THE SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY IN COLLIN COUNTY, TEXAS:
A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SEX OFFENDERS

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The primary goal of this study was to analyze the characteristics of current registered sex offenders in Collin County, Texas, as well as to compare age and gender of the victims of these offenders in order to know who sex offenders primarily target in these crimes. The study also sought to discover geographic patterns of where the registered sex offenders reside for the purpose of keeping communities aware. Participants consisted of 175 registered sex offenders (N = 175) in Collin County, Texas, found on Collin County’s and the Texas Department of Public Safety’s online public registries. The findings demonstrate that there were significant trends among the sex offenders, their victims, location of residence, and housing complications as a result of progressing sex offender laws. Treatment programs and the reintegration of offenders in the community were also addressed. The meaning of the results in this study can aid in the development of safety and prevention strategies, provide an understanding about the utilization of sex offender registries, and can benefit law enforcement to predict the movement of current sex offenders, along with knowing where to find other potential offenders.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The number of registered sex offenders in the United States has grown significantly in recent years. Sex offenders must adhere to stricter laws and probation guidelines, registering their names and addresses in whichever county they reside. In Texas, the Department of Public Safety Crime Records Service has a master database, which provides extra details about each offender compared to the Collin County registry. The registration process begins in the jurisdiction where the offender is required to register; in this study, the Collin County Sheriff’s Department was examined (CCSD, 2012). The sex offender information collected by law enforcement agencies throughout the state is then transferred into the Texas sex offender registry (TXDPS, 2012).

Collin County was used in this research because it is quickly growing and emerging as one of the more desirable places to live in North Texas. Collin County is comprised of approximately 800,000 residents in thirty-one cities, including large urban areas as well as smaller rural towns. Currently, there are 175 registered sex offenders, with the registry being updated on a daily basis, or as needed. In Collin County, Texas, offenders are required to update general information on the online registry either quarterly or annually, based on the sentence given for the type of crime committed. To begin, a general overview of what constitutes a sex offender is necessary in order to better understand the population in this study.

Sex offenders come from various walks of life, which is why it is difficult to categorize this group of criminals. A “sex offender” is labeled as someone who commits a forceful sex crime or attempts to commit a sex crime. It does not have to be actual physical contact with the victim, as with child pornography cases. Offenders can be first time offenders, chronic repeat
offenders, old or young, have a mental disorder, or live a completely normal life. This is what makes a sex offender challenging to detect, unless the crime is reported. Victims of sex offenders also vary in age, but children and adolescents are the most frequently targeted (Alexander, 2010). Some punishments served by registrants for committing sex crimes include, but are not limited to, potential lifetime registration, mandatory GPS monitoring, lifetime probation, and polygraph testing (Payne & DeMichele, 2008). Registrants also undergo sex offender treatment - not as punishment - but in order to avoid recidivism.

Since sex offenders are diverse in their levels of offending (i.e. first time offense vs. repeat offender, victimizing children vs. adults, type of crime), the rehabilitation and treatment process should accommodate each individual’s case. Probation and parole officers’ aid in assisting sex offenders with reintegrating into the community is imperative; therefore, training and educating officers on how to deal with high risk versus low risk offenders is essential. Treatment and sanctions should be assessed according to each individual’s offense, prior criminal history, victim information, and the level of risk he or she imposes on recidivating. Although sex offenders spend time with treatment counselors and probation officers to learn how to become a productive member of society, society has blocked the opportunities for offenders by creating employer and housing restrictions.

Sex offenders are often unsuccessful trying to find housing in well-developed areas. Policymakers have enacted zoning restrictions and “buffer zones,” meaning offenders are required to live at least 500-2000 feet away from places where children are likely to congregate (Zandbergen & Hart, 2009). For example, offenders cannot live near schools, churches, parks, or daycare centers (Zandbergen & Hart, 2009). As policymakers were aggressive to enact sex offender laws such as the buffer zone rule, it was not thought out for those offenders who assault
older victims and who are not necessarily attracted to children. In this case, a buffer zone to stay away from child-friendly areas does not serve its purpose. Unfortunately, this policy forces these individuals to have limited options in choosing where to live.

The residential restrictions have generated housing concerns for registered sex offenders. The areas where most offenders are allowed to reside are typically low-income areas with a weak community structure. Tewksbury and Mustaine (2008) describe how offenders mostly reside in socially disorganized communities. It is common for registrants to live in clustered community housing areas such as apartments and trailer parks. Becoming a lifetime registrant for committing a sex crime tarnishes one’s credibility and reputation, along with creating unintended consequences by prohibiting offenders from choosing where to live or work. Negatively labeling offenders because of a registry will continue to harm their behavior and attitude, increasing the likelihood to reoffend. On the other hand, the development of sex offender registries helps law enforcement monitor an offender’s whereabouts and increases citizens’ awareness of where local sex offenders live.

Analyzing the data from the Collin County sex offender registry is valuable for law enforcement, researchers, and other experts to enhance their understanding of criminological patterns after the arrest and sentence served. A thorough analysis of the registry in Collin County allows researchers to make correlations on characteristics and demographics, to map out “hot spots” where most registrants live, and to see if those areas are already high in crime. The advantage to knowing about hot spots and high crime areas is that if there are registered offenders who are clustered in those areas, law enforcement can take more preventive measures to assure those offenders are not committing crimes as well as keeping the rate of victimization low. Finding these patterns with the information given on the registries can lead law
enforcement to other sex offenders if they know what areas to concentrate on, as well as prevent
current registrants from recidivating.

The results of the study are important to interpret because as Collin County and counties
similar in size continue to rapidly evolve, officers must be familiar with the criminal patterns of
their jurisdictions to control and prevent crime. Additionally, officers will continue to enforce
the buffer zone rule in new communities. The more buffer zones that are created, the less
options offenders have in choosing where to live; thus, only leaving the option for offenders to
reside in socially disorganized, high crime areas where they are more prone to recidivate as
proposed by the social disorganization theory (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2008). The restriction
zones which prohibit offenders from living wherever they choose results in emotional distress,
thus discouraging the offender to deviate from crime.

Research Questions

Since the establishment of sex offender registries nationwide, agencies and researchers
have attempted to categorize the typical sex offender characteristics, but because the offenders
vary in age, gender and type of profession, it has become a challenge to define which people are
collectively called sexual predators (McAlinden, 2007). This study attempts to apply the
registered sex offender’s information from the online databases by conducting a descriptive
analysis of sex offenders in Collin County. This study also seeks to discover geographic patterns
of where the registered sex offenders reside based on existing research and the information
provided by the public sex offender registry list from Collin County (Campbell, 2004; CCSD,
2012). The proceeding research will add to current empirical data by answering the following
questions:
1) Where is the highest concentration of sex offenders in Collin County, Texas?
2) What are the general characteristics of sex offenders in Collin County, Texas?
3) Do the registered sex offenders live in high crime areas or non-high crime areas?
4) Do the registered sex offenders have a tendency to live in rural areas or within city limits?
5) In what ways do the victims compare in terms of age and gender?

Conclusion

Since the presence of known sex offenders is increasing through online registries and community awareness, researchers are now able to collectively examine this group of criminals and find trends among offenders and their victims. A great amount of research has been done on general sex offender characteristics, in addition to general characteristics of victims (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). There is also a great deal of research on the negative effects caused by sex offender registries and how the registries can be better utilized (Craun & Theriot, 2009; Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009). In addition, there is reliable information on buffer zones, employment challenges, and successful completion of sex offender treatment.

