

2021

Community Attitudes Towards Juvenile Sex Offenders and Registration in Virginia

Paige Reed

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Community Attitudes Towards
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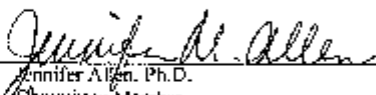
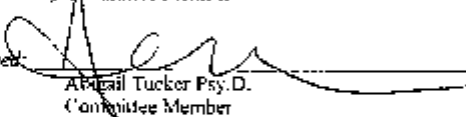
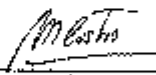
by
Paige Reed

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2021

Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Paige Reed under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Philosophy at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved: 	_____	12/10/21
Grace Telesco, Ph.D. Committee Chair		Date
Approved: 	_____	12/10/21
Jennifer Allen, Ph.D. Committee Member		Date
Approved: 	_____	12/10/21
Abigail Tucker Psy. D. Committee Member		Date
Approved: 	_____	12/10/21
Marcelo Castro, Ph.D. Associate Dean		Date

Statement of Original Work

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Paige Reed

Name

December 10th, 2021

Date

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone that participated in this research. You all played a crucial role in the successful completion of this study. I would also like to express my gratitude for Nova Southeastern University for taking a chance on me and allowing me to further expand my knowledge in several areas of criminal justice and research. To my dissertation committee: I greatly appreciate your dedication to my education and your willingness to oversee this research. The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the precious time you have given me and the recommendations that you have provided. Thank you all for making this commitment.

To my students: Thank you for motivating me to push through adversity and get this done. You all continue to inspire me every day and I am so fortunate that I had the opportunity to share this experience with you. Last but most certainly not least, to Dr. Beth Easterling: Your unwavering support was the biggest influence for me completing this work. I truly appreciate everything that you have done and continue to do for me. I did not know when I asked you to be my undergraduate thesis advisor years ago that I was gaining my biggest advocate and supporter, as well as a future colleague and friend. I would not be anywhere close to where I am today without you. Thank you for believing in me.

Abstract

Community Attitudes Towards Juvenile Sex Offenders and Registration in Virginia. Paige Reed, 2021. Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: Juvenile sex offender, registration, attitudes, support, recidivism.

The collateral consequences and harmful effects of juvenile sex offender registration and restrictions has been the forefront of conversation surrounding sex offender legislation in the United States. The literature available has consistently shown that juveniles profoundly differ from adults in significant areas such as decision making, cognitive capability, judgment, and overall development. The literature has also consistently shown that juvenile sex offenders are amenable to treatment, have considerably low recidivism rates, and are unlikely to offend into their adulthood. Despite this, and even though the juvenile justice system prioritizes rehabilitation over punitive measures, juvenile sex offenders are commonly subjected to a sex offender registration and notification system that was initially developed and intended for adults.

The purpose of this research was to gather information regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and juvenile sex offender registration in Virginia. Using the Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders-Juvenile Stem Version (ATSO) scale, the researcher collected data regarding attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders from a sample of Virginians ($N = 198$). The researcher also sought to understand the level of support Virginians had towards juvenile sex offender registration. The Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (SJSOR) scale was used to collect this data. The scores were broken down over various demographic variables to determine if they could predict scores on each of the scales used in this study. The study revealed that political affiliation was a significant predictor for ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores, and that political affiliation and ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores were significant predictors for SJSOR scale scores. A discussion on juvenile sex offender registration reform in Virginia was provided.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Problem Statement	1
Impact and Purpose	3
Background and Significance	3
Origins of the Problem.....	5
Implications for JSO’s and the Community.....	7
Benefit of Solving the Problem.....	8
Consequences of Not Solving the Problem	9
Adding to the Knowledge Base	9
Barriers and Issues	10
Purpose Statement.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	13
Characteristics of Juvenile Sex Offenders	13
Implementing SORNA & Minimum Registration Requirements.....	14
Virginia-Specific Requirements.....	15
Collateral Consequences for Registered Juvenile Sex Offenders	16
Juvenile Sex Offender Recidivism.....	17
Summary of Relevant Studies.....	18
Significance.....	23
Research Questions	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	26
Participants.....	26
Instrumentation	28
Proposed Research Design & Methodology	30
Data Analysis	30
Summary	33
Chapter 4: Findings.....	34
Participant Demographics	34
Reliability.....	36
Validity	37
Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders-Juvenile Stem Version Scale.....	38
Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration Scale	41
Multiple Regression Results	44
Summary	48
Chapter 5: Discussion	50
Data Interpretation	50
Theoretical Perspective	58

