The other 44.7% of participants disagreed (23.2%) or strongly agreed (21.5%) that they have looked to see if a sex offender in their neighborhood

Participants were also asked if they have ever been accused of sexual misconduct. The vast majority of participants strongly disagreed (84.9%) or disagreed (11.3%) they had been accused of some type of sexual misconduct. Only 2.1% of respondents agreed that they have been accused of some kind of sexual misconduct.

Next participants were asked if they personally know someone who is a registered sex offender. The vast majority (85.8%) of participants strongly disagreed (65.5%) or disagreed (20.3%) they personally knew a registered sex offender. However, just over 10% personally knows a registered sex offender.

Finally, participants were asked if there was anything else they wanted to add about Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders. Only 104 participants chose to add a comment. The majority of comments were similar to this one "It's hard to judge if a juvenile should register for the rest of their lives because they have a chance to rehab and it could also hurt their character growing up. Also decisions seem like they would be

made on a case-by-case basis upon the juveniles' age and to what extent the criminal act was.”

One participant chose to share a personal story, “My roommate committed a sexual offense 12 years ago that was minor. He recently lost a \$130,000 a year job because a coworker found him on the website. Since, this one mistake he has never been a threat or done wrong. I think it is unfair this will haunt him forever.”

Comparisons by Gender and Age

Attitudes were compared first by looking at responses made by gender. Table 8 presents responses on items relating towards the law behind sex offender registries (i.e., questions 1, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19 and 20). Women and men differed significantly in their responses for 6 of the 10 items. Women were more likely than men to agree that Megan's Law should apply to juveniles (Q. 1), Megan's Law is an important tool to fight crime (Q. 15), and the importance of community notification (Q. 20). Men were more likely to disagree that registration violates the protective standards of the juvenile court system (Q. 5). Women were more likely than men to believe that registration helps to prevent child sexual abuse (Q. 8) but both groups had no opinion to whether registration could eliminate sexually motivated abductions (Q. 14) or protected children from sex offenders (Q. 9). Both groups remained neutral toward if Nevada should require juveniles to register as sex offenders (Q. 18). The groups did not differ in agreement on whether it is OK for states to have their own guidelines (Q. 16) or whether there should be one standardized website (Q. 19).

To compare participants by age, the sample was split into four groups by quartiles: 18-year-old participants; 19 years olds; 20 and 21 year olds; and, all 22 years

Table 8

Attitudes towards Sex Offender Registries – compared by gender

Item	Women N= 280	Men N=247	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1. Megan's Law should apply to juvenile sex offenders.	4.14	3.91	6.46	.011*
5. Registration of juveniles under Megan's Law violates the protective standards (acting as guardians to children in crisis) set by the juvenile court system.	2.58	2.78	6.49	.011*
8. Megan's Law registration requirements help to prevent child sexual abuse.	4.04	3.92	2.23	.136
9. Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders.	3.69	3.84	2.93	.088
14. Megan's Law can help eliminate sexually motivated abductions.	3.71	3.44	9.38	.002**
15. Megan's Law is an important tool in fighting sex crimes.	4.13	3.98	4.78	.029*
16. It is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law.	3.38	3.38	.000	.985
18. Nevada should require juveniles to register as sex offenders.	3.82	3.57	8.73	.003**
19. There should be only one standardized national sex offender registry website that lists all offenders.	3.69	3.63	.373	.542
20. Notifying a community every time a sex offender moves into a neighborhood should be a mandatory provision under Megan's Law.	4.18	3.94	8.07	.005**

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

old or older. None of the items in this group varied significantly by age. These analyses can be seen in Table 9.

The next area considered were items looking at the treatment of juvenile sex offenders (i.e., Questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17 from Section 1). Gender differences are presented in Table 10. The groups did not reveal any significant difference in their attitudes related to whether a state requiring a juvenile to register as a sex offender violates their constitutional rights (Q. 3) or if the juvenile court system should act as a guardian to children in crisis (Q.4). Men were more likely than women to have no opinion that registration would harm juveniles (Q. 2) and that juveniles can be rehabilitated (Q. 6). Women were more likely to remain neutral that the police should monitor juveniles regularly (Q. 7), juveniles should be treated the same as adults (Q. 12), and whether juveniles should have to inform their school of their sex offenses (Q. 10). Women were more likely to disagree that juveniles under the age of fourteen should have to register as a sex offender (Q. 13) and more likely to agree the community has a right to know if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood (Q.17). Men were more likely to disagree that juveniles should have to register for life if it is their first offense (Q. 11).

