

Contextualizing the Effects of Sexual Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) Policies on Employment and Economic Status of Persons Convicted of Sexual Offenses

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Abstract: Researchers have established that the sex offender registry has had a negative impact on individuals convicted of a sexual offense (ICSOs), in terms of harassment, unemployment, and loss of social support groups. However, prior research does not describe the nuances of unemployment for ICSOs, the amount of income lost due to registration, or the possible reasons why ICSOs struggle to maintain employment. Our findings suggest that ICSOs experience a significant monetary loss due to registration and are not able to return to their pre-conviction income levels, thus becoming more dependent on supplementary income sources. Results from this study and future analyses are discussed as well.

Keywords: sex offender registry, sex offenders, economic impact, income loss, collateral consequences

Research has long suggested that criminal convictions that place people on public sex offender registries have negative effects on people's abilities to find and maintain employment (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Lester, 2007; Mustaine *et al.*, 2006; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006). Employment difficulties not only impact the socioeconomic status of individuals convicted of sexual offenses (ICSOs), but also present a range of

consequences that conflict with the public safety goals of registration laws. For instance, ICSOs who cannot find employment may become transient in the community until such time they can afford to pay rent. If shelters are not available or refuse to admit ICSOs, the individual may become temporarily homeless. This type of housing transience hinders law enforcement's ability to maintain accurate lists of ICSO's whereabouts and is linked with higher rates of Failure to Register charges (Socia *et al.*, 2015).

Even for those registrants who can gain and maintain employment, their status on the sex offender registry may cause other negative outcomes impacting their socioeconomic status. Residency restriction laws create exclusionary zones that often prohibit registrants from living in areas with affordable rent or areas with public transportation (Durling, 2006). This physical isolation can also impact the availability of suitable employment and travel ability, further reducing the registrant's overall socioeconomic status. Additionally, licensing and certification restrictions for those on the sex offender registry may prohibit ICSOs from working in more qualified professional positions. These economic disadvantages are compounded by the fact that many government assistance programs also have restrictions excluding ICSOs from receiving benefits, so these individuals may lack opportunities for formal assistance.

In this paper we argue that for public safety purposes, it is time to better understand the registration/notification and employment relationship. Prior literature in this area fails to isolate the effects of registration status from others factors that may influence employment opportunities or the lack thereof. For instance, how do we know that challenges in finding employment are directly related to conviction and the registrant's status and are not influenced by an individual's training, employment patterns before conviction, knowledge of technology, core personality traits, and other endogenous individual level factors? It has long been easy to attribute people's lack of achievement in employment to their *convict* status, and even easier to attribute unemployment to the *sex offender* label. However, other factors might trump the sex offender label and methodologies used to date lack the ability to separate those factors from one another. In this paper, we offer preliminary survey results comparing pre- and post-conviction variables of change in socio-economic status, difficulty in obtaining employment, and substantive changes to income.

Literature Review

ICSOs are perceived to be some of the most dangerous and recidivistic offenders living in our communities, associated with a high likelihood of raping and murdering children (Sample & Kadleck, 2008). While this fear is quite pervasive, research suggests that ICSOs do not recidivate at the same rate they are perceived to recidivate (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). However, much of the legislation

surrounding the sex offender registry was designed specifically to reduce “high” ICSO recidivism levels (Sample & Kadleck, 2008). Researchers have not found the registry and community notification system to be an effective mechanism in reducing ICSOs recidivism levels, although the symbolic impact of these laws has led to the continued proliferation and expansion of existing registry systems (Sample *et al.*, 2011).

Beginning in the early 1990s with the Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children Act (1994) and Megan’s Law (1996), states implemented sex offender registry and community notification programs that provided communities with information regarding the residential locations of ICSOs post-conviction. In 2006, the Adam Walsh Act expanded the prior legislation by implementing more comprehensive registry requirements, ultimately creating a strongly restrictive environment for ICSOs. The Adam Walsh Act’s expansions regarding sex offender registration and community notification (SORNA) have been associated with a variety of collateral consequences including unemployment, housing instability, and harassment (Burchfield, 2012; Farkas & Miller, 2007; Tewksbury & Lees, 2006), among other issues. However, to date researchers have not analyzed the true extent of the economic implications of sex offender registration.