Implications.....	61
Limitations	63
Recommendations for Future Research	64
References.....	65
Appendices	
A Demographic Questionnaire	71
B Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders (ATSO) – Juvenile Stem Version.....	73
C Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (SJSOR) Scale	75
Tables	
1 ATSO Score Distribution.....	38
2 Mean ATSO Score Based on Political Affiliation.....	39
3 Mean ATSO Score Based on Parenthood.....	39
4 Mean ATSO Score Based on Sexual Victimization	40
5 SJSOR Score Distribution.....	42
6 Mean SJSOR Score Based on Political Affiliation.....	42
7 Mean SJSOR Score Based on Parenthood.....	43
8 Mean SJSOR Score Based on Sexual Victimization	43
9 ATSO Score Analysis of Variance	45
10 ATSO Score Coefficients	45
11 ATSO Score Correlations	46
12 SJSOR Score Analysis of Variance	47
13 SJSOR Score Coefficients	47
14 SJSOR Score Correlations	48

Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Problem

The collateral consequences of the current registration laws and requirements for juvenile sex offenders are harmful to their social development and present a lifetime worth of punishment and negative effects (Brost & Jordan, 2017; Cochrane & Kennedy, 2010; Harris et. al, 2016; Letourneau et. al, 2018b). Despite having developmental differences from adults, the complex nature of juvenile sexual offending, low sexual recidivism rates, and little evidence that the registry is effective (Letourneau et. al, 2018a), 38 states have juvenile sex offender registration requirements (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). The registry may do more harm than good for juvenile offenders and the high costs of these registries, along with the focus on low-risk offenders, may not benefit the public. Considering that sex offenders are subjected to registration requirements and their collateral consequences, this research is essential in understanding the impact of such requirements on communities.

Problem Statement

Sex offenders are viewed one of the most dangerous groups in our society, often eliciting feelings from the public such as fear, horror, disgust, and moral outrage (King, 2019; Olver & Barlow, 2010; Stevenson et. al, 2015). Consequently, sex offender-specific policy was driven by these same feelings from the public as well as the series of moral panics that were fueled by extreme and rare cases of violent sexual offending that were sensationalized by the media. Additionally, in 2003 the Supreme Court incorrectly cited sex offender recidivism rates as being “frightening and high,” which is frequently referred to when explaining the rationale behind harsh sex offender policy and consequences (Wright, 2019). As a result, sex offenders are still

required to abide by strict registration requirements and restrictions that have been implemented as a response. While the sex offender registry was put in place in an interest of public safety, it poses several dilemmas. Though sex offenders have served their punishment of incarceration, they are still subjected to an ongoing lifetime worth of punishment post-release. The disclosure of personal information to the public along with the collateral consequences of imposed restrictions raises ethical and legal concerns. In addition, while recidivism rates for sex offenders are considerably low, many of those that do recidivate can contribute it to a violation of registration requirements (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009). Specifically, for juvenile sex offenders, research indicates that most juveniles do not continue sexually offending into adulthood (Salerno et. al, 2014). In fact, juveniles who have been adjudicated in court have sexual recidivism rates that are less than half of that of adult sex offenders (Christiansen & Vincent, 2013). Though recidivism rates are considerably low, particularly for juvenile sex offenders, current policy permits the disclosure of sex offender status and detailed information to the public in an effort to enhance public safety and awareness. There is no indication that there is any significant correlation between the public receiving notification on sex offenders and recidivism (Salerno et. al, 2010).