However, additional research is needed to examine housing trends and where the majority of offenders reside in Collin County. More information is needed to gain an understanding if registered sex offenders typically live in high crime areas, or if they tend to live in lower crime areas. Also, there is lack of evidence regarding whether or not offenders live in more rural or urban communities. Is there something about smaller, country towns that offenders prefer? Does a small town keep the offender at a low profile, or do offenders live in rural areas because the larger, urban areas make it more difficult for registered sex offenders to succeed?
The subsequent chapter is a review of current literature and empirical data that encompasses a description of sex offenders and the evolution of the sex offender registry. The influence of the implementation of sex offender registries is also addressed.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the establishment of public sex offender registries, there has been an increased awareness of sex offenders throughout the United States. However, there have also been several obstacles with the implementation of sex offender laws, such as mandatory registration on public sex offender registry lists, which causes a negative effect on a person’s well-being. Sex offender registries have supported swifter justice for the victim and his or her family, and an assurance that people are aware of abusers. Stricter sex offender laws have also guaranteed that these perpetrators are incarcerated longer, or have harsher probation guidelines rather than receiving a more lenient sentence.

In addition, experts have argued that sex offender registries prohibit offenders from rehabilitating and moving forward with their lives. Since society knows about convicted and registered sex offenders, what about the molesters who have not been caught? Has the sex offender registry promoted a false sense of security? Although there are several issues that exist with these criminals, this literature review strives to present current material about characteristics, recidivism rates, treatment programs, housing issues, and policies that sex offenders must abide by.

Characteristics of Sexual Offenders

A common assumption about sex offenders is that they are mostly men. Women also commit sexual offenses, although the arrest rates are generally lower due to the underreporting of cases. For female offenders, most child abuse takes place when the woman is taking care of the victim (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). In a previous study, researchers found in a
sample of male \((n = 136)\) and female \((n = 128)\) sex offenders, the average age for male sex offenders was around 40 years old (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009). Female sex offenders were mostly between 26-32 years old, married, and had children (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). The study also concluded that female offenders are more inclined to have male victims, while male offenders are more likely to abuse females; yet, female sex offenders were less likely than males to recidivate (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009).

A three-tier system was developed by Zilney and Zilney (2009) in order to distinguish sex offenders that are most to least likely at risk to reoffend. The first tier is for low risk, Tier 2 is for moderate risk, and Tier 3 is for high risk offenders that are most likely to repeat a sexual offense (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). Several parole and probation officers have a system such as this in order to make an evaluation of the offender’s progress, and to administer the level of threat an offender poses to the public.

The types of sexual offenses that perpetrators commit vary in the level of aggression against the victim. Veysey and Zgoba (2010) discussed various types of sex crimes reported to the police. The most frequent crimes reported were rape, sexual abuse, molestation, indirect contact such as exhibitionism, child sex trafficking, and child pornography (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010; Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011). Vandiver (2006) found 64% of the sex crimes in her study were assaults, comprised of aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault, and sexual assault involving a child. Thirty-five percent of the offenses were indecency with a child, including sexual contact, and exposure (Vandiver, 2006). Child pornography has drastically increased in police reports because of the accessibility to use the Internet; but law enforcement has greater technology than before, making it easier to catch offenders online (Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011).
Personality characteristics show sex offenders to be more passive, while compared to violent criminals, who showed more aggressive traits (Craig, Browne, Beech, & Stringer, 2006). This group of criminals is less likely to draw attention to themselves, as they can easily influence their victims to act as if nothing is happening. Sexual offenders are described as having mental disorders, including depression, psychosis, personality and antisocial disorders (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). This indicates how sex offender treatment should be included with probation and parole requirements to overcome the mental obstacle that many sex offenders exhibit. Sex offenders with higher levels of mental disorders may require more extensive treatment than those offenders who did not show signs of any mental condition (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009).

Veysey and Zgoba (2010) estimated that approximately 35% of offenders received mental health treatment as part of their sanction. In addition, Veysey and Zgoba (2010) also found 45% of perpetrators had drug abuse problems, while 47% reported alcohol abuse problems. That is at least half of the offender population who was potentially under the influence of a controlled substance during the encounter with his or her victim, which in turn, affects the offender’s mental state.

Another common characteristic among sex offenders was growing up in dysfunctional families and experiencing sexual abuse as children (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010; Dietrich, Smiley, & Frederick, 2007). Offenders often report and try to justify their crime based on the fact that they were abused as a child. One study that examined female sex offenders revealed that one-third reported sexual abuse, starting around 8 years old (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). Previous encounters of child sexual abuse played a significant role in how the offender interacted with others as an adult, and supports the evidence that many offenders
develop psychological disorders. If an offender was repetitively abused as a child, he or she may
grow up to develop antisocial behaviors or become sexually violent against others (Dietrich,
Smiley, & Frederick, 2007).

Studer, Aylwin, and Reddon (2005) conducted a study on the amount of testosterone in
sex offenders and determined whether or not it had an effect on sexual violence. Higher levels of
testosterone showed to have an influence on male aggression (Studer, Aylwin, & Reddon, 2005).
The researchers of the study found that the testosterone level was a significant method to predict
sexual aggression and recidivism (Studer, Aylwin, & Reddon, 2005). As a result, several states
began using chemical castration, which decreases male hormone levels and lowers sex drive as a
punishment for perpetrators (LaFond, 2005). This research reinforces the basis as to why there
are substantially higher numbers of male offenders as opposed to female offenders.

Vandiver’s research presented the importance of detecting and treating juvenile sex
offenders. Juvenile sex offenders make up about 11% of sex crimes in the United States
(Vandiver, 2006). The criminal patterns of juvenile sex offenders are a strong predictor as to
whether or not a juvenile would recidivate as an adult (Vandiver, 2006). In a number of juvenile
cases, the juvenile is sexually curious or promiscuous with a boyfriend/girlfriend, and is charged
as a sex offender (Vandiver, 2006). The juvenile then becomes a lifetime registrant for a
situation that otherwise would not be considered abuse. This is where sex offender policies are
flawed, because now the juvenile faces shame as an adult, hampering their opportunity to
become successful. The majority of juvenile sex offenders were later rearrested in adulthood for
nonsexual offenses; very few were rearrested for a sexual offense (Vandiver, 2006). This
justifies early intervention, which can be more effective at the juvenile level or that the juvenile
was simply sexually curious (Vandiver, 2006).
Characteristics of Victims

Children tend to be the most vulnerable to being victimized, and they typically suffer from long-term psychological effects (LaFond, 2005). Some of the consequences for victims include depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, suicide, eating disorders, antisocial behaviors, and alcohol and drug abuse (LaFond, 2005). Police reports show the majority of victim-offender relationships are with a relative or an acquaintance, whereas the stranger-victim relationship is less common (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). The victims are daughters, sons, stepchildren, or grandkids to perpetrators, whom the victims trust and have a good rapport with. In fact, one study reported that 75% of female sex offenders knew their victim (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010).

Alexander (2010) found that male and female victimizations take place at different ages in the child’s life. The most common age for female victims is 14 years old, while 4 years old is the common age for male victims (Alexander, 2010). Most victims are females between 6 to 12 years old (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). The difference in ages between males and females is primarily because younger males are more susceptible to be defenseless; whereas 12-year-old females are in the prepubescent stage. Almost half of the victims live with their perpetrator, and the majority of cases reported took place in the victim’s or offender’s home (LaFond, 2005).

The underreporting of sex crimes is a difficult task for law enforcement to overcome for various reasons (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). Only about 14% of sex crimes are reported to the police, an alarming number to think about when considering how many victims are keeping that information to themselves (Alexander, 2010). Victims do not report the crimes because they experience feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear of retaliation by the offender, or do not
understand they were being abused (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). For younger children, the lack of reporting is due to age factors, or the child is so young that he or she is dependent on the person who is committing the abuse (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). The victim may rely on his or her perpetrator for food, money, clothing, or a place to live. Sex offenders easily manipulate their victims into not telling anyone about the abuse; often times, the offender threatens the victim with further sexual abuse (McAlinden, 2007). Gibson and Vandiver (2008) explained that since victims are less likely to report the crime, especially if the offender is someone they know, then recidivism rates will remain low.

Recidivism Rates

The goal of public sex offender registries was to stop convicted sex offenders from recidivating, and deter people from committing sex crimes (Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009). Has the requirement for convicted offenders to register made an impact on the recidivism rates? Are there other factors such as treatment programs, or the personal history of each registered offender that influenced the decision to not reoffend? Surprisingly, sex offenders are less likely to recidivate than violent offenders (Craig, Browne, Beech, & Stringer, 2006).