Governmental Assistance Restrictions

ICSOs are restricted from receiving some types of governmental assistance. Section 4008 of The Agricultural Act of 2014 (aka the “Farm Bill”) prohibits those “convicted of federal aggravated sexual abuse, murder, sexual exploitation and abuse of children, sexual assault, or similar state laws...from receiving SNAP benefits” (7 U.S.C. § 2015). Passed in 2014, the restrictions for ICSOs under the Farm Bill did not go into effect until June 14, 2019. SNAP benefits are not the only benefits that are impacted by felony convictions and registered status. While some government programs cannot be taken away based on a felony conviction (Social Security, unemployment, Medicaid/Medicare), others can be reduced (Veterans’ Disability) or removed altogether (SNAP WIC, or Section 8 housing benefits). With these restrictions in place, ICSOs must be self-reliant on finding employment and suitable housing in an environment un conducive to reentry success post-conviction.

Employment and Licensing Restrictions

In addition to the many housing restrictions that ICSOs experience, there are other barriers to reentry that these individuals must contend with as well. Some of the biggest barriers for ICSOs rest in the area of employment. Like other individuals with a criminal record, many ICSOs must try and overcome the stigma of being a felony offender. States like California have made attempts help those with felony

records by becoming “ban the box” states, in which potential employers can no longer ask if the applicant has been convicted of a felony offense (The Fair Chance Act, 2018). However, the concept of “ban the box” laws is rather new in development, leaving many ICSOs with no other option but to report their felony offenses during their job search.

To complicate matters, many states have mandated that ICSOs lose occupational licenses and be barred from specific positions, such as those positions in child care or in certain medical practices (Hethcoat II, 2012; Jacobs & Blitsa, 2012; Rhode, 2018). In Texas, the state mandatorily revokes occupational licenses for all felony offenders at the time of incarceration or of community supervision revocation (Tex. Occ. Code § 53.001). These individuals may reapply for their occupational licenses once they are no longer under state supervision, but for some individuals they have permanently lost these licenses. For example, medical licenses are one type of occupational license that has been subject to mandatory revocation statutes. Typically, medical review boards would revoke licenses when physicians commit sexual offenses against patients, but laws surrounding the mandatory revocation of medical licenses extend to nearly all ICSOs regardless of offense, victim, or the situation in which the offense was committed (Hethcoat II, 2012). Texas is one such state in which mandatory revocation of medical licenses occurs for all felony offenders, including ICSOs (Texas State Board of Medical Examiners, 2020). Critics argue that this type of statutory loss is an overreach of state laws, as it bypasses medical review boards entirely and eliminates discretion of those within the profession to determine the revocation status (Hethcoat II, 2012). However, to date, those laws remain legal and enforceable.

License revocation can also occur even in cases where the license is not mandatorily revoked. Many occupational licenses contain a good moral character clause that allows for revocation of licenses when a criminal conviction occurs (Rhode, 2018). For instance, ICSOs who practiced law prior to their criminal conviction could be disbarred by the American Bar Association simply for failing to display this good moral character (Rhode, 2018). The American Bar Association estimates that more than 12,000 felony offenders and 6,000 misdemeanor offenders have been issued disqualifications over their criminal record; this includes permanent and mandatory bans for some ICSOs depending on type of offense committed (Rodriguez & Avery, 2016).

Employment Challenges and the Economic Impact of Registration

In addition to possible licensing concerns and housing stability/location issues, ICSOs must also overcome the felony stigma to find any type of employment (Petersilia, 2003). With all of these obstacles working against ICSOs trying to successfully reenter society

post-conviction, it can be a difficult experience, even in comparison to different offender types (Brown *et al.*, 2007). Yet currently, although we have extensive prior literature conducted on the reentry efforts of ICSOs in general, our knowledge regarding the employment experiences and economic impacts of registration on this population is rather limited.