While the sex offender registry may raise ethical and legal concerns, there is a strong desire for safety and social order. Legal justification for the management of sex offenders is largely rooted in the utilitarian goal of protecting society (Wright, 2015). Since the public views sex offenses as heinous, and sex offenders overall as violent, there is justification to test the legal parameters in the name of public safety. Aligning with this thought, individuals in favor of the sex offender registry commonly argue that there is simply a stronger interest in the rights of the community than the individual rights of sex offenders (Orrechio & Tebbett, 1999). Considering

all of this, the stakes are even higher for juvenile offenders whose social development may be impacted by the requirements and stigma of the registry. There is a need for current data outlining perceptions of the juvenile sex offender registry to determine if this is best practice, or if the registry may be causing more harm than good. There are several agencies devoted to abolishing the juvenile sex offender registry due to the harm that is caused. After reviewing the literature, the researcher concluded that there is a lack of information regarding attitudes towards the sex offender registry, specifically for juvenile offenders.

Impact and Purpose

The problem presented has an impact on both juvenile sex offenders and the community. Juvenile sex offender registration and restrictions provide harmful effects for youth and have not shown to improve public safety (Letourneau et. al, 2018b). Lack of research regarding this topic allows for a gap in the literature and imposes on any future informed decision making by law makers and agents of the criminal justice system. Gathering information on community attitudes towards the juvenile sex offender registry can help fill this gap. Filling the gap can promote success in terms of both reentry and community safety, and even possibly contribute to moving towards reform or the abolishment of juvenile sex offender registration practices. The overall purpose of this research was to gather information regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and juvenile sex offender registries. This information can guide discussions on balancing the need for community safety with the ethical treatment of juvenile sex offenders.

Background and Significance

The national policy that guides law enforcement agencies on the ongoing management of sex offenders is the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA). SORNA is a registration and notification system that clarifies the minimum standards that sex offenders must abide by, and that law enforcement agencies must follow (Department of Justice, 2007). It is mandated that sex offenders provide their full name and any aliases, current and prior addresses, internet identifiers and addresses, all phone numbers, social security number, date of birth, physical description, type of offense committed, full criminal history, driver's license or identification card, travel documents, employer name and address, school information, professional licenses, vehicle information, a DNA sample, fingerprints, and a current photograph (Department of Justice, 2007). Public SORNA websites in each state are required to include the full name of the offender and any aliases, all residential and popular addresses, vehicle information, a physical description of the offender, all sex offenses the offender was convicted of, and a current photograph (Department of Justice, 2007). The website that is available to the public may not disclose the offender's social security number or travel and immigration document numbers, any arrests that the offender was not convicted of, or the victim's identity (Department of Justice, 2007). In some states, juveniles are bound to these same requirements.

While these minimum standards must be followed in all fifty states for adult offenders, individual jurisdictions can make their own requirements more stringent (Department of Justice, 2007). Law enforcement agencies are given discretion to require supplemental information or impose additional restrictions. For example, jurisdictions may choose to put residency and internet restrictions in place, increase face to face contact requirements, and make additional information available on the public website (Department of Justice, 2007). Jurisdictions also commonly increase registration length and expand on the classes of sex offenders that are

required to register (Department of Justice, 2007). Some states go even further, requiring that driver's licenses and identification cards denote sex offender status when applicable (Carpenter, 2013).

If sex offenders do not abide by all of the registration requirements, they can face charges brought forth by law enforcement, or be subjected to fines (Department of Justice, 2007). Law enforcement officers can charge a sex offender with failure to register if they choose to not register, provide inaccurate information, or fail to update records within three business days for any required information that changes (Department of Justice, 2007). A charge of failure to register may carry up to ten years of imprisonment (Department of Justice, 2007). Along with this, sex offenders are responsible for knowing the specific requirements for their jurisdiction (Department of Justice, 2007). Considering that each jurisdiction has discretion on enforcing additional requirements, this can be difficult for the offender to keep track of.

