The Location of Registered Sex Offenders and Their Impact on Neighborhood Crime and Informal Social Control


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Several high profile sex offense cases led to the development of sex offender registration and community notification laws. Community notification laws were intended to decrease victimization by and reduce the recidivism of registered sex offenders (RSOs) by involving the public in the informal social control of RSOs. From the lenses of both traditional and contemporary social disorganization theory, I examine the characteristics of communities where RSOs reside. Drawing upon two theoretical perspectives, I also examine the relationship between RSOs and both crime and two types of informal social control: protective behaviors and neighboring activities. I combine unique longitudinal data on RSOs from the Washington State Attorney General's office with two surveys of Seattle residents, crime data from the Seattle Police Department, data on all returning offenders from the Washington State Department of Corrections, and contextual data from the U.S. Census. My results suggest that RSOs live in disadvantaged neighborhoods with low levels of collective efficacy. My results also suggest a positive association between RSOs and levels of violent crime, rape, and property crime, but no association between RSOs and changes in each crime type over time. Despite both the intent of community notification laws to increase informal social control and concerns by researchers that RSOs have a detrimental impact on informal social control, my results suggest no association between the growth or level of RSOs and either levels of both protective behaviors and neighboring activities or changes in either protective behaviors or neighboring activities over time.

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