Prior research has linked unemployment and recidivism rates within ICSO samples (Hanson & Harris, 1998), but little research has looked into the true economic impact that registration has on ICSOs. When ICSOs are employed, it tends to be in low-paying jobs that do not require a strong educational background or skill set (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Metcalfe, Anderson & Rolfe, 2001). Brown and colleagues (2007) also reported frustration from ICSOs because they were unable to regain the economic standing that they lost due to the conviction. Rolfe, Tewksbury, & Lahm (2018) dug further than most into the economic impact, but their research was still limited to dichotomous variables of receiving assistance/no assistance and the impact that assistance had on the ICSOs' need to live with family members and financial burdens. As expected, as income increased, the need to live with family members decreased for this sample (Rolfe *et al.*, 2018). However, these findings still do not illuminate some of the reasons why ICSOs may be unemployed beyond the registrant status.

Current Study

The current study seeks to understand the true impact of the sex offender label on economic status of ICSOs. In this paper, we describe the impact that the sex offender registry has had on ICSOs' socioeconomic status and employment patterns by examining retrospective, self-report data collected with the assistance of advocacy groups affiliated with the National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL).

Methodology

This research used an online self-report survey sent via snowball sampling to ICSOs. Sampling was achieved with the help of NARSOL affiliated advocacy groups and by email referral. The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data relating to the ICSO's socioeconomic status and employment patterns before and after the sexual offense conviction in order to facilitate analysis of the influence of the sex offender registry on post-conviction outcomes. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Tyler (IRB #Sum2018-08).

Data Collection Procedure

Data for this survey was collected via an online survey instrument administered through Qualtrics. The survey questionnaire consisted of measures that examined

multiple dimensions of economic impact, including changes in financial fecundity, employment stability, job advancement, socioeconomic status, and financial support. Respondents were asked to report their status for each of these factors at three time points: 1) immediately before arrest/conviction; 2) immediately following conviction and/or release from incarceration; 3) at the time of survey response¹. This allowed us to determine changes in economic trajectories using the point of conviction/incarceration as the focal point.

Survey data was collected using snowball sampling with the assistance of community-based advocacy groups. The survey was initially sent to three state-level advocacy groups requesting that the survey be forwarded to the group's membership listserv. All three groups were affiliates with the National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL), which consists primarily of ICSOs and family members of ICSOs. The authors received email requests from other NARSOL affiliates requesting that the survey be forwarded to their membership listservs as well. In total, the survey was emailed directly to 24 advocacy groups for ICSOs or their families across 18 unique states. We received confirmation that the email was forwarded to membership listservs for nine of the advocacy groups, but we were not informed whether the survey was forwarded to the remaining fifteen groups' listservs.

Given the use of snowball sampling, a response rate for the survey cannot be calculated. We cannot therefore assess the magnitude of our response bias and our total sample may not represent the full population of registered citizens. A total of 1,002 persons gave consent to participate in the study via the electronic consent form. There was a high level of missing data, with most survey questions (not including contingency questions) recording between 700 and 800 responses. The population we are studying is a highly distrustful, stigmatized group that may be less willing to openly report various aspects of their criminal history and private life (Klein *et al.*, 2018). However, due to the descriptive nature of this research, we did not want to eliminate participants from the sample based on missing data alone. For transparency purposes, we have provided the total sample size in the results section for every specific operation and calculation.

We believe that this survey offers an in-depth look at the economic impact on ICSOs in a way that has not been done before. Despite this, we must acknowledge that there are several limitations to our survey instrument. Since the survey collected self-report data only and did not include any official documentation such as paystubs or employment records, we acknowledge that this data may not provide a complete and objective assessment of changes in economic trajectories. Longitudinal data collection may have afforded participants the opportunity for better recall about their finances compared to a retrospective survey. However, given the logistical difficulties in

conducting longitudinal research, retrospective data collection was appropriate for this sample. Furthermore, while the use of a non-probability sample raises concerns for the external validity of the findings, it is a common practice when trying to research ICSOs (Coetzee, 2020; Cooley, 2022; Harris & Cudmore, 2018).