In states that hold juvenile sex offenders to these same standards, there are additional concerns to keep in mind. Juvenile sex offenders that are required to abide by registration requirements and restrictions often face life-long punishment and stigma, mental health concerns, problematic socialization and development, and increased victimization experiences (Letourneau et. al, 2018). There is little to no evidence showing that requiring juvenile sex offenders to succumb to the requirements of SORNA provides any advantage to public safety. While significant and negative effects are produced for juvenile offenders, any positive effects from this process are minimal.

Origins of the Problem

Periods of moral panic commonly spark public interest and increase levels of fear throughout the nation, often based on misperceptions and false information that is communicated or inferred through the media. The desire for community safety and protection after seeing the extreme cases regarding Jacob Wetterling, Megan Kanka, and Adam Walsh sensationalized by the media has produced harsh legislation to be passed regarding the management of sex offenders. In a majority of the states in our country juvenile sex offenders are subjected to similar requirements and restrictions as adult sex offenders under Megan's Law even though, historically, the goal has been to provide distinctions between adult and juvenile offenders (Garfinkle, 2003). The current legislation fails to take in to account the important developmental differences between children and adults. As a result, juvenile sex offenders may face irreparable harm to their social development, increased rates of sexual victimization, and a lifetime of stigma and punishment (Brost & Jordan, 2017; Cochrane & Kennedy, 2010; Harris et. al, 2016; Letourneau et. al, 2018b). While adult sex offenders may face these same issues, the collateral consequences that juveniles face may not be justified considering that there are little to no public safety benefits to juvenile sex offender registration.

In addition, there are several ethical and legal dilemmas of concern regarding the registry and overall management of sex offenders. The sex offender registry and the community notification system may infringe on the offender's right to privacy. It can be argued that the information that is available, and easily accessible, on the public website may not be on a need-to-know basis. The Human Rights Watch (2007) has compiled several reports of sex offenders being beaten, killed, stalked, having their property damaged, sexually victimized and preyed upon themselves, and even driven to suicide due to the registration system and its requirements.

These reports have ranged from offenders charged with rape to indecent exposure (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Juvenile offenders have faced or may face these issues in their childhood and throughout adulthood, given the length of registration and the stigma that comes from the registered sex offender label. While community notification and the public website were implemented for public safety, they're not always used for their intended purposes. Many offenders have challenged in court that their first amendment rights are being violated (Shapiro, 2017). In addition, there is very little research supporting that the registry and its requirements curtail future sexual offending and lower recidivism rates overall. In fact, recidivism rates for sex offenders are considerably low and many of those that do recidivate can contribute it to a violation of registration requirements (Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009). In addition, juvenile sex offender recidivism rates specifically are even lower due to them being more amenable to treatment (Letourneau & Miner, 2005).

Implications for JSO's and the Community

Seeing that sex offenders are the only group of individuals that are subjected to registration requirements and restrictions, they are the primary group that is affected. Juvenile sex offenders fall victim to numerous restrictions that can impact daily life and make it difficult to access social networks and basic needs. This may hinder social development and produce harmful unintended consequences. Sex offender management serves as a constant reminder of the crime that the offender committed, and it creates a label that is difficult to escape. The personal information that a sex offender is required to disclose, and is readily available to the public, makes them an easy target for both verbal and physical harassment (Tewksbury, 2005). This can make it difficult for sex offenders to live a "normal" life free of discrimination and fear.

Even though juvenile sex offenders commit these crimes as a minor, the consequences of registration and the label may follow them for a lifetime.