The recidivism rate for sex offenders is generally lower than the recidivism rate for nonsexual offenders (LaFond, 2005; Patrick & Marsh, 2009; Zilney & Zilney, 2009). Recidivism rates vary by the type of offense, with rapists having the highest percentage of recidivism, and incest offenders with the lowest rates (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). Previous research showed that 7.7% of rapists were rearrested for rape, while 31.9% of burglars were rearrested for burglary (LaFond, 2005). This provides evidence to the notion that recidivism is
still lower for sexual offenders than non-sexual offenders. LaFond (2005) also found that offenders with a prior sexual criminal history were more likely to recidivate than a first time offender.

Researchers usually gather their data from self-report surveys or arrest data (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). However, Dietrich, Smiley, and Frederick (2007) discovered higher crime rates from self-reports than arrest records. Campbell’s (2004) research on recidivism rates for sex offenders factored age, marital status, prior sex offenses, stranger victim versus acquaintance, and severe mental disorders as the variables to measure in predicting future offenses. Patrick and Marsh (2009) reported that perpetrators who were acquaintances with their victims had a higher probability of reoffending compared to perpetrators who were related to the victim. Additional research also confirms that as most sex offenders get older, they are less likely to reoffend (Campbell, 2004).

Predicting recidivism has been problematic because it may take two perpetrators of similar crimes vastly different time periods to reoffend. One may take a year, while the other may not recidivate until twenty years have passed (Campbell, 2004). The short-term vs. long-term sex offender illustrates inaccuracies in measuring recidivism since there are several variables to consider with each individual (Campbell, 2004; LaFond, 2005; Vess & Skelton, 2010). What researchers have found to be somewhat effective is to evaluate recidivism rates of offenders based on the specific offense rather than examining a cohort of offenders (Campbell, 2004). Since sex offenders are not a homogenous group, this would aid in a better assessment in comparing patterns with the aggressive offenders versus the more passive offenders.

One of the flaws with measuring recidivism based on a specific crime is that the data obtained is only on crimes reported to law enforcement (LaFond, 2005). Since many sex crimes
go underreported, the outcome could actually result in different numbers (LaFond, 2005; Vess & Skelton, 2010). Plea bargaining also plays a role in the rate of recidivism, since it is considered a non-sexual conviction (Vess & Skelton, 2010). This is another possible explanation as to how recidivism remains low for sex offenders, considering the number of offenders who have charges reduced to a plea bargain agreement. Zilney and Zilney (2009) described how intensive supervision and sex offender treatment is expected to play a crucial role in decreasing the rate of recidivism. Treatment is not a significant factor in reducing recidivism, but is has been proven to help perpetrators from re-offending (Patrick & Marsh, 2009).

Another weakness in monitoring recidivism rates is that previous studies used different follow-up periods to measure and predict if an offender was at a higher risk to commit more crime (Vess & Skelton, 2010). Researchers have used a five year follow up period to determine re-offense rates, while other studies have shown that longer follow-up periods have demonstrated higher rates of recidivism (Vess & Skelton, 2010). Perhaps future studies on sex offender recidivism should use a standard measurement on what is an acceptable follow-up time period to base future results upon, providing a more accurate description of recidivism based on the same time frame. Furthermore, Vess & Skelton’s (2010) study provided empirical evidence that 17% of offenders who victimized children later victimized adults, which is significant to show that sex offenders will not always recidivate against the same type of victim.

Stricter Laws and Sanctions for Sex Offenders

Historically, the only type of laws that protected victims from sex crimes were rape shield laws in the 1970s and 1980s (LaFond, 2005). Society argued for legislators to redefine the meaning of rape and assaults, allowing prosecutors to make harsher convictions against
offenders (LaFond, 2005). By the 1980s, sex offenders were held fully accountable and served longer sentences for their crimes (LaFond, 2005). In the 1990s, the most violent crimes against children broke news nationwide and caused policymakers to initiate stricter laws against sex offenders (LaFond, 2005). Legislators created sex offender laws based on the worst, highest profile cases seen in news headlines, although sex offender laws vary from state to state (Dietrich, Smiley, & Frederick, 2007; Patrick & Marsh, 2009). New laws have become stricter through the years, with the primary goal to deter potential offenders from committing a crime.

Veysey and Zgoba (2010) concluded that punishment for sex offenders has become more severe and invasive into the lives of offenders. The severity of the punishment includes increased incarceration sentences for the offender, while the invasive aspect restricts offenders from living and working in certain areas, as well as continuously registering on sex offender registry lists (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). A problem that law enforcement, researchers and policymakers face when developing conclusions about the recidivism rates of sex offenders is the underreporting of sex crimes (Dietrich, Smiley, & Frederick, 2007). One study observed higher rates of victimization by collecting self-report surveys as opposed to examining arrest records (Dietrich, Smiley, & Frederick, 2007). These results support the notion that victims feared reporting their cases of abuse.

Recently, legislators shifted their attention to focus on identified sex offenders to assure that they do not recidivate. Veysey and Zgoba (2010) clarified the definition of recidivism as violating the law after a prior arrest, committing a new sex crime (violent or nonviolent), or failing to comply with probation or parole. Understanding which offenders are likely to recidivate is a challenge in itself because each offender has his or her own distinct personality traits, different ages of victims, and different motives to commit the crime in the first place.
However, enhancing surveillance on offenders and restricting their movements to gain access to potential victims through registration and notification laws helps law enforcement monitor offenders more closely (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010).

The two major crime prevention laws regarding the increased awareness of sex offenders were Megan’s Law (1996) and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (2006), which followed the development of the Jacob Wetterling Act in 1994 (Freeman & Sandler, 2010; Welchans, 2005). The Jacob Wetterling Act (1994) established the foundation for convicted sex offenders to register with law enforcement (Welchans, 2005). Megan’s Law then authorized law enforcement to notify the public when a sex offender was living or working in the area (Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009; Zandbergen & Hart, 2009). Now, every state is required to have a notification system to advise the public of known offenders. McAlinden (2007) explained how Megan’s Law paved the way for communities to use sex offender registries as a hands-on approach to crime prevention.

The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (2006) established the foundation to create national Internet databases, which allows the publication of names and addresses of arrested sex offenders (Costigliacci, 2008; Craun & Theriot, 2009). A primary purpose of the Adam Walsh Act was to increase public safety through the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), which allowed better managing of sex offenders by creating three tiers based on their conviction (Costigliacci, 2008; Freeman & Sandler, 2010). Tier 1 offenders are low-risk, misdemeanor offenses, while Tiers 2 and 3 are moderate to high-risk offenders who engage in more aggressive sexual behavior (Costigliacci, 2008; Freeman & Sandler, 2010). Based on the tiers given to each offender, this also determines the length of time one must verify their information on the registry (Costigliacci, 2008). Depending on the state’s law, some
offenders are required to register quarterly or annually for up to ten years, or become a lifetime registrant (McAlinden, 2007).

According to McAlinden (2007), all states require sex offenders to provide general information including demographics, their physical address, and the type of crime they committed. Veysey and Zgoba’s (2010) study on characteristics and correlates of sex offenders over time examined the application of Megan’s Law to measure trends in offender characteristics, and predictors of offender recidivism. Their research concluded that if predictors of recidivism changed over time, then one could not assume which types of perpetrators would be likely to recidivate (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). Freeman and Sandler’s (2010) evaluation of the Adam Walsh Act explained how one cannot accurately predict recidivism based on an offender’s conviction and level of risk.