Hypotheses

The current study sought to determine whether the sex offender registry has an impact on the socioeconomic status and employment patterns of ICSOs. We analyzed this question through the following hypotheses:

1. Individuals convicted of a sexual offense (ICSOs) are at a lower socioeconomic status than they were before they were convicted.
2. ICSOs have more difficulty obtaining employment than they did before they were convicted.

Hypothesis One

To measure whether ICSOs were at a lower socioeconomic status than they were before they were convicted, we asked respondents to report their socioeconomic status for time periods Before, After, and Current. Response options included lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, or upper class for each period. Since socioeconomic status is a subjective assessment, we also asked respondents to report their annual household income Before, After, and Current so we could triangulate their perceptions of socioeconomic status with objective criteria. Responses were collected via a sliding scale that ranged from \$0 to \$250,000.

We know that changes in household income and socioeconomic status can be attributed to other sources such as spousal employment changes, so we asked respondents to report if and how much their income decreased as a result of having to register on the sex offender registry with the survey items, “Since having to register on the sex offender registry, has your income decreased significantly?” and “Can you please provide a number related to lost income in terms of annual salary?”

Hypothesis Two

To measure whether ICSOs had more difficulty obtaining employment than they did before they were convicted, we compared employment patterns before and after conviction. For each time period, respondents reported whether they were employed and the total number of jobs they held before and since their conviction/release from incarceration. Finally, since licensing restrictions may preclude ICSOs from working in the same profession before and after conviction, we asked respondents if they had lost

any licenses after conviction and to classify their employment as Blue Collar (positions that are skilled in manual labor), Pink Collar (hospitality, care-oriented or other service-oriented work), and White Collar (performed in an office or other administrative setting) for each of the three time periods. The descriptions provided in parenthesis were included in the survey for clarification for the respondent.

Analytic Procedure

The data were analyzed using univariate and bivariate analyses in IBM SPSS. When appropriate, tests for association were used to determine significant differences between groups. As this study was focusing on the distribution of job and income loss among ICSOs, multi-variate regression analyses were inappropriate. To analyze changes in job type, loss of licensure, and socio-economic status, we chose to focus on the similar analyses to help combat the missing data contained within the sample itself. Other research has utilized similar analyses to establish a baseline within the ICSOs literature (Tewksbury, 2004; 2006; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2006).

Description of Sample

Consistent with the overall composition of sex offender registries (Ackerman *et al.*, 2011), most respondents were white males (89.4% and 94.9% respectively) who identified as heterosexual (81.5%), with an average age of 51 years old. Over half of respondents had earned a post-secondary degree of some kind (54.2%), with 18.3% earning a graduate or other professional degree. Approximately half of respondents (48.8%) were married or in a committed relationship at the time of the survey. Using Census Region to delineate location of current residence, approximately half of our sample (50.8%) came from the South, but all regions were represented. In their piece, Ackerman *et al.* describe the majority of ICSOs as white males, with a mean age of 44.8 years old (2011). Additionally, more than 55% of their sample committed a physical sexual offense against a child with 70% of their victims being younger than 15 years of age at the time of the offense. Although this study uses a non-probability sample, our participants reflect the most common demographic profile of most ICSOs.

Given the heterogeneity of ICSOs (Ackerman *et al.*, 2011), we asked respondents to provide details of their most recent sexual offense conviction. The average number of sexual offense convictions was 1.36, with the most common offense type involving sexual contact with a minor (41.7%) followed by child pornography (27.8%), and other (25.6%). Most of the convictions were for a felony charge (93.2%), and the most common sentence received was a split sentence involving incarceration and probation (35.3%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| <i>Individual Variables</i> | <i>% or \bar{X} (SD)</i> | <i>N</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Male | 94.9 | 962 |
| White | 89.4 | 964 |
| Age | 51.2 (12.3) | 980 |
| Non-Hispanic | 93.2 | 935 |
| Heterosexual | 81.5 | 961 |
| Highest Education | -- | 869 |
| < High School Diploma or GED | 2.1 | -- |
| High School Diploma or GED | 43.7 | -- |
| Associate degree | 11.5 | -- |
| Bachelor's Degree | 24.4 | -- |
| Graduate or Professional Degree | 18.3 | -- |
| Current Relationship Status | -- | 720 |
| Single | 29.3 | -- |
| Married or In a Committed Relationship | 48.8 | -- |
| Divorced, Separated, or Widowed | 21.9 | -- |
| Census Region of Current Residence | -- | 920 |
| West | 19.7 | -- |
| Midwest | 16.5 | -- |
| South | 50.8 | -- |
| Northeast | 13.0 | -- |