Conversely, communities might be impacted by this problem as well. Sex offender registration requirements and restrictions were created in a response to high levels of public fear of sex offenders overall, despite this fear being perpetuated by media coverage of extreme and atypical violent and sex-related cases. While the intent of our current sex offender management system is to keep people safe, it may be creating a false sense of security. In addition, the research that is available doesn't support the registry as an effective means to deter and manage the juvenile sex offender population. Considering that the registry may not be achieving its primary goals, the system may be spending time and resources managing a population that doesn't need to be managed to the same degree as adults. As a result, our most serious and at-risk offenders may be getting lost in a sea of minimal-risk offenders that pose little-to-no danger to the community, including the registered juvenile sex offender population.

Benefit of Solving the Problem

Gathering data regarding community attitudes towards the juvenile sex offender registry and its' requirements allowed the researcher to gauge the current political and social climates and determine if this is best practice. Though there is a need to balance community safety with personal freedom, the registry may be doing more harm than good, particularly for juvenile offenders. Much of this policy regarding the management of sex offenders in the community was passed after extreme cases with a sexual component were sensationalized by the media and sparked public fear and outrage. The legislation produced because of these cases served the purpose of satisfying the public's desire for the supervision and control of sex offenders as a

public safety initiative (Shaffer, 2010). Though current policy supports law enforcement's goal of social order and retribution, it does not support the personal freedom of sex offenders. It also fails to consider the developmental differences between juveniles and adults, the differing fundamental offending patterns and outcomes, as well as the harmful collateral consequences that juveniles face now and, potentially, for their lifetime. Taking a closer look at this issue may allow us to still satisfy the need for community safety, while also keeping the rights and best interest of our juvenile sex offenders in mind.

Consequences of Not Solving the Problem

Without producing research regarding community attitudes towards the juvenile sex offender registry, it will be difficult to move forward in finding another solution that best fits the needs of our community members while also addressing the specific issues that juvenile sex offenders face. Society will continue to see ethical and legal questions raised, violence and harassment against sex offenders, problematic social development, a contribution to higher recidivism rates due to failure to adhere to registration requirements and restrictions, and overall irreparable harm. There will also continue to be a gap in the literature regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and the registry.

Adding to the Knowledge Base

The goal of this study was to gather data regarding community attitudes towards the juvenile sex offender registry. Gathering this data can help determine how the public perceives current juvenile sex offender registration and restriction practices, gauge what's working and what's not working, gain insight on if juvenile registration is needed, and determine if community safety needs can be met through other avenues. This data offers a resolution to the

problem by clarifying if the juvenile sex offender registry is needed to keep our communities safe and what can be done to help our juvenile sex offenders reintegrating back into society to be more successful. The research produced offers alternative solutions to the registry or solidifies that it is needed despite the collateral consequences associated with it. There is a gap in the research regarding perceptions and opinions of the registry. This new data adds to the literature and helps guide future discussion regarding our current policy and legislation regarding the juvenile sex offender population.

Barriers and Issues

There were a couple of barriers when conducting this research. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had to be sought prior to beginning data collection for this study. This process was started early on in the interest of time. Another barrier was gaining a good response rate on the survey to ensure that the statistics are valid. Getting voluntary participation was a barrier as well. Sex offenders and the registry are a “touchy” subject, and this posed a challenge. Gaining a large, diverse sample size would have been a solution to this barrier however, as projected, this was not able to occur for this specific study. Finally, seeing that this is a controversial topic, honesty in responses could have been an issue. This barrier was minimized by ensuring anonymity in survey responses, however, it is difficult to know how truthful respondents were when completing the survey. It’s also important to note that the attitudes towards sex offenders that many individuals hold were likely be shaped by false information and misperceptions that many people hold regarding this population. It was difficult to differentiate whether this data that was collected is based on accurate information, thus reflecting a meaningful gauge of attitudes that will most appropriately direct the discussion of future

directions for research and recommendations for existing policy. It was important to recognize this barrier when discussing the data.

