

Study casts doubt on sex offender notification laws

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While evidence suggests that requiring convicted sex offenders to register with the police reduces the chances they'll re-offend, a recent paper co-authored by a University of Michigan law professor shows that publicizing sex offenders' identities may actually increase the chances they'll commit another sex crime.

Michigan [law professor](#) J.J. Prescott and professor Jonah Rockoff of the Columbia Business School wrote the paper, which was published in the *Journal of Law & Economics*. It examines 10 years of data from 15 states and takes a systematic look at the aftermath of two stages of the ever-changing get-tough legislative response to sex offenders: first, laws that require convicted offenders to register with their local police, and second, laws that also require notification—that is, publication of offenders' identities, their crimes, etc.—either through searchable internet pages or other means, including personal visits or newspaper notices.

The outcomes of the two approaches are distinctly different, the professors found.

First, their evidence indicates that a registration requirement without public notification reduces reported sex crimes substantially, probably because police are better able to monitor and arrest recidivists. In jurisdictions with an average number of offenders registered, that reduction can be as high as 13 percent, and grows larger as the registries grow. This last fact implies that registration laws lower crime more by

discouraging registered offenders from committing new crimes than by discouraging potential first offenders from committing crimes in the first place.

Second, the data suggest that making the identities of registered offenders public may actually weaken public safety by making registered [sex offenders](#) more likely to commit new crimes. In jurisdictions that require notification, the deterrence provided by making convicted offenders' identities known for would-be first offenders may be more than offset by released offenders' tendency to commit new crimes when they are subjected to notification requirements. The data also indicate that jurisdictions with notification laws suffer slightly higher rates of overall reported sex crimes.

So while registration appears to discourage repeat offenses, notification requirements actually seem to encourage them—possibly, according to the authors, "because the associated psychological, social, or financial costs (of notification requirements) make a crime-free life relatively less desirable."

More information: [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm ...
?abstract_id=1100663](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1100663)

Provided by University of Michigan

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