Results

Hypothesis One: ICSOs reported having a lower socioeconomic status than they held before they were convicted

Respondents reported substantial changes in their socioeconomic status over the three time periods. The most common social class prior to conviction was middle class (43.7%), but most respondents (53.7%) reported being in the lowest socioeconomic status group immediately after conviction. By the time of the survey, there were increases in the socioeconomic status of most respondents, but the distribution remained heavily skewed towards the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Those results are depicted in Table 3.

A Friedman Test identified the difference in mean ranking between the three time periods as statistically significant ($X^2 = 530.675, p \leq .001$). Unfortunately, the Friedman Test does not allow for a comparison of specific differences between groups, but it

Table 2: Sexual Offense History Variables

| <i>Offense Variables</i> | <i>% or \bar{X} (SD)</i> | <i>N</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Number of Sexual Convictions | 1.36 (.9) | 806 |
| Offense Type | -- | 776 |
| Sexual Contact with a Minor | 41.7 | -- |
| Sexual Contact with an Adult | 4.1 | -- |
| Prostitution or Solicitation | 0.6 | -- |
| Child Pornography | 27.8 | -- |
| Other | 25.6 | -- |
| Felony | 93.2 | 777 |
| Sentence Type | -- | 781 |
| Probation | 29.1 | -- |
| Incarceration (\leq 1 Year) | 5.6 | -- |
| Incarceration ($>$ 1 Year) | 30.0 | -- |
| Mixed Sentence (Incarceration & Probation) | 35.3 | -- |
| Time on the Registry (Years) | 9.5 (12.4) | 786 |
| Census Region of Offense | -- | 914 |
| West | 19.8 | -- |
| Midwest | 17.6 | -- |
| South | 48.6 | -- |
| Northeast | 14.0 | -- |

was the most appropriate test for significance given the lack of independent variables, normality concerns, and the ordinal measurement of the dependent variable.

Table 3: Change in Perceived Socio-Economic Class Over Time

| <i>Perceived Socio-Economic Class</i> | <i>Before Conviction (%, N=744)</i> | <i>Immediately After (%, N=687)</i> | <i>Currently (%, N=742)</i> |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Lower | 6.9 | 53.7 | 36.7 |
| Lower-Middle | 18.4 | 24.7 | 30.7 |
| Middle | 43.7 | 17.2 | 23.3 |
| Upper-Middle | 27.8 | 4.1 | 8.0 |
| Upper | 3.2 | 0.3 | 1.3 |

The decrease in socioeconomic status was accompanied by perceptions of financial loss. Most respondents (76.9%) indicated that their income had “decreased significantly” since having to register on the sex offender registry, with a median loss of \$25,001 - \$35,000 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Estimate of Yearly Income Decrease

| <i>Estimate of Yearly Income Decrease</i> | <i>% (N = 576)</i> |
|---|--------------------|
| \$5,000 or less | 2.8 |
| \$5,001 - \$15,000 | 15.8 |
| \$15,001 - 25,000 | 19.4 |
| \$25,001 - 35,000 | 12.2 |
| \$35,001 - 45,000 | 10.6 |
| \$45,001 - 55,000 | 10.8 |
| \$55,001 or more | 28.5 |

Numerical results from the annual household income survey items mirror the changes reported in the socioeconomic class data. The median household income Before Conviction was \$50,852 (\bar{X} = \$71,824, SD = \$58,320). The median household income dropped to \$16,437 (\bar{X} = \$28,289, SD = \$37,303) After Conviction, and then increased to \$31,780 (\bar{X} = \$48,548, SD = \$48,390) at the time of the survey. This indicates that ICSOs had average income loss of nearly \$24,000 annually since their conviction. Given these results, we can conclude that Hypothesis 1 was supported by the findings.