Some convicted offenders responded to Megan’s Law stating that establishing such a policy would serve as a deterrent to not recidivate (Welchans, 2005). Ironically, professionals who help sex offenders with treatment have questioned Megan’s Law and the Adam Walsh Act because they state that having the offender’s information on a public registry will not deter future offenders, nor will the sex offender registries protect children or adults from future acts of sexual abuse (Costigliacci, 2008; Welchans, 2005). Other critics questioned the effectiveness of Megan’s Law and the Adam Walsh Act, including parole and probation officers who help offenders with employment and housing (Freeman & Sandler, 2010; Welchans, 2005). Ultimately, the professionals who work with offenders want to assure that these individuals deviate away from criminal patterns and behaviors and such laws could potentially prevent successful community reintegration.
These laws are noteworthy because they laid the framework for sex offender registries as a crime prevention strategy. In addition, they were a key factor in holding sex offenders accountable for their crimes by making it a felony for failing to register or update their current information (Craun & Theriot, 2009). Despite some of the criticisms given about these landmark policies, Megan’s Law and the Adam Walsh Act have made it easier to monitor the movement of sex offenders. Like every new policy, there will always be innovative perspectives to reconsider and modify the effectiveness in public safety and reduce the rate of victimization.

Sex Offender Registries

In 2001, about 386,000 sex offenders were registered in the United States (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). With the establishment of the online registries come added benefits, weaknesses, and assumptions made by the public. Those assumptions have led society to believe in some misconceptions about sex offenders. This section provides a more accurate description of sex offender registries as well as what they have done to benefit law enforcement and other professionals.

The way a registry functions is that it is monitored by law enforcement, and sex offenders must report their information quarterly, semi-annually, or annually for ten years to life, on an individual basis (Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011). Even if a registrant moves to a different city or state, the new jurisdiction within that location must be informed that he or she is a convicted sex offender. As a general requirement with all registries, offenders must include their name, address, sexual offense, and a physical description (Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011). Some may additionally ask for employment, level of education, the length of sentence, and the victim’s age.
and gender. Sex offender registries are updated daily as well (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2007).

For communities, a key advantage to knowing where a sex offender lives is being able to protect oneself and one’s family. This enables individuals to take extra safety precautions, especially if a high risk offender resides close by. The sex offender registry is favorable for employers because they would know not to hire the repeat child molester at a local outdoor pool or daycare center, for example. Sex offender registries are extremely convenient for law enforcement to map any “hot spots” where most sex offenders live by using geographical information systems (GIS coding) to track and monitor offenders (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011; Zandbergen & Hart, 2009). GIS can aid in mapping and tracking potential leads to criminals who have not been arrested through the location of the crime or service calls (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011). Further, researchers also benefit by analyzing the published data to draw inferences about offender demographics, discover new correlations, and assist law enforcement to discover trends among the registered offenders, especially in relation to the victims.

Conversely, sex offender registries have some drawbacks as well. One downside to the registry is that the public often thinks of offenders as strangers rather than acquaintances, so people often let their guard down when it comes to people they know (Craig, Browne, Beech, & Stringer, 2006). Another negative aspect is that offenders have limited options on deciding where to live and work for the rest of their lives. It is common for people to have a lack of empathy for these offenders, but treating them as less than a normal person and depriving them of where to live and work only steers the offender back into the vicious cycle of recidivating (LaFond, 2005). Another disadvantage to the registry is that some people do not care to know
where offenders live, so they do not take time to access the database (Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009).

Sex offender registries have led the public to believe that these perpetrators are strangers to the victim; when in truth, about 90% of offenders are related to their victim or know them in some way (Craun & Theriot, 2009; Kernsmith, Comartin, Craun, & Kernsmith, 2009). In addition, researchers projected that sex offender registries do not make communities feel any more secure knowing that a local convicted offender’s information is posted online (Craun & Theriot, 2009; Vandiver, 2006). Communities should be more aware and worried about who has not been caught.

Housing Concerns as a Result of Registries and Buffer Zones

Housing restrictions or buffer zones are intended to limit the opportunity for a sex offender to come into contact with potential victims by distancing themselves from areas where there is a higher concentration of children (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2008). The consequences of buffer zones and notifying neighborhoods of sex offenders in the area have gained attention from researchers who examined its effectiveness on offenders. Additionally, the social disorganization theory suggested by Shaw and McKay examined neighborhood characteristics to crime rates, which provides understanding to the relation between crime rates and where sex offenders reside (Shaw & McKay, 1942). However, there is a necessity for more detail on whether offenders tend to live near more urban or more rural areas and why.

Shaw and McKay’s social disorganization theory examines crime rates in different neighborhoods by measuring residential stability, ethnic heterogeneity, levels of social controls,
poverty, family stability and income to predict crime rates (Shaw & McKay, 1942). The socially disorganized communities lack public order, have higher crime rates, and are the less desirable neighborhoods in which to live (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Due to the lack of social control and instability of the residential areas, Shaw and McKay propose that these areas are comprised of victims and offenders living in closer proximity to one another, a characteristic that is likely to be associated with the higher crime rates (Shaw & McKay, 1942).

In relation to registered sex offenders mostly residing in socially disorganized areas, the economic disadvantages and job instability is the cause of much distress and reluctance to self-improvement. Higher rates of unemployment are also linked to rape cases and other sex crimes (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2007). There are significantly more opportunities to access potential victims, which is an issue if registered sex offenders cannot find suitable work and housing (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010).

Initially, social disorganization theory was intended to measure violent crimes, but has been utilized to examine the movement of sex offenders away from economically stable neighborhoods (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Since the general public in disadvantaged communities are less interested in who is living in their area, it becomes easier for offenders to integrate in that community without being reminded of the negative stigma that obscures their image. Housing in socially disorganized areas is more accessible because the well-structured neighborhoods with buffer zones are more concerned about perpetrators in areas where children most likely congregate.

The suggestion that registrants living in less developed neighborhoods leads to the subsequent question as to whether offenders then reside in larger, urban cities or rural regions, which is limited in aforementioned research. According to Berenson and Appelbaum (2011),
urban cities have more restriction zones, resulting in very limited housing access in those areas. Therefore, registrants typically seek housing in rural towns (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011). Tewksbury, Mustaine, and Stengel (2007) found the rate of sex crimes lower in rural areas than in urban areas. It is probable that the crime rate is lower in rural areas due to fewer opportunities to reoffend, such as living further away from buffer zones and a larger population. Crime rates are likely to be lower as studies have shown that offenders do not always find their victims near their own homes (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010).

On the other hand, the low sex crime rate may be a factor of underreporting the crime, as many of the perpetrators are known to the victim (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2007). Previous data showed that most offenders choose to live in more rural areas because it gives a sense of isolation and privacy (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2007). Although communities are aware of where registrants reside, it is still unknown what they do on a regular basis. Urban areas with a high number of buffer zones support the notion that offenders have no other choice but to live in rural areas. In smaller, rural towns that demonstrate informal social control, offenders may feel more liberated and less scrutinized by the public.

A major drawback to the housing restrictions prohibits offenders from living in well-established communities (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2008). Tewksbury (2008) noted that the majority of sex offenders were middle and upper class individuals who were forced to change their housing option as a result of the public registries. The findings in this research confirmed that registered sex offenders tend to populate in socially disorganized, rural communities with residents who show a lack of concern for their neighborhoods and a lower socio-economic status (Craun & Theriot, 2009; Tewksbury, 2008). An increase in crime in these locations could
potentially occur if the presence of registrants continues to grow and a lack of social control is evident in the community (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010).

Communities with an economic disadvantage may not even have an online sex offender registry readily available to them, another reason why those residents may not be attentive to registered offenders (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010). Furthermore, buffer zones were found to be a contributing factor to homelessness among sex offenders (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011). As expected, registered offenders have very little community support when it comes to adequate housing and employment, leading to a rise in poverty levels, unemployment, and homelessness (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010).

The implementation of the buffer zone rule affects all sex offenders, including those who had not abused a child. How are buffer zones effective if perpetrators only victimize adults? Since the restriction laws were emphasized to keep children safe and far from sex offenders, the policy failed to consider how to minimize the interaction of sex offenders with other potential adult victims.

**Deterring Sex Offenders through Treatment Programs**

The primary goal of treatment programs is to assure that sex offenders do not recidivate (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009). Ensuring public safety is a top priority for everyone, hence the reason for effective programs that prevent future crime. The secondary goals include improving self-esteem and quality of life (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009). The criminal justice system not only sanctions criminals for their deviant behavior, but as a whole, the justice system wants offenders to stray away from a deviant lifestyle (LaFond, 2005). Treatment
programs are extremely intensive and focus on holding the offender accountable for his or her crime (Dietrich, Smiley, & Frederick, 2007).