These attitudes towards the treatment of juveniles were also considered by age. These results can be seen in Table 11. Most items did not vary significantly by age. Two items did, however, vary significantly. The first item (Q. 11) showed greater agreement within the younger ages. Also varying by age was the belief that juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated (Q. 6) but there was no discernable pattern of agreement (18 years old – 3.55, 19 years old – 3.43, 20 and 21 years old – 3.84, 22 and older – 3.42).

Table 9

Attitudes towards Sex Offender Registries – compared by age group

Item	Age 18	Age 19	Ages 20-21	Ages 22 +	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1. Megan's Law should apply to juvenile sex offenders.	4.04	4.01	3.99	4.08	1.97	.898
5. Registration of juveniles under Megan's Law violates the protective standards (acting as guardians to children in crisis) set by the juvenile court system.	2.65	2.76	2.70	2.61	.636	.592
8. Megan's Law registration requirements help prevents child sexual abuse.	4.00	4.02	4.01	3.95	.135	.939
9. Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders.	3.83	3.76	3.88	3.62	1.99	.118
14. Megan's Law can help eliminate sexually motivated abductions.	3.63	3.64	3.61	3.49	.653	.581
15. Megan's Law is an important tool in fighting sex crimes.	4.05	4.07	4.08	4.06	.038	.990
16. It is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law.	3.53	3.41	3.43	3.20	2.03	.109
18. Nevada should require juveniles to register as sex offenders.	3.80	3.72	3.63	3.68	.754	.521
19. There should be only one standardized national sex offender registry website that lists all offenders.	3.60	3.75	3.57	3.75	1.08	.357
20. Notifying a community every time a sex offender moves into a neighborhood should be a mandatory provision under Megan's Law.	4.12	4.10	4.03	4.03	.341	.796

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders – compared by gender

Item	Women N=280	Men N=247	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
2. Requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders could cause harm to their social development.	3.28	3.52	7.49	.006**
3. It is constitutional for states to require juvenile to register as sex offenders.	3.73	3.64	1.23	.267
4. The juvenile court system should act as guardians to children in crisis (including those who have committed crimes), looking out for the best interests of the child.	3.77	3.81	.255	.614
6. Juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated.	3.43	3.70	10.4	.001***
7. Juvenile sex offenders should be monitored regularly like parolees by the police.	3.99	3.76	8.30	.004**
10. Juvenile sex offenders should have to inform the school that they attend of their sex offenses.	3.81	3.61	5.19	.023*
11. Juveniles should have to register as sex offenders for their entire life even if it is for their first offenses.	3.01	2.88	1.55	.214
12. Juveniles should be treated the same as adults if they commit sex offenses.	3.27	2.97	9.64	.002**
13. Juveniles should have to register as a sex offender even if they are under the age of 14 when they commit the act.	2.92	2.72	4.41	.036*
17. The community has the right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in the neighborhood.	4.35	4.01	18.4	.000***

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 11

Attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders – compared by age group

Item	Age 18	Age 19	Ages 20-21	Age 22 +	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
2. Requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders could cause harm to their social development	3.27	3.28	3.52	3.46	1.89	.130
3. It is constitutional for states to require juvenile to register as sex offenders.	3.65	3.65	3.62	3.83	1.27	.282
4. The juvenile court system should act as guardians to children in crisis (including those who have committed crimes), looking out for the best interests of the child.	3.78	3.84	3.67	3.86	1.01	.388
6. Juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated.	3.55	3.43	3.84	3.42	5.78	.001***
7. Juvenile sex offenders should be monitored regularly like parolees by the police.	3.86	3.91	3.82	3.94	.457	.712
10. Juvenile sex offenders should have to inform the school that they attend of their sex offenses.	3.77	3.78	3.59	3.74	.902	.440
11. Juveniles should have to register as sex offenders for their entire life even if it is for their first offenses.	3.14	3.03	2.74	2.88	3.18	.024*
12. Juveniles should be treated the same as adults if they commit sex offenses.	3.27	3.20	3.07	3.01	1.49	.215
13. Juveniles should have to register as a sex offender even if they are under the age of 14 when they commit the act.	2.89	2.86	2.73	2.81	.537	.657
17. The community has the right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in the neighborhood.	4.24	4.36	4.08	4.13	2.16	.092