Table 5: Total Household Income Over Time

| <i>Total Household Income</i> | <i>X (SD)</i> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Before Conviction | \$71,824 (\$58,320) |
| Immediately After Conviction | \$28,289 (\$37,303) |
| Currently | \$48,548 (\$48,390) |

Hypothesis Two: ICSOs had more difficulty obtaining employment than they did before they were convicted

To evaluate employment opportunities, respondents were asked to report their employment status prior to their conviction and at the time of the survey. Almost all respondents were employed either part time or full-time prior to their conviction (91.4%) but only 55.3% were employed at the time of the survey. A Cochran Q test showed this difference to be significant ($\chi^2(1) = 190.125, p < .001$). The breakdown of employment status is shown below in Table 6.

The average number of jobs held by ICSOs declined by 55% post-conviction, decreasing from 5.96 jobs (SD = 3.95) to 3.31 jobs (SD = 3.63). A paired samples t-test confirmed that this decline was significant ($p < .000, N = 709$). The visual pattern of the data, shown in Figure 1, shows that most respondents reported having two or less jobs post-conviction. Three hundred and sixteen (41%) reported losing a license or certification necessary to work in a specific industry.

Table 6: Changes in Employment Status Over Time

| <i>Employment Status</i> | <i>Before Conviction (%, N=745)</i> | <i>After Conviction (%, N=664)</i> | <i>Percent Change</i> |
|---|---|--|-----------------------|
| Employed (part or full time) | 91.4 | 55.3 | -36.1%*** |
| Unemployed (or unable to work, retired, disability) | 8.6 | 44.7 | +36.1%*** |

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

**Figure 1: Number of Jobs Before and After Conviction**

Before conviction, 31.7% of respondents worked in Blue Collar positions, 7.2% worked in Pink Collar positions, and 61.2% worked in White Collar positions (N = 713). Immediately after conviction and release from incarceration, 62.4% of respondents worked in Blue Collar positions, 10.9% worked in Pink Collar positions, and 26.7% worked in White Collar positions (N = 431). At the time of the survey, 51.4% of respondents worked in Blue Collar positions, 9.7% of respondents worked in Pink Collar positions, and 36.9% of respondents worked in White Collar positions (N = 461). Figure 2 depicts this change in job classification.

The Cochran Q test was used to identify significant changes in job classification over time. Significant changes across the three-time categories were observed for Blue Collar ($\chi^2(2) = 100.459$, $p < .001$) and White-Collar identification ($\chi^2(2) = 102.592$, $p < .001$), but not for Pink Collar. Results of an exact McNemar test determined that there was a statistically significant difference between all three-time categories for both Blue Collar and White-Collar identification as reported in Table 7. Due to the concern

