

T-27

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SORNA ON JUVENILES

**Predicting Recidivism among Juvenile Sex Offenders:
The Utility of the ERASOR and SORNA Tier III**

Jeanette Goldsberry, M.A.

Psychologists are routinely called upon to evaluate adolescent sexual offenders and determine, among other things, their risk for recidivism. Unlike the body of knowledge on adult sexual offenders, what is available on the predictive validity of risk assessments for adolescent sexual offenders has been equivocal. While the assessment tools used to predict recidivism risk lack unequivocal empirical support, federal legislation appears to have no empirical rationale. As such, this study assessed the predictive validity of the Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism (ERASOR) and of classification under Tier III of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA, 2006). ERASOR scores and SORNA classification were determined by reviewing case files of 164 adolescent males who committed a sexual offense and were adjudicated to a juvenile correctional facility in Arizona. Four of the 134 possible subjects who met criteria for inclusion in the study had sexually reoffended. Only 32 subjects' case files included sufficient data to complete the ERASOR, and just two had sexually reoffended. Area Under the Curve analysis revealed that determining a rating of risk by integrating the ERASOR Total Score and corresponding Clinical Judgment Rating with the author's clinical opinion predicted sexual reoffending (AUC = .92 (95% CI [.81, 1.0]; $p = .05$). A much larger sample ($n = 116$) was used to investigate the predictive validity of SORNA Tier III; however, classification under SORNA Tier III did not significantly predict sexual recidivism (AUC = .64 (95% CI [.38, .90]; $p = .33$). Notably, 55 (47.41%) subjects were classified as Tier III sexual offenders, whereas 4 (3.45%) sexually recidivated. Findings concerning the ERASOR were limited by sample size, but are the first to support its ability to predict sexual recidivism among adolescents released from a U.S. correctional facility. Predictive utility of the ERASOR is contingent upon having sufficient clinical information, evaluator competence, and clinical judgment. Of concern is the issue of federal legislation: Low risk adolescents are likely being required to register as sex offenders. Thus, we may be preventing successful rehabilitation and community reintegration of adolescents that could otherwise become productive prosocial members of society.

Goals of the Paper:

1. To inform the psychological and legal community about the use of the ERASOR to assess adolescent sex offender's risk for sexual recidivism.
2. To inform the psychological and legal community about the predictive utility of SORNA Tier III for adolescent sex offenders.
3. To engage the psychological and legal community in a discussion of the risks of registration and community notification for adolescent sex offenders.

Answering the Call to Study the Effects of Juvenile SORN: Lessons from Two Studies

Sharon E. Denniston, MICS, Ph.D. Candidate
Michael F. Caldwell, Psy.D.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) recommends that policies intended to reduce sexual recidivism by juveniles who commit a sexual offense be evaluated for their potential iatrogenic effects on juveniles. The DOJ also urges that research using scientifically rigorous methods be conducted to assess the impact of Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) policies on juveniles who commit a sexual offense.

Rarely a day goes by that issues related to sexual abuse are not found in the media in the United States. Rightfully, this issue demands attention. Juveniles are involved on both sides of it—as victims, and as offenders subject to sex offender registration and notification policies. However, the growing body of evidence indicates: 1) low recidivism rates by juveniles who commit a sexual offense, 2) the failure of SORN policies to effectively predict future sexual offending, and 3) a lack of support that SORN is achieving public safety outcomes. This informs the need for further scholarly inquiry that provides knowledge about the *objective functional consequences* of juvenile sex offender registration, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the “net effect” of this policy—knowledge that demands consideration when creating future policies that seek to prevent sexual abuse, as well as justice and mental health interventions.

Findings from research exploring the relationship between juvenile sex offender registration and depression in current and former registrants after they've matured into adulthood will be presented.

Studies collecting data from registrants subject to SORN for a juvenile offense are virtually non-existent. The exploratory study, *Raised on the Registry*, provides a revealing look into the impacts of SORN policies on youthful offenders. Findings from this study will be shared—findings that enlighten and provide a basis for future rigorous studies that answer the call to study the impacts of SORN policies on juveniles who commit a sexual offense.

Goals of the Paper:

1. Share research findings regarding the consequences of Juvenile Sexual Offender Registration so this knowledge might inform public policy decisions all over the world regarding juveniles that commit a sexual offense.
2. Raise awareness of recent U.S. DOJ recommendations regarding Juvenile Sexual Offender Registration policy
3. Inspire future research on the consequences of Juvenile Sexual Offender Registration.