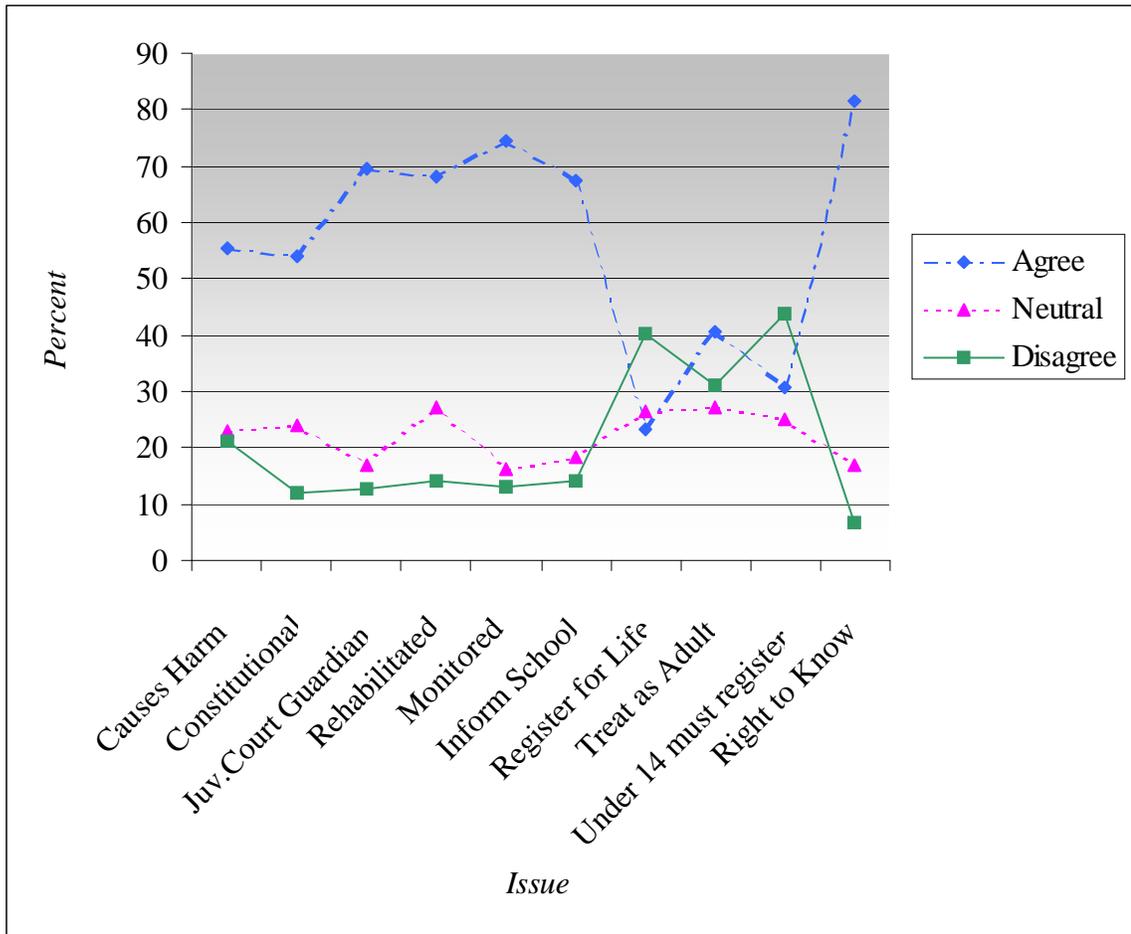
Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

One final way to look at the responses in this area is presented in Figure 1. It is interesting to look at for some items there was a clear consensus but on others, responses were evenly split between agreement, disagreement and no opinion.

Figure 1

Attitudes toward juvenile sex offender



The next area considered were questions relating to students' knowledge about sex offender registries (i.e., Questions 1-6 from Section 3). The attitudes were first compared by gender and those results can be seen in Table 12. Most items did not vary

significantly by gender. Only, two of the six items varied significantly. The first item (Q. 4) revealed men were more likely than women to be accused of sexual misconduct.