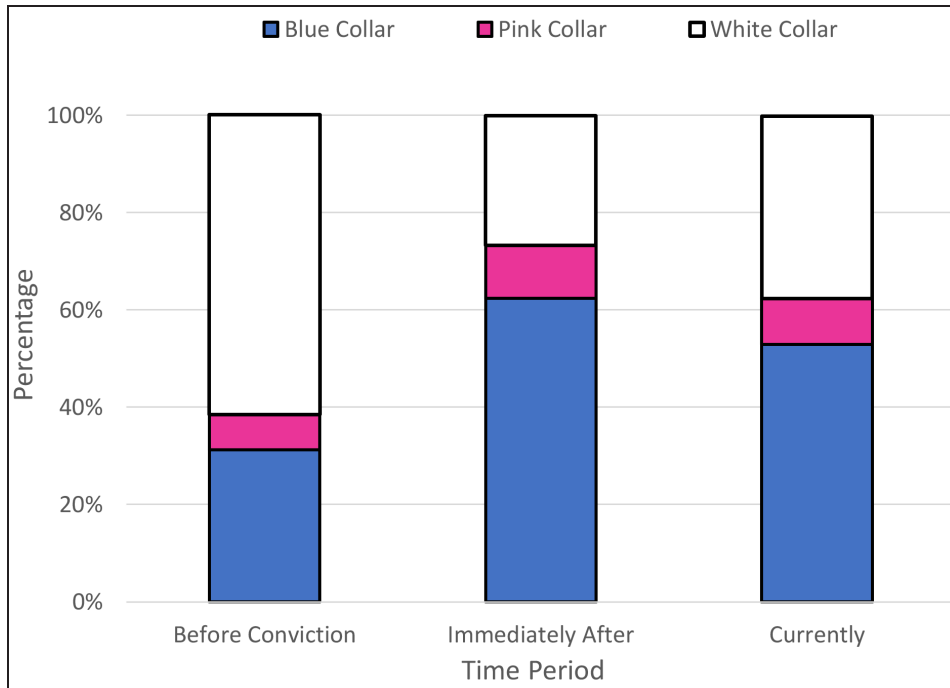


Figure 2: Change in Job Classification Over Time

about missing cases impacting the findings, we used a case-wise deletion approach to run the same analyses using 339 cases that did not have missing data for any of the analyzed variables. All significance values remained the same. We therefore reported the larger sample results. Given these results, we can conclude that Hypothesis 2 was supported by the findings.

Discussion

Based on the results shown above, there was a clear trend occurring for nearly all variables over time. ICSOs experienced a sudden, and often drastic drop, in most of the categories analyzed immediately after their conviction. There was a rebound of sorts occurring over time, but in most cases, it never returns to their pre-conviction rates. Both of our hypotheses were proven correct, overall suggesting a very substantial impact of sex offender policies on the economic status of individuals listed on the sex offender registry.

One of the most impactful findings from this study rests with the amount of money that ICSOs are losing due to their sex offense convictions. Prior to conviction, our participants reported an average annual household income of \$72,000. The average household income dropped over to \$28,000 after conviction, then rebounded to an

Table 7: Percentage Change Over Time

| Category | Before to After Percent Change | | After to Currently Percent Change | | Before to Currently Percent Change | |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Job Classification | | | | | | |
| Blue Collar | + 30.7% | *** | - 11.0% | *** | + 19.7% | *** |
| Pink Collar | + 3.7% | - | - 1.2% | - | + 2.5% | - |
| White Collar | - 34.5% | *** | + 10.2% | *** | - 24.3% | *** |
| Health Insurance Coverage | | | | | | |
| Health Insurance | - 31.1% | *** | + 15.8% | *** | - 15.3% | *** |
| Employer Provided Health Insurance | -32.6% | *** | + 7.6% | *** | - 24.5% | *** |
| Family Provided Health Insurance | - 4.5% | *** | + 3.8% | *** | - 0.7% | - |
| Private Health Insurance | - 3.6% | *** | + 7.5% | ** | + 2.9% | * |
| Assistance Program Usage | | | | | | |
| Medicare/Medicaid | + 5.0% | *** | + 12.7% | *** | + 17.7% | *** |
| Social Security | + 0.0% | - | + 11.1% | *** | + 11.1% | *** |
| Social Security Disability | + 0.6% | - | + 5.4% | *** | + 6.0% | *** |
| Veterans' Affairs Disability Benefits | - .04% | - | + 4.2% | *** | + 3.8% | *** |
| Unemployment | + 2.4% | * | - 8.4% | *** | - 6.4% | *** |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) | + 10.7% | *** | - 4.3% | *** | + 6.4% | *** |
| Women, Infants and Children | + 0.0% | - | - .01% | - | - .01% | - |
| Retirement Savings | | | | | | |
| Employer Sponsored 401K Plan | - 11.9% | *** | + 6.9% | *** | - 5.0% | *** |
| Pension Plan | - 5.7% | *** | + 5.4% | *** | - 0.3% | - |

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

average of \$48,000. This represents a \$44,000 initial loss, only \$20,000 of which has been recovered through the present day. This means that respondents were still experiencing, on average, a \$24,000 loss of income per year as a direct result of their conviction. For many individuals, this income loss was even larger, as almost 30% of our sample stated they lost \$55,000 a year or more in income. Not only does the financial loss come in terms of their base income but for many ICSOs, they are required to pay for restitution, court costs, and other supervision costs which also can impact their income level. While the rebound in income does help offset some of the initial loss, for many participants being able to maintain steady employment at the same job can be difficult. Due to the amount of movement between jobs, the ability to rebound income can be hard to achieve.