Treatment is conducted in individual or group settings, depending on the dangerousness of the offender and severity of the crime (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). If the perpetrator is a threat to others, he or she will usually undergo individual therapy. But if the offender does not pose any harm or threat, then the preferred method is group therapy. Studer, Aylwin, and Reddon (2005) concluded that successful treatment and therapy reduces levels of testosterone, reduces levels of aggression; and thus, reduces the chances of reoffending. Treatment also lets professionals identify the “offense cycle” of the perpetrator by providing him or her with detailed motives for committing the crime (Campbell, 2004).

Each offender begins his or her steps towards a successful treatment by taking full responsibility for his or her behavior, and learns to improve life skill sets in order to live an ordinary life (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). An advantage to treatment programs is that offenders will get the one-on-one attention they need from the therapist to focus on his or her own situation. A drawback is that the duration of treatment may take several years. Another limitation with sex offender treatment is the notion of a “one size fits all” program (Campbell, 2004). Based on the research presented, no two sex offenders are alike. With different ages, motives, types of victims, or psychological issues, it can be challenging for medical professionals to cater specific treatment programs for each offender (Campbell, 2004).

Other research argues that treatment does not work and incarceration is the better option for punishing perpetrators (Patrick & Marsh, 2009). Society has been in favor of incarcerating sex offenders because of the consensus that it is unmanageable for a deviant person to restructure his or her life to the “usual” (McAlinden, 2007). Incarceration helps victims and communities to
feel safer, knowing that a sex offender is behind bars and not harming anyone. In contrast, incarcerating offenders without any treatment affects the way they socialize with the public upon release. Therefore, incarceration only would contradict the goals in treating convicted sex offenders (McAlinden, 2007).

Further research is recommended to determine whether treatment or incarceration is more operative in curing sex offenders, and what types of treatment programs are most effective (Patrick & Marsh, 2009). Zilney and Zilney (2009) presented a newer hybrid model of treatment by combining mental health treatment programs and incarceration as a way to deter offenders from recidivating. Many offenders showed symptoms of mental illness, but that does not mean that they can opt out of punishment and receive only medical treatment. Moreover, incarcerating sex offenders will assure communities that justice is being served and that criminals are not on the streets.

The hybrid model has become the most popular way to work with sex offenders (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). McAlinden (2007) presented the idea of electronically tagging sex offenders in order to control and monitor their whereabouts. This may benefit probation and parole officers in order to know where the offender is at all times, and can aid in preventing future offenses (McAlinden, 2007). The disadvantages to electronic tagging is that it is not clear exactly what the offender is doing, it raises ethical issues as to violating a person’s right to privacy, and the equipment for each offender could be costly (McAlinden, 2007).

There is also a need for probation and parole officers to increase their training in managing sex offenders, because, like the therapists, their supervision should be tailored to be offender-specific rather than crime-specific. According to Alexander (2010), officers should examine the details about each offender’s case, such as the age and relationship to the victim,
prior criminal history, and other behavioral patterns. It is highly beneficial in choosing the right strategy to reform each offender by understanding the case details of each offender the officer works with. Though treatment programs strive to successfully assist offenders in reintegrating into society, there can be no reintegration if offenders are on a registry and constantly have a negative label as a “sex offender.”

Discussion

One way experts can work with sex offenders is to increase treatment programs that focus on coping with the childhood abuse that offenders may have experienced. If the problem of previous childhood abuse is tackled, it may support and reduce the potential risks of committing crime. Policymakers should review current sex offender laws because what may be the ideal remedy for a chronic repeat offender can be detrimental to someone that may have perpetrated a non-aggressive, one-time offense. “The public has the misperception that all sex offenders are predatory,” according to Gibson and Vandiver (2008, p. 177).

Patrick and Marsh (2009) emphasized legislators to be more informed with empirical data and accurate facts rather than developing new laws based on what the media distributes about high-profile crimes against children. The severity of punishment for a first time offender does not amount to the same type of punishment a repeat sex offender would receive. Accurate facts and statistics could strengthen public policy instead of creating laws that could be counterproductive.

This holds especially true when it comes to the public sex offender registry lists. Registering for years to life prevents offenders from obtaining jobs or living in certain areas in their communities. How can this be effective when the justice system also considers
reintegration for offenders a goal? Reevaluating current sex offender registry laws will relieve offenders whose crimes were less severe to successfully progress away from the justice system. Megan’s Law and the Adam Walsh Act made a significant impact and can be credited for deterring some sex offenders from reoffending, but it also has its misperceptions (Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). For example, in order for the public to be better informed about who sex offenders really are, Craun and Theriot (2009) suggested that registry lists should include the offender’s relationship to the victim. Was the offender a parent, grandparent, cousin or babysitter? Adding the offender/victim relationship will strengthen the belief that not all sexual abuse cases are victim-stranger related.

Sex offender registries helped researchers and law enforcement determine if there are any areas, geographically, that sex offenders reside closer to by mapping and finding trends of where these suspects possibly find their targets, such as schools and churches. Public registries should be used for the most dangerous, repeat sex offenders (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). Zilney and Zilney (2009) suggested policies should be created for Tier 3, at-risk offenders because the Tier one, lower risk offenders are not a threat to the public. Public sex offender registries have not been helpful when it comes to juveniles who commit a low-risk sexual offense, and now must carry the burden of being a registered sex offender for the next ten years (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). Since the law applies to every risk level of sex offender, it has become more problematic for juvenile delinquents to start with a clean slate as adults (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008).

Another way to prevent future offenses is educating parents or teachers about signs and symptoms in children who may have been victimized. If the child is hiding their abuse, or are so young that they do not know otherwise, this will help more cases to be detected. There should also be an increase in educating children at an early age so they know to tell a teacher or
counselor. There is no disadvantage in letting parents and children know about predators and signs of sexual abuse, it is a benefit for all. Increasing education and awareness will also give the public more accurate information rather than myths about sex offenders (McAlinden, 2007).

There should be more research conducted on juvenile sex offenders and enhanced treatment programs for those offenders because early intervention can prevent sexual reoffending as adults (Vandiver, 2006). Gibson and Vandiver (2008) reported about 60-80% of adult sex offenders began committing sex crimes as juveniles. That is why a heavier emphasis ought to be placed on identifying, treating, and controlling juvenile sex offenders prior to reaching adulthood (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008). Gibson and Vandiver (2008) estimated about 5-14% of juvenile sex offenders will recidivate as adults. Gibson and Vandiver (2008) suggested a middle ground to identify commonalities among this population of criminals because doing so can create better, more effective treatment programs.

Summary

Understanding and identifying sex offenders at a high risk of recidivism continues to challenge professionals since offender characteristics vary substantially (Zilney & Zilney, 2009). Knowing the characteristics begins with researching juvenile sex offenders and paying attention to their behaviors. If juvenile sex offenders can successfully be treated, then successful treatment can have a significant impact upon reducing the number of adult cases (Gibson & Vandiver, 2008).

Legislators should reconsider current sex offender laws to fit low, moderate, and high risk offenders because the negative label as a “sex offender” has prevented low-risk offenders from gaining support and respect to live a normal lifestyle. If offenders continue to live with
negative stigma and are harassed by society, this may trigger an offender to commit more crimes (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011; Zilney & Zilney, 2009). As sex crimes continue to reach new levels, so will the need for further research on recognizing characteristics and trends with sex offenders, crime patterns, better utilization of sex offender registries, and improving U.S. policies.

The prevalence of legislation on buffer zones is widely utilized throughout the states to enhance public safety (Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson, 2012). However, buffer zones seem to only create a temporary solution. Until registrants have faced several environmental and social factors that affect their attitudes, they may have little to no opportunity to reform in the socially disorganized areas they are forced to live in. Such factors negatively influence sex offenders, thus perpetuating the cycle to recidivate in heavily populated areas where registrants reside (Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson, 2012).