Whereas, women were more likely to have looked online to see if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood (Q. 5). The groups did not show any significant difference in their knowledge pertaining to the purpose of Megan’s Law (Q.1), whether they knew how to find if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood (Q. 2), whether they know a sex offender is living in their neighborhood (Q. 3), or if they personally know a registered sex offender.

Table 12

Knowledge of Sex Offender Registries and juvenile sex offenders– compared by gender

Item	Women N=280	Men N=247	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1. Prior to this survey, you understood the purpose of Megan’s Law	3.27	3.33	.332	.565
2. You know where to find out if you have any sex offenders in your neighborhood	3.61	3.63	.031	.861
3. You know if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	2.92	2.86	.315	.575
4. Have you ever been accused of sexual misconduct?	1.13	1.27	8.58	.004**
5. You have looked online to see if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	3.19	2.92	4.24	.040*
6. You personally know someone who is a registered sex offender	1.63	1.62	.012	.914

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

p < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001.

Only one item varied significantly by age, the question as to whether or not the students knew a sex offender personally (Q. 6). Twenty and twenty-one year olds (1.81) were more likely than twenty-two and older (1.66) to personally know someone who is a registered sex offender, followed by eighteen year olds (1.59) and nineteen year olds (1.41). Table 13 in presents all of these age comparisons.

Table 13

Knowledge of Sex Offender Registries and juveniles – compared by age group

Item	Age 18	Age 19	Ages 20-21	Ages 22 +	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1. Prior to this survey, you understood the purpose of Megan’s Law	3.27	3.25	3.38	3.28	.275	.844
2. You know where to find out if you have any sex offenders in your neighborhood	3.55	3.58	3.58	3.78	1.09	3.52
3. You know if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	2.98	2.94	2.73	2.96	.982	.401
4. Have you ever been accused of sexual misconduct?	1.18	1.29	1.14	1.18	1.59	.192
5. You have looked online to see if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	3.18	3.00	2.88	3.19	1.33	2.64
6. You personally know someone who is a registered sex offender	1.59	1.41	1.81	1.66	2.79	.040*

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).
p < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001.

The next area analyzed were questions relating to true stories and registration requirements (i.e., Questions 1-4 from Section 2). The attitudes were first compared by gender and those results can be seen in Table 14. Women and men differed significantly in their responses for most of the true stories except true story 1. These values were not large enough to be statistically significant but would be considered a practical significance. Women were more likely than men to disagree that the offender accused of statutory rape should have to register as a sex offender (Q.2). Men were more likely than women to disagree that the courts decision was fair when considering the age of the offender at the time of her offense (Q. 3a) and she should be required to register for twenty-five years (Q.3b). Men were more likely to strongly disagree that the offender who has been accused three times of sexual misconduct should have to register for life (Q. 4).

Table 14

True Stories – compared by gender

Item	Women N=280	Men N=247	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
True Story 1- Do you agree that she should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of her life?	1.98	1.97	.253	.615
True Story 2- Do you agree that he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	1.98	1.94	5.74	.017*
True Story 3a-Do you believe that the court decision was fair considering her age at the time of the offense?	1.76	1.86	7.55	.006**
True Story 3b-Do you believe that she should have been required to register as a sex offender for 25 years for her offense?	1.87	1.94	8.24	.004**
True Story 4- Do you believe he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	1.06	1.13	7.03	.008**

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

After analyzing age differences in attitudes toward true stories and registration requirements for these juvenile sex offenders, there was no statistical significance between the independent and dependent variables. Table 15 in presents all of these age comparisons.

Table 15

True Stories – compared by age group

Item	Age 18	Age 19	Ages 20-21	Ages 22 +	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
True Story 1-Do you agree that she should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of her life?	2.98	1.99	1.96	1.97	.873	.455
True Story 2- Do you agree that he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	1.97	1.97	1.94	1.98	1.29	.278
True Story 3a-Do you believe that the court decision was fair considering her age at the time of the offense?	1.74	1.81	1.83	1.84	1.79	.149
True Story 3b-Do you believe that she should have been required to register as a sex offender for 25 years for her offense?	1.91	1.90	1.91	1.90	.090	.965
True Story 4- Do you believe he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	1.08	1.07	1.08	1.13	1.29	.278

Item means range from 1.0 (strongly disagree) to 5.0 (strongly agree).