Purpose Statement

The overall purpose of this research was to gather information regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and juvenile sex offender registries in Virginia. This information will guide discussions on balancing the need for community safety with the ethical treatment of juvenile sex offenders. Gathering information from the state of Virginia helped with adding to the existing general knowledge of attitudes towards sex offenders and begins to fill the gap in the literature regarding juveniles specifically. The researcher aimed to gather data that was representative of the population in Virginia to get a better idea of community perceptions and potential willingness for reform of the current registration requirements.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are used throughout this dissertation.

Recidivism. Recidivism is an offender's subsequent relapse back into criminal behavior, resulting in a new conviction and/or sanction for their acts.

Reentry. Reentry is the act of an offender returning to the community post-incarceration.

JSO. JSO is the acronym for Juvenile Sex Offender.

Juvenile sex offender. A person under the age of 18 who commits a crime involving a sexual act. Sexual acts may range from non-contact offenses such as exhibitionism, to violent sexual acts such as rape.

SORNA. SORNA is the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act. SORNA was enacted as a part of the Adam Walsh Child Safety and Protection Act of 2006 as a response to the expressed need for a national registration and public notification system.

ATSO. ATSO is the acronym for Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders scale.

SJSOR. SJSOR is the acronym for Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registry Scale

Collateral consequences. Collateral consequences are the unintended, and sometimes unknown, result of a particular action or inaction. In this case, collateral consequences are discussed in relation to sex offender registration and restrictions.

Summary

This chapter gave a brief introduction to the complexities of registration and restrictions for sex offenders, specifically juvenile sex offenders. The research problem was highlighted to provide a clear reasoning as to why this research is essential and beneficial to both the juvenile sex offender population and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The researcher established a need for additional research to help fill the gaps in the literature. Potential barriers and issues of this study were noted. The researcher provided definitions for some commonly used terms and acronyms that can be found in this dissertation. The following chapter includes an extensive literature review that summarizes the relevant information for this study that is available.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Characteristics of Juvenile Sex Offenders

There is little research available on sex offenders, and research regarding the juvenile sex offender population is even more difficult to come by. Of the information that's available, it's been concluded that adult sex offenders and juvenile sex offenders do differ, even though there is no such thing as a "typical" sex offender regardless of what age the offender is (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). The primary differences that have been noted between adult sex offenders and juvenile sex offenders are that juveniles are more amenable to treatment, they have lower recidivism rates, and they align more closely with other juveniles who offend generally than they do with adult sex offenders (Letourneau & Miner, 2005). Arguably most important, juvenile and adults differ significantly on a developmental aspect. The brain development and function of juveniles is not comparable to adults, and this has played a major role in shaping the juvenile justice system and policies (Steinberg, 2017).

The courts have long recognized the differing cognitive capabilities between adults and juveniles, hence the development of a juvenile justice system that is different and distinct from the adult criminal justice system. It was noted in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), that due to these differences, "juvenile offenders cannot with reliability be classified among the worst offenders." The court has also found that most juveniles who engage in criminal activity are unlikely to offend as an adult, largely due to differences from adults in their greater immaturity, vulnerability, and changeability (*Miller v Alabama*, and *Jackson v Hobbs*, 2012). As juveniles mature, they may be more susceptible to remorse, renewal, and rehabilitation (*Miller v Alabama* and *Jackson v Hobbs*, 2012). As a result of lessened decision-making skills, impulsivity and the like, juveniles are far less culpable than adults and should not be held to the same standards

(*Miller v Alabama* and *Jackson v Hobbs*, 2012). Additional research has shown that juveniles have a higher likelihood of impulsive and risk-taking behaviors, difficulty managing emotions and controlling behaviors, have poor judgment, and are susceptible to peer pressure, all of which can influence criminal behavior (Tolan, Walker & Repucci, 2012). The juveniles' diminished culpability, inability to predict future consequences, as well as their increased likelihood of successful rehabilitation make arguments for long-term punishment both weak and inconsistent (*Graham v Florida*, 2010).