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to obtain the results in specific detail. The information gathered for this study was collected through two public sex offender registries, the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Collin County Sheriff’s Department, and converted into a database that illustrates the trends throughout Collin County, Texas.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research has continuously demonstrated how sex offender registries have changed the way the public perceives and negatively labels these criminals (LaFond, 2005; Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). Moreover, the growing number of harsher sex offender laws negatively affects offenders as opposed to helping those who are at a lower risk to recidivate. Consequently, shaming registered sex offenders and prohibiting them from living in specific areas increases the likelihood that they will not become a productive member of society; rather, they will continue to target vulnerable victims and commit more crime.

Therefore, the current study seeks to analyze registered sex offenders in Collin County to examine demographic characteristics and criminological patterns. More specifically, the present study aims to recognize “hot spots” in order to see where the heavier populations of offenders reside. Additionally, this study provides further investigation to compare relationships between victims and offenders, as well as gain new perspectives on what public sex offender registries have done for society.

The first research question states: where is the highest concentration of sex offenders in Collin County? The results to this question are highly significant, as it focuses on where the majority of sex offenders live based on the addresses and ZIP codes given on the online databases. The results can provide support that perhaps housing restrictions are an increasing concern as Collin County continues to grow.

The second research question asks about what the general characteristics of sex offenders are in Collin County. It is equally important to expand on previous literature about the general
demographics of sex offenders. If the results are consistent with previous empirical data, a
generalization can be made about who is most likely to be an offender.

The third question asks whether or not the registered sex offenders live in high crime
areas or non-high crime areas. The outcome is relevant because this would support or disprove
the theory that offenders are prone to living in a socially disorganized area where there is a
higher crime rate.

Question 4 examines if the registered sex offenders have a tendency to live in rural areas
or within city limits. This question has significance because Collin County has a good blend of
urban and rural areas that is vastly increasing in population size, similar to other developing
communities. This question would also add to the support or contradict that housing restrictions
are an increasing issue for offenders, which limits the options in where to reside.

The final question addresses how the victims compare in terms of age and gender. It is
imperative to also measure the victim’s general characteristics to have stronger evidence relating
to the risk factors for victimization. Moreover, finding correlations between age and gender
would support previous studies, and observations can be made about the age of offender to age
of victim.

Data and Setting

*Population*

The population of interest for this study consisted of 175 registered sex offenders \(N = 175\) in Collin County, Texas, in January 2012.
Sample

The sample that was utilized for this study was all of the registered sex offenders who were listed on Collin County, Texas’ registered sex offender database. The final count when all of the information was gathered was \( N = 175 \) offenders. There were significantly more males than females included in this research, with 170 members of the sample being male and only 5 females in the study.

The online database for Collin County, Texas provided general information on each registered sex offender. But for the purposes of this study only the following data was obtained for the sample: name, age, sex, race, city, ZIP code, type of offense, date convicted, conviction state, date released, and the degree of each felony (CCSD, 2012).

The sex offender registry website from the Texas Department of Public Safety was also used because it provides additional facts on each registered sex offender in Collin County that is not provided on Collin County’s website. The information gathered for this study included: risk level, verification requirement, age and sex of the victim, years of sentence, and whether or not the offender is on probation or parole (TXDPS, 2012).

Although this was a fairly large sample, Collin County is just one small part of the state, and an even smaller portion of the United States. Therefore, the sample may not be a sufficient representation of the overall population of registered sex offenders in the U.S. However, given the size of Collin County and the number of registered offenders, the findings of the study may be valuable to other counties of proportionate size and population.

Measures

The facts collected from the state and county sex offender registries were put into a
database spreadsheet and coded through SPSS. Information was measured through descriptive statistics, which displayed consistencies and/or variances in each of the variables measured. The descriptive statistics included mean, mode, range, and correlations between variables.

Variables

A descriptive analysis to describe trends within the county was used to examine several variables. The variables included: age of offender, sex, race, city in which he/she resides, ZIP code, type of offense, date convicted, conviction state, date released, degree of each felony, risk level, verification requirement, age and sex of the victim, years of sentence, and whether or not the offender is on probation or parole.

Gender for offenders and victims was coded as male = 0 and female = 1, and race was coded as Caucasian = 1, Hispanic = 2, Black/African American = 3, Asian/Pacific Islander = 4, other = 5. The degrees of each felony consisted of first degree = 1, second degree = 2, third degree = 3, not available = 4. Verification requirement informs how frequently an offender must register to the database, which was annually = 0, quarterly = 1, or not available = 2. Probation and parole was measured as probation = 0, parole = 1, and unknown = 2.  

The remaining variables were not coded into SPSS, since they are continuous variables. Age of offender and victim were measured to find the means and frequencies in these variables. The city and ZIP code is also measured for frequency of where most registered sex offenders reside. The conviction date and date released were measured to find, on average, the amount of time an offender is detained. Conviction state was analyzed to determine how many offenders must continue to register their information from states other than Texas, and length of sentence was measured to compare the mean and frequency given to each offender.

1 See Table 1 to review how these variables were coded into SPSS.
Table 1

**Coding of Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Offender</td>
<td>Male = 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Victim</td>
<td>Male = 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race of Offender</td>
<td>Caucasian = 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hispanic = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black/African American = 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander = 4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Felony</td>
<td>First degree = 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second degree = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third degree = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verification Requirement</td>
<td>Annually = 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quarterly = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available = 2</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parole = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not available = 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The study was designed to examine each variable individually, and develop an overall conclusion on the results of the analysis. The variables measured in the study were chosen because they provide an insight on the sex offender demographics, most recurring crimes, housing options, sanctions, and which victims are usually targeted. The measurements on these variables may also give a better understanding as to why sex offenders live in certain cities more than others within Collin County. The averages and frequencies of registration requirements will also be explored.
Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the methodology and procedures taken in order to conduct the research on registered sex offenders in Collin County. By analyzing the variables provided by the sex offender registries, one can describe the demographics and housing concerns pertaining to city vs. rural areas where the registrants live. Additionally, the residential restrictions, such as buffer zones, can also be explained.

The next chapter discusses the results of the study, which is constructive for continuing research on sex offender registries. In addition, the results will display where registered sex offenders are prone to live and whether or not there is an association in relation to the level of crime in those areas.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS OF OFFENDERS

Table 2 examines the demographic characteristics that were found to be most common among registered sex offenders. There were significantly more males 97.1% \((n = 170)\) than females 2.9% \((n = 5)\) in January of 2012. Caucasians represented 90.3% of the sample \((n = 158)\) followed by 4.6% of Hispanics \((n = 8)\). Moreover, the sample consisted of 2.9% Black/African Americans \((n = 5)\), Asian/Pacific Islander was 0.6% \((n = 1)\), and others not listed in the sample was 1.7% \((n = 3)\).