$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

It was hoped that attitudes could be compared by other demographics (e.g., whether or not the participant had children) but there was not enough variability in these responses to use them as independent variables. Another comparison that was not possible was looking at students who had been accused of sexual misconduct. Only 11 students disclosed that they had been so accused.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Discussion

It appears that participants are largely supportive of requiring juvenile sex offenders to register like adult offenders. The vast majority of participants believe juvenile sex offenders should be required to register under Megan's Law. Only slightly more than half believed Megan's Law causes harm to a juvenile's social development. The vast majority of participants appear to concur with the presumptions embodied in Megan's Law.

Participants' attitudes toward sex offender registries reflect support and comfort with the law. Across a number of items the vast majority of participants agreed that juveniles should have to register under Megan's Law, but only slightly more than half agreed that Nevada should require juveniles to register and a little less than half disagreed Megan's Law violates the protective standard set forth by the juvenile court system. The majority of participants appeared to agree with the presumptions set forth by Megan's Law. Participants attitudes revealed belief that sex offender registries helps prevent child sexual abuse, it is effective in protecting children from sex offenders, helps eliminate sexually motivated abductions, and is an important tool in fighting sex crimes. The majority of participants' agreed it is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law and they also agreed that there should be on standardized national sex offender registry website listing all sex offenders. The vast majority agreed that it should be mandatory that a neighborhood be notified if a sex an offender moves in.

It was interesting what the majority of participants believed sex offender registries could accomplish through advertising the locations of sex offenders. They put

significant faith in the ability of registries to deter crime. Statistically significant findings revealed that men were more confident than women in their belief that Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders. However, women were more likely to believe that Megan's Law helps prevent child abuse and helps eliminate sexually motivated abductions. There appears to be a disconnect between looking to tools that advertise the location of sex offenders and the reality of sexual victimization largely occurring at the hands of loved ones, not strangers.

Participants' attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders reflect conflicting perceptions about the treatment of the juvenile sex offender. When asked directly if juveniles should be treated the same as adults, the results were mixed splitting comparably between agreement, disagreement and no opinion. Across a number of items slightly more than half of participants agreed that requiring juveniles to register could cause harm to their social development. The majority agreed that juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated. These attitudes would suggest a belief that juveniles would be harmed by registration. The majority also, however, believed that police should monitor offenders regularly like parolees, the offender should inform their school of sex offenses, and the community has a right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in their neighborhood.

There was also inconsistent agreement about the rights of the child and the protection of the community. Over 70% of the group agreed that the purpose of the juvenile justice system is to look out for the best interests of the child. Contradictorily, less than 20% felt that public registration of juveniles violated the protective standards of the court. Additionally, the vast majority felt it was constitutional for states to require juveniles to register.

Despite a general support for registration, more participants disagreed than agreed that a juvenile should have to register for their entire life if it was their first offense and if they are under the age of 14 when the act committed. This age specific attitude contrasts the general agreement that juveniles should be treated the same as adults.

Another area of contrast was participants' attitudes toward true stories where they expressed disagreement with registration for three out of the four juvenile examples. For the scenarios involving minor sexual incidents (e.g., hugging or consensual underage sexual activity), the vast majority of participants disagreed with the courts decision to require these juveniles to register as sex offenders for life. In the scenario where a girl flashed her siblings, the majority of participants disagreed with the court's decision criminalizing the behavior of a ten year old. They also disagreed with the decision to require her to register for 25 years. For the final scenario involving a repeat offender, the vast majority agreed with the court decision in requiring offender to register for life, less than 10% disagreed with the decision.

The participants felt that they had some knowledge of sex offender registries and sex offenders, as demonstrated through their responses to questions 1-6 from section three. Slightly more than half understood the purpose of Megan's Law prior to taking the survey. This might be expected to be higher in our subject pool since they are enrolled in an introduction to criminal justice class.

The majority of participants know how to find if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood, but slightly less than half have looked online for sex offender information. A little more than a third of the participants know if there is a sex offender living in their neighborhood. It is interesting that this wide spread support for the utility of sex offender

registries did not translate into widespread use of registries to check for offenders' locations.

When comparing gender responses results designated that women were stricter in their attitudes towards the punishment of juveniles. Women were more likely than men to agree that a juvenile should inform their school of sex offenses, be treated the same as adults, register under age of fourteen, be monitored like parolees, and should be required to register as a sex offender. This difference in attitudes could be because women are sexually assaulted more often than men.