Our participants reported higher rates of unemployment post-conviction (44.7%) compared to before their conviction (9%). Loss of licensure also contributed to change of industry or change of job classification altogether. Although there was some reversal of this pattern over time, there remained a significant increase in Blue Collar positions and a significant decrease in White-Collar positions when comparing before conviction status to current status. As discussed in the introduction, industry certifications like medical licenses, child care certifications, and bar licenses can be revoked as a result of a conviction. Forty-one percent of our respondents reported losing a license or certification necessary to work in specific industries as a result of their criminal conviction. Many of these specialized licenses affect jobs classified as White-Collar, so respondents who worked in these areas prior to conviction may have found themselves unable to find a job in the industry in which they were qualified and had to seek employment in areas which they were less qualified and/or that required less specialized skills. When this occurs, ICSOs are not able to return to the careers they have built before their convictions often requiring major upheavals in their employment trajectories. Like most individuals with a criminal background, ICSOs can face problems obtaining a job due to the background check conducted by most employers. The background check combined with being on the publicly accessible sex offender registry stacks the deck against registrants. Not only do they face difficulties in gaining employment, but once they are employed, they may face harassment from employers or co-workers (Tewksbury & Lees, 2006).

Limitations

Conducting research with ICSO populations can be a difficult endeavor for researchers who have not worked to build rapport with this group of reentering citizens. While there is an acknowledged self-selection bias included in this sampling structure, this study sought to collect data from ICSOs directly. Using the advocacy groups such as NARSOL to serve as an intermediary helps to build trust with the participants who are generally distrustful of outsiders (Klein *et al.*, 2018). Working with the advocacy groups helps to provide legitimacy to the researchers and the study in the eyes of ICSOs. Snowball sampling is often one of the best collection techniques because ICSOs are receiving the survey from a trusted source that supports the research.

One additional limitation rests in the retrospective nature of this research. While longitudinal research would be ideal to track changes in participant income over time, there are a number of challenges associated with conducting that type data collection with an ICSO sample. With all longitudinal data, attrition is a concern for researchers as participants must remain in the study through various data collection points. For many ICSOs, they are already in the public view too much and therefore, might be

opposed to being tracked by the researchers for a number of years (Klein *et al.*, 2018). As previously mentioned, ICSOs are already reluctant to participate in cross-sectional research studies without trust being established between the researcher and the subjects. We again acknowledge there is self-selection bias that occurs through the use of snowball sampling, which limits the external validity of the findings. Additionally, since these findings are based on retrospective self-reported responses, we must use caution when interpreting these results. Despite these limitations, the use of a non-probability sample is fairly common in ICSO research (Coetzee, 2020; Cooley, 2022; Harris & Cudmore, 2018).

Conclusion

Researchers have examined the collateral consequences that ICSOs experience as a result of their conviction. While the literature to date has acknowledged a financial impact for ICSOs due to registration and notification policies, to date there has not been a detailed examination of financial outcomes for ICSOs. The current study was conducted in order to facilitate a better understanding of the economic conditions and futures of ICSOs and their family members. These findings suggest that a sexual offense conviction causes both immediate and long-term harm to ICSOs' financial stability. However, the current analysis does not allow us to confirm that registration and notification policies are the only, or even the primary, cause of this harm. In order to make that type of determination, future research must examine not just the respondent's economic history but how registration and notification policies interact with personal characteristics, employment attitudes, and individual behaviors so as to better identify how much of the economic harm can be attributed to the sexual offense conviction versus outside factors.

Note

1. For ease of reference, we refer to these time periods as 1) Before; 2) After; 3) Current for the remainder of this paper.

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