The average age of the sample was 44.94 years old \((\text{median} = 44, \text{SD} = 12.944)\) and the majority was 50 years old \((\text{mode} = 50)\), which was higher than the averages for males age 40 and females between 26-32 years old as provided in previous research. The youngest registered sex offender was 20 years old and the oldest was 76 years old.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics of Registered Sex Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When examining the relationship between the cities where the registered offenders reside, Princeton had the highest number of sex offenders \( n = 33 \) (18.9%), followed by Nevada \( n = 22 \) (12%), Farmersville \( n = 19 \) (10.9%), McKinney \( n = 14 \) (8%), Melissa \( n = 12 \) (6.9%) and Anna \( n = 10 \) (5.7%). Twelve registrants (6.9%) had not listed a city or ZIP code under their registration information. The remaining twenty-five cities in Collin County consisted of 10 or less registered offenders, with at least one offender in each city as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Locations Where Registered Sex Offenders Reside*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>Plano</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Alstyne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Princeton</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Prosper</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Ridge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caddo Mills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Rockwall</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celina</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Royse City</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>Savoy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairview</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Sherman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmersville</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Greenville</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Weston</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Wichita Falls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinney</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Wylie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criminal codes under the Texas Penal Code were used to distinguish which crimes were the most frequently reported. Chapter 21 of the Penal Code indicates sexual offenses, Chapter 22 describes the assaultive offenses, Chapter 25 describes offenses against the family,
Chapter 30 specifies burglary and criminal trespass, and Chapter 43 indicates public indecency (TCAS, 2012). Out of the offenses listed in Table 4, the three most common types of sex crimes were indecency with a child by sexual contact \( n = 49 \), sexual assault of a child \( n = 27 \), and sexual assault \( n = 17 \). There were 75 profiles that had no criminal code or type of crime listed. Six of those were due to being out of state registrants. Other offenses included indecency with a child by exposure 8.2%, possession with intent to promote child pornography 2.1%, and indecent exposure 1%.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Offense</th>
<th>( n )</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.08</td>
<td>Indecent Exposure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.11(A)(1)</td>
<td>Indecency With Child By Contact</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.11(A)(2)</td>
<td>Indecency With Child By Exposure</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.011(A)(1)</td>
<td>Sexual Assault</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.011(A)(2)</td>
<td>Sexual Assault of a Child</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.021</td>
<td>Aggravated Sexual Assault</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.02</td>
<td>Prohibited Sexual Conduct (Incest)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.04</td>
<td>Enticing A Child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.02(D)</td>
<td>Burglary of Habitation Intend Other Felony</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.26(E)</td>
<td>Possession With Intent To Promote Child Pornography</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results illustrated that there were more felonies than misdemeanors. Forty-eight offenses or 25.5% of the sample were measured as first degree felonies. The most frequent were second degree felonies, given to 109 offenses or 58% of the sample. Third degree felonies comprised 16 offenses or 8.5% of the sample. Two offenses (1.1%) were considered Class B
misdemeanors, and 13 offenses or 6.9% of the sample did not have the degree of felony or misdemeanor listed with their criminal charge(s).

Depending on the severity of the offense and whether or not there were previous crimes committed, the registered sex offenders in Collin County, Texas continuously verify their addresses and any information that is subject to change on the sex offender registry database. Out of 175 registered offenders, 107 offenders (61.1%) are required to annually verify their personal information with the sex offender registry and 18 offenders (10.3%) must update their information quarterly. There was no verification requirement information for 50 (28.6%) registered sex offenders.

Table 5 examines the victims’ age and gender. Females were the most frequently reported with 61% of the sample, while males made up only 10.3%. The larger age cohort consisted of 43% of youth from ages 11-20, followed by 22.2% of children between 1-10 years old. 28.7% of offender profiles did not have the victim’s gender listed and 29.7% did not provide the victim’s age.

Table 5.

*Victim Gender and Age Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 and up</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 demonstrates the occurrence of the sanctions given to the sample of sex offenders in terms of years of incarceration, in addition to whether the offender is currently on probation or parole status. 28.7% of the sample were sentenced to 10-13 years in prison, while 19.5% were only sentenced for 2.5 years. The third most frequent sentencing verdict fell between 6-9 years in prison, which entailed 12.3% of registered sex offenders. Only four offenders received a sentence exceeding 26 years to life in prison. 33.3% of offenders did not have a sentencing verdict reported on their profile. Presently, 38.9% of offenders are on probation, while 19.4% are on parole status. 41.8% of the sample did not have sufficient information to determine the current status of the perpetrator.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentencing and Probation vs. Parole Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Punishment Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parole</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the final chapter, a discussion over the findings of this study is addressed including the advantages, disadvantages, and suggestions for additional empirical research. Further, a
conclusion to the current study on current registered sex offenders in Collin County explains the importance of utilizing registries and reevaluating the structure of buffer zones as the community continues to expand.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to analyze the characteristics of current registered sex offenders in Collin County, Texas, along with their victims’ general demographic information. Another objective of the current research was to describe the concentration of where sex offenders live to determine if housing restrictions affect residential choices within urban and rural areas. Data obtained from the study suggests that the majority of registered sex offenders are predominately male that habitually target young females. Further, the data also shows that several offenders live in rural areas as opposed to living in the larger, vastly populated cities. Such findings are noteworthy due to the hindrance that registered sex offenders experience as a result of restriction zone laws and severe employment guidelines. Therefore, one would expect sex offenders to recidivate due to the fact that there are new opportunities to find potential victims and become less efficacious with regards to being a productive member of society.

The highest number of registered sex offenders was among Caucasian males between the ages of 36-45. The results of offender demographics are consistent with previous research examining the demographics which also found that white males were the common sex offenders at 40 years old (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009). Interestingly, there were only 5 females in the sample, which supports earlier studies that found arrest rates to be lower for females than for males (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendricks, 2010).

Out of the five female sex offenders, two were 35 years old and both Caucasian. One female was 52 years old and Hispanic; another was 60 years old and African American, and the oldest offender was 69 years old and Caucasian. The age range of these five women was significantly higher than 26-32 years old, which is what was previously stated about the average age range of sex offenders.
female offender (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). In comparison to the types of offenses, these women were charged with aggravated sexual assault and two were charged with indecency with a child by sexual contact. Another female was charged with sexual assault of a child, and one did not have the crime listed as she is an out of state registrant. Under the registry by the Texas Department of Public Safety, two out of the five offenders reported their verification requirement, the victim’s age and gender, and their current status (TXDPS, 2012).

The two women whose registration information was available are required to update their profiles annually with the Collin County sex offender registry. Both women victimized females, ages 14 and 16. These findings were inconsistent with the assumption that women were most likely to have male victims (Miller, Turner, & Henderson, 2009; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). However, the other three women had no information reported regarding those variables. One woman was given five years in prison and the other was given seven years. Yet, the current status is that both women are serving probation, but the length of time on probation is undetermined. Sandler and Freeman (2011) generalized female sex offenders to have more lenient sentences than males, which supports the results in this study because most males were sentenced to ten or more years in Collin County.

The results show that nearly 54% of registered offenders live in smaller towns with a population of 6,000 people or less, where only about 38% reside in cities with a population of 6,000 or more people (CCSD, 2012). It was inconclusive in determining the remaining 8% of sex offenders since there was no address provided in either of the two registries. These outcomes show reliability towards prior studies which observed sex offenders to live in more rural areas as opposed to urban areas (Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Stengel, 2007). However, the
results in this analysis could possibly be due to the circumstance that Collin County, Texas is comprised of several small municipalities, with thirteen out of thirty-one cities considered to be “larger” by way of 6,000 or more residents (CCSD, 2012). This could also suggest that the buffer zone policies implemented near areas where children congregate could be pushing sex offenders to the outer limits of the county.

The frequency of the types of offenses most commonly reported were indecency with a child by sexual contact 25.1%, sexual assault of a child 13.8%, and sexual assault 8.7%; thus confirming such outcomes as frequently reported in aforementioned research (Eke, Seto, & Williams, 2011; Veysey & Zgoba, 2010). About 2.1% of the perpetrators in the sample were arrested for possession with intent to promote child pornography, which is interesting since it is a rapidly increasing sex crime. There were 195 total offenses listed, more than the number of offenders in the sample because a number of offenders were arrested and charged with multiple crimes. Nearly all of the offenses reported in the registries were felonies, primarily second degree felonies. Two offenders were charged with indecent exposure, the only Class B misdemeanors found in the data. There were no charges listed on the registry for thirteen offenders.

Perpetrators in this sample are required to verify their personal information annually or quarterly, depending on the threat of danger imposed on others and whether or not they are repeat offenders. In general, annual registration is the consensus among various states. The largest portion of the sample received a 10-13 year sentence (28.7%) and the second largest group of offenders was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison (19.5%). Four offenders received one year or less, two of which were the Class B misdemeanor charges. Only one perpetrator was sentenced to life in prison. Surprisingly, not all offenders serve their entire sentence and as a
result, there are a higher number of offenders on probation (38.9%) rather than on parole (19.4%). The findings with probation and parole statuses demonstrate the need for increased training for officers who manage sex offenders, as previously cited, since most registered sex offenders are living in the community.