When analyzing age difference results reflected no discernable pattern. But it was interesting that the age groups twenty and twenty-one were more likely to personally know a registered sex offender and they also believed that juveniles can be rehabilitated. To my surprise, eighteen and nineteen year olds were more likely to agree that juveniles should have to register for their entire life.

I would like to mention that our findings supported previous research on knowledge and acceptance of sex offender registries. In comparison our results were similar to Levenson and colleagues (2007) because most participants from both studies were familiar with Megan's Law and believed it assisted with public safety. Our results were parallel to Malesky and Keim (2001) where their participants believed notification laws created a false sense of security for parents. On the other hand, our participants believed notification laws aid in eliminating sexually motivated abductions and prevent child abuse, which leads to a false sense of security.

Interestingly, the findings showed a divergence between the participants' attitudes of sex offender registries when applied to juveniles and how they responded to the true stories. It appears that the participants believe Megan's Law is effective and it should be

applied to juveniles. After the participants understood the individual circumstances for each particular case scenario their attitudes changed significantly, they then believed it should not apply to those particular juveniles.

Limitations

As with any study there are limitations. Only UNLV students were polled which limits the generalizability of these findings. The next step in this research should be to conduct it with non-college populations.

Recommendations for Future Research

The lack of research on the topic of juvenile sex offenders highlights a critical need for more research to be done. Research should focus on how to rehabilitate juvenile sex offenders, what causes a juvenile to become an offender, and how to protect the rights of children.

Conclusion

The data collected supports the research question that UNLV students attitudes coincide with the presumptions set forth by Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders should be required to register under Megan's Law even though it could causes harm to a juvenile's social development. Responses seemed to indicate that participants were supportive of Megan's Law and were concerned with the tracking of juvenile sex offenders. The majority of participants also believed that juveniles can be rehabilitated and that each case should be treated individually.

This study was designed to test whether expansion of registration laws to juveniles is widely supported by the general public and if the general public was aware of the long-term consequences when applying registration laws to juveniles. While they appeared to show some concern about the negative effects of registering juveniles, the

general public would choose apparent community safety over the concerns of publically labeling these young offenders. The knowledge gained through this study uncovered a need for public education and awareness of the effects of registration laws on juveniles and their development into healthy adults.

The following statement is the foundation of why this topic is important “The dilemma regarding registration requirements of juvenile offenders involves valuing public safety and the protection of the vulnerable populations over rehabilitation and possibly individual rights” (Baranoski and Buchanan, 2003; Scott and Gerbasi, 2003, cited in Craun and Kernsmith, 2006).

Megan’s Law is a result of society’s demand for stricter laws to prevent sexual assault against children, but when it is a child that is committing the sexual assault, society needs to balance the needs of children on both sides. Policies should look at the bigger picture and consider how to treat these young offenders instead of simply labeling them as a sexual predator for the rest of their life. With sex offender registries expanding to the federal level in SORNA, most of these laws are vague, mostly because lawmakers do not define the term “sex offense” clearly. By simply passing a law to solve a growing problem, the public is naïve to believe these laws are actually helpful.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1 - Attitudes towards Megan’s Law and juvenile sex offenders.

History of Megan’s Law: In October 1994 New Jersey passed the toughest sex offender registration act in the United States, which is known as Megan’s Law (Hindman, 1997). The law was named after seven-year-old Megan Kanka who was raped and murdered by a paroled sex offender. Her parents and the community were outraged that they were not informed that a twice-convicted sex offender was living in their neighborhood. This started the movement that resulted in the passage of what came to be called “Megan’s Law” (Petrosino, 1999). In 1994, President Clinton signed the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Registration Act requiring each state to establish a system for sex offender registration (Center for Sex Offender Management, 1997). Megan’s Law was an amendment to this federal law allowing each state to write their own guidelines for sex offender registration (Grubestic, 2007). Megan’s Law requires all convicted sex offenders to register with local law enforcement agencies for the remainder of their lives. All 50 states have sex offender registration but the standards vary from state to state. Only 28 states require juveniles adjudicated (convicted) for a sex offense to register as sex offenders.

Instruction: Below are a series of statements about Megan’s Law and juveniles. We would like to know to what extent you agree or disagree with each one. Please indicate how much you agree and disagree with each statement by circling the appropriate letters alongside the statement. Please do not skip any statements.

SD - Strongly Disagree **D** – Disagree **N** – Neutral **A**- Agree **SA**- Strongly Agree

1. Megan’s Law should apply to juvenile sex offenders.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. Requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders could cause harm to their social development	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. It is constitutional for states to require juvenile to register as sex offenders.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. The juvenile court system should act as guardians to children in crisis (including those who have committed crimes), looking out for the best interests of the child.	SD	D	N	A	SA

5. Registration of juveniles under Megan's Law violates the protective standards (acting as guardians to children in crisis) set by the juvenile court system.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. Juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. Juvenile sex offenders should be monitored regularly like parolees by the police.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. Megan's Law registration requirements help prevent child sexual abuse.	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. Megan's Law is effective in protecting children from sex offenders.	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. Juvenile sex offenders should have to inform the school that they attend of their sex offenses.	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. Juveniles should have to register as sex offenders for their entire life even if it is for their first offenses.	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. Juveniles should be treated the same as adults if they commit sex offenses.	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. Juveniles should have to register as a sex offender even if they are under the age of 14 when they commit the act.	SD	D	N	A	SA
14. Megan's Law can help eliminate sexually motivated abductions.	SD	D	N	A	SA
15. Megan's Law is an important tool in fighting sex crimes.	SD	D	N	A	SA
16. It is acceptable that each state has its own guidelines under Megan's Law.	SD	D	N	A	SA
17. The community has the right to know if a juvenile sex offender is living in the neighborhood.	SD	D	N	A	SA
18. Nevada should require juveniles to register as	SD	D	N	A	SA

sex offenders.					
19. There should be only one standardized national sex offender registry website that lists all offenders.	SD	D	N	A	SA
20. Notifying a community every time a sex offender moves into a neighborhood should be a mandatory provision under Megan’s Law.	SD	D	N	A	SA

SECTION 2- True Stories.

Instruction: Below are four true stories about Megan’s Law and juveniles. We would like to know to if you agree or disagree with each one. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement by circling yes if you agree and no if you disagree. Please do not skip any statements.

True Story 1
 In Oregon, juvenile sex offenders must be included in the sex offender registry for life. The offender is a girl who spent the majority of her time in the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) for petty theft, running away, and other minor crimes. During her last stay at Hillcrest (OYA) she declared herself to be a lesbian. A member of the staff saw her putting her arm around another girl and based on this action, she was sent to the sex offender unit.

Do you agree that she should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of her life?	Yes	No
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True Story 2
 The offender and victim dated for about two and half years. He was one year older than her and after he turned eighteen they remained together. About a year later they decided to date other people; at this time she was also eighteen. Her parents were outraged by the break up and so they reported him to the authorities for statutory rape. He was charged, found guilty, spent seventy-two months in prison, and under state law has to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life.

Do you agree that he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	Yes	No
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True Story 3
 The offender was 10 years old when she and her two stepbrothers (age eight and five) were caught flashing each other and pretending to have sex with their clothes on. Two years later she plead guilty to first and second degree sexual conduct and was sentenced to eighteen months in a residential treatment program and was required by the judge to register as sex offender for twenty-five years. She petitioned to be added to the non-public registry instead of the public registry but she was denied because she was more than five years older than one victim at the time of the offense. She claimed the court had poor mathematical skills because her stepbrother was five and she was ten at the time of the offense.

Do you believe that the court decision was fair considering her age at the time of the offense?	Yes	No
Do you believe that she should have been required to register as a sex offender for 25 years for her offense?	Yes	No

True Story 4

The offender was a fourteen year-old boy who sexually assaulted an eight year-old girl. This boy, her neighbor, had been arrested three times for sexual misconduct on other victims.

Do you believe he should have to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life?	Yes	No
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SECTION 3- Generalized Questions.