The results in this study confirm that the general demographics of victims are children and mostly females. Alexander (2010) found the most frequent age for female victims was fourteen years old, and four years of age for male victims. The results of this study indicated 61% of victims were females and 10.3% were males with the two largest age groups being 1-10 years old (22.2%) and 11-20 years old (43.6%), while the number of incidents per group declined as the victims’ age increased. However, there was not sufficient information in the registries to determine if the relationship between the victim and his or her offender was a relative, acquaintance, or stranger related.

These findings suggest there are significant similarities in this study among the demographics of registered sex offenders and their victims with the empirical evidence found in previous research. Conversely, the results cannot determine whether or not sex offenders reside in the rural areas of Collin County, Texas by force of policy implementation and public offender registries, or by choice. Moreover, the results demonstrated incompleteness of sex offender information on the Collin County sex offender database and the Texas Department of Public Safety’s sex offender registry. Such outcomes may have implications for policymakers and future researchers.

Based upon prior research, policy makers enacted swifter and harsher policies such as the restriction zone laws and buffer zones as a deterrent to steer away from child-friendly areas (Comartin, Kernsmith & Kernsmith, 2009; Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Covington, 2010). The
buffer zone rule has inevitably hindered the opportunities for offenders to live and work in specific locations. This issue is necessary to address for further discussion because as Collin County, Texas is growing considerably, there will be additional buffer zones implemented in developing areas throughout the county. Also, offenders may feel rejected or anxious and may potentially recidivate as a result of the negative stigma from restriction zones and belonging to a public registry. Even though the restriction zone laws can potentially have a negative effect on sex offenders, they are still strongly favored by the public and policymakers (Comartin, Kernsmith & Kernsmith, 2009).

The inconsistencies with providing different information on the Collin County sex offender database and the Texas Department of Public Safety’s online database is an observation found in the outcome, and is a concern for Collin County. For instance, the website for Collin County provided the offender’s charges, while the Texas Department of Public Safety provided the offender’s charges, along with the sentence served, his or her probationary status, and the victim’s age and gender. The Texas Department of Public Safety also provided the perpetrator’s employer and occupation, verification requirements, and risk level of reoffending (low, medium, or high). This was a similar finding in Berenson and Appelbaum’s (2011) research, which examined the sex offender registries in two New York counties and found inconsistencies with the registries.

While one website may have provided more details than another, some information was completely omitted, and certain offenders who were listed on Collin County’s database were not found on the Texas Department of Public Safety’s database. Every variable analyzed in this study required coding for a “not available” option for lack of thoroughness on the online databases, with the exception of the offenders’ demographics. Perhaps the sex offender is
refusing to comply to verify information, or the Collin County Sheriff’s Department did not receive completed reports with sufficient information to submit the offender’s data on the Internet. The Texas Department of Public Safety has a crime records service department who receive updates on sex offenders from the local law enforcement agencies (TXDPS, 2012). The crime records services may not have received the proper sex offender information or there may have been an error in the offender profiles as a result of incomplete data (TXDPS, 2012). Due to the insufficient information, it is likely that the registry has imposed a false sense of security since the public would not know if an offender is in close proximity that has not yet been arrested.

Limitations

One of the key limitations in the study is the size of the sample. Although the sample was large enough to develop inferences based on the given information, the sample was not large enough to be a significant representation of the population of registered sex offenders in the United States. As a result, the conclusions of the study may not be accurate enough to apply to all registered sex offenders.

Another limitation is that the study only included data from Collin County, Texas. This region covers a vast area of rural land as well as economically developed cities. There is no inner-city life or downtown area, which alters the demographics such as type of residents that live in Collin County, and the types of crimes that most often take place. It is safe to say that the geographic region puts the validity of the study in question because other counties that neighbor Collin County differ in size, population, demographics, and overall community structure.
Perhaps further research can be conducted on neighboring counties to make associations with a larger population of sex offenders.

Inconsistent sex offender registry lists was also a disadvantage in this study. On the sex offender registry list for Collin County, some information was not provided on every offender. For example, the date an offender was convicted and released, the conviction state, or type of felony were among the few categories not entered into the system. Two possible reasons were that it was an out of state registrant, or the jurisdiction where the offender was charged did not provide enough information to the Collin County Sheriff’s Department. On the sex offender registry list from the Texas Department of Public Safety, some offenders were not listed at all. Also, probation/parole information was not listed on some offenders, nor was victim’s age and gender on a few of the registrants. It would be more beneficial if the county and state registries were consistently maintained in the details provided.

There was a limit in the research with not knowing exactly what motivates each perpetrator to offend. While some offenders feel that their motive is due to a dysfunctional family, other offenders believe that their motive for offending is because of a mental/personality disorder. Perhaps future research can analyze the offender’s age and gender to his or her victim’s age and gender to formulate any correlations about the comparison with age groups. However with this study, the sex offender’s personal records are confidential and unattainable through public records.

Another limitation is predicting recidivism. This is primarily because offenders come from various backgrounds and there are numerous direct and indirect sex crimes against victims. There is a necessity for future studies to explore more data to predict potential recidivists. Berenson and Appelbaum (2011) suggest utilizing the GIS mapping technology as another
means for law enforcement to create maps of the movement of sex offenders. However, not all police departments have the funds or technology for such advancements (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011).

A third limitation is that sex offenders in previous literature were sampled from specific treatment programs or incarcerated, which differs from registrants in this study who are on probation, parole, or living without restrictions. It is suggested that future analyses explore other registered sex offenders in communities that are affected by buffer zones, and investigate where the higher concentration of registrants reside. Investigating similar registrants in other counties provides reliability to conclude that there are housing issues for registered offenders; but at the same rate, law enforcement is able to focus on clusters of where the majority of offenders are located to potentially find new leads and suspects.

Conclusion

This study was limited in information accessibility, as other factors such as relation of offender to victim and mental conditions are kept confidential. Therefore, the necessary data to conduct this study relied on public records provided by the Collin County Sheriff’s Department and the Texas Department of Public Safety. The facts provided by the public registries were extremely beneficial, but if variables such as the offender’s mental condition or relation to the victim were provided, one could examine what the offender’s motive was, and perhaps have a stronger visual in determining recidivism.

If further research investigates other counties who face similar issues with pushing offenders out to socially disorganized areas, then there can potentially be a shift in policies that may reconsider the influence and implementation of restriction zone laws. Society needs to
consider the hazards of offenders living in clusters close to each other, especially in areas with lower socio-economic statuses and higher crime rates. This method of reducing sexual victimization in areas with restriction zones in urban areas creates a risk for new crimes to occur in rural areas.

Additionally, this study is important for law enforcement to recognize the potential flaws in the sex offender registries when comparing the local registry to the national registry. It is a great tool for the individuals who utilize sex offender registries for neighborhood safety, child care, employment verifications, or residential locations. However, the registries may not be helpful if a registrant’s profile is incomplete. It should be noted that the details and any changes are consistently communicated on the local and state level. The sex offender registry allows researchers and police departments to observe trends among several variables, allowing for the departments to create strategies that are specific to the areas they are examining.

All things considered, the findings of the descriptive analysis and influence of the sex offender registry indicate that the registered offenders in Collin County, Texas are characteristic of the registered sex offender population in the United States, including the types of offenses that were reported to law enforcement. The results of the current study suggest that further research is needed for policy makers to reconsider the guidelines of the buffer zone laws, as this may negatively impact an offender from adequate living and working conditions, only to potentially lead to new opportunities to recidivate (Berenson & Appelbaum, 2011). While the data provided by the Collin County sex offender registry and the Texas Department of Public Safety sex offender database display inaccuracies with offender profiles, the data provides a solid overview of the offenders that comprise the quickly expanding North Texas region of Collin County.
APPENDIX

IRB APPROVAL
February 24, 2012

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Scott Belshaw
Student Investigator: Priscilla Valenzuela
Department of Criminal Justice
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 12108

Dear Dr. Belshaw:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled “A Descriptive Analysis of Sex Offenders in Collin County, Texas.” The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, February 24, 2012 to February 23, 2013.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Sheila Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK: sb
REFERENCES