Instruction: Below are general questions about Megan’s Law and juveniles. We would like to know if you agree or disagree with each one. If you are uncomfortable answering the following questions, please remember you can skip any questions you do not want to answer. Please indicate how much you agree and disagree with each statement by circling the appropriate letters alongside the statement.
SD - Strongly Disagree D – Disagree N – Neutral A- Agree SA- Strongly Agree

1. Prior to this survey, you understood the purpose of Megan’s Law	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. You know where to find out if you have any sex offenders in your neighborhood	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. You know if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. Have you ever been accused of sexual misconduct?	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. You have looked online to see if you have any sex offenders living in your neighborhood	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. You personally know someone who is a registered sex offender	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. Someone over 18 years of age who has sex with someone under 16	SD	D	N	A	SA

8. A 15 year old who has consensual sex with a 14 year old	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. An 18 year old male who has consensual sex with a 15 year old girl	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. A 16 year old girl who has consensual sex with a 15 year old boy	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. A 13 year old boy who is kissing his 13 year old girlfriend	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. A 12 year old girl who smacks another 12 year old classmate on the bottom	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. A 13 year old who kisses another 13 year old while their tops are off	SD	D	N	A	SA

Is there anything else you want to add about Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders?

SECTION 4- Demographics:

Please answer each question. This is a completely anonymous survey, so please honestly answer as many questions as possible.

What is your area of study?

Age: _____

Gender: (Please circle one) Male Female

Ethnicity: (Please circle as many as apply)

African-American Asian Caucasian Hispanic Other: _____

Religion: (Please circle one)

None Christian Mormon Islamic Jewish Catholic Other: _____

Do you have any children? Yes _____ No _____

Number of Boys _____ Number of Girls _____

Year in University 1 2 3 4 Other: _____

Have you ever been employed in law enforcement? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been employed in counseling? Yes _____ No _____

Thank you for participating. Please leave your survey in the sealed box.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM



INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Criminal Justice

TITLE OF STUDY: Attitudes toward Megan’s Law and juvenile sex offenders

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Alexis Kennedy

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 895-5122

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about perceptions of Megan’s Law and juvenile sex offenders.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because previous research has shown that college level students share similar attitudes with other adults in the community at large. You are being invited to participate because you are enrolled at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and you are at least 18 years old.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: complete an anonymous self-report questionnaire package consisting of questions about perceptions of Megan’s Law and juvenile sex offenders. You will be asked to provide some demographic information (e.g., age, sex, and ethnic background). Your name will not be associated with or linked to the data, and your consent form will be stored separately from the data.

Benefits of Participation

There may be a direct benefit to you as a participant in this study. You may benefit from gaining direct knowledge about the process by which psychological data is collected in a university setting. We hope to learn more about the effectiveness of measuring attitudes towards Megan’s Law and juveniles sex offenders.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You might be uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate and withdraw from the study without jeopardizing your course grade. If you exercise your right to withdraw from the study before it is completed, you will still receive your research credit points.

Cost /Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated financially for your time. You will receive two (2) research credit points for CRJ 104 for your participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Kennedy at **895-5122**. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794**.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING FORM

EXPERIMENT INFORMATIONAL FORM

* PLEASE READ *

Principal Investigator, Dr. Alexis Kennedy (895-5122)

Survey on attitudes toward Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders. This survey included items designed to measure attitudes toward Megan's Law and juvenile sex offenders. This new study attempts to see how attitudes of Nevadans match the assumptions written into federal legislation designed to protect victims of Megan's Law. In 1994, President Clinton signed the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Registration Act requiring each state to establish a system for sex offender registration (Center for Sex Offender Management, 1997). Megan's Law is an amendment to this federal law allowing each state to write their individual guidelines for sex offender registration (Grubestic, 2007). Megan's Law requires all convicted sex offenders to register with local law enforcement agencies for the remainder of their lives. All 50 states have sex offender registration but the standards vary from state to state. Only 28 states require juveniles adjudicated for a sex offense to register as sex offenders. Although sex offenders are required to register, the public seems to have a different perception about the effect Megan's Law has on juvenile sex offenders and their social development.

Some of the questions asked today are personal and may have been unsettling. If you would like to talk further about any issues raised here, the following is a resource available to you:

✓ **Student Counseling and Psychological Services at UNLV 895-3627**
Confidential counseling on any topic

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APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL NOTICE



**Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Approval Notice**

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: December 19, 2008
TO: **Dr. Margaret Alexis Kennedy**, Criminal Justice
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. J. Michael Stitt, Chair
Protocol Title: **Attitudes Toward Megan's Law and Juvenile Sex Offenders**
Protocol #: 0810-2874

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is December 17, 2009. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

PLEASE NOTE:

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond December 17, 2009, it would be necessary to submit a **Continuing Review Request Form** *60 days* before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

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