Implementing SORNA & Minimum Registration Requirements

Despite these vast differences between adult and juvenile offenders, and the statement from the Supreme Court that juveniles should not be classified with the worst offenders, this is a practice that is still happening today. The public has loosely generalized sex offenders as being one of, if not the most, feared groups of offenders thus classifying them as being amongst the worst of the worst. Legislation passed as a response to moral panic from sexual offending and our current policies are evidence of this. The legislative response to sexual offending has helped to create the sense that there is a productive system in place to protect the public and manage this group of offenders. SORNA is the current standard for sex offender registration and community notification. Under the guidelines of SORNA, sex offenders are required to provide a wealth of personal information and abide by the registration requirements, at a minimum. Individual states and jurisdictions have the ability to impose more stringent requirements for offenders and set additional restrictions (Department of Justice, 2007). SORNA opens the door to a lifetime worth of punishment and a host of collateral consequences that may be detrimental to the offender's successful reentry and overall well-being (Tewksbury, 2005). While society typically thinks of sex offender registration and restrictions as being for adult offenders, at least 39 states require

that juvenile offenders follow the guidelines of SORNA, at least to some degree (Juvenile Law Center, 2020). Seeing that there are clear distinctions between adult and juvenile sex offenders, it's surprising to see that, in some jurisdictions, juveniles are subjected to the same requirements as adults.

Virginia-Specific Requirements

The Commonwealth of Virginia does have requirements specifically for juvenile sex offender registration under SORNA guidelines. Juveniles convicted in circuit court of an offense that normally requires sex offender registration are required to adhere to those requirements. In addition, judges are given discretion on whether a juvenile is required to register if the juvenile is age 13 or older and is adjudicated delinquent (Va. Code § 9.1-902). As it did with the general public, the moral panic regarding sex offenders and the use of unverified data and assumptions do have a direct impact on judicial decision making (Cucolo & Perlin, 2019). Consequently, more punitive measures are being taken towards sex offenders in the form of longer sentencing, the possibility of being designated a “sexually violent predator” and being subjected to civil commitment post-incarceration, and the possible requirement of juveniles to have to register when judicial discretion in present. Historically, Virginia has been a “Get tough on crime” state, specifically for sexual offenders. It's important to note that Virginia has recently made some important steps in favor of criminal justice reform, such as abolishing the death penalty, but reform is still falling short for sex offenders. Virginia lawmakers recently moved a bill forward to end the civil commitment of sex offenders post-incarceration. The proposal was quashed after hearing strong opposition citing the need to protect the public from “sexually violent predators (Associated Press, 2021).” Virginia's decision to abolish the death penalty while still upholding

an archaic form of sex offender management response and incapacitation may be indicative of attitudes that Virginians hold towards sex offenders.

Collateral Consequences for Registered Juvenile Sex Offenders

The collateral consequences of sex offender registration and restrictions can be harmful for both juvenile and adult sex offenders. Our juvenile justice system is aimed at protecting children from further harm, practicing therapeutic jurisprudence, and keeping the best interest of the child in mind, however, subjecting juvenile offenders to current registration and restriction practices goes against the goals of our juvenile justice system. The practice of requiring juveniles to register and abide by the same requirements as adult offenders fails to recognize that juvenile and adult offenders differ greatly in development, patterns of offending, and level of culpability (Garfinkle, 2003). Requiring juveniles to register may create barriers to successful community integration, education, peer and family relationships, and well-being in general. Juvenile registrants report difficulties with suicidal ideation, harassment and bullying, school issues, and unstable living arrangements (Harris et. Al, 2016). Subsequent harm from these barriers results in harmful social development and constant stigma (Cochrane & Kennedy, 2010). The effects of registration follow juveniles well into adulthood, where the stigma still exists, and the restrictions pose a larger negative impact. Registration hinders employment, restricts internet access, imposes residency requirements, increases the likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system, increases victimization and harassment, and weakens meaningful social ties and support systems (Human Rights Watch, 2007; Reed, 2017; Regina, 2012; Tewksbury, 2005; Tewksbury & Zgoba, 2009; Wright, 2015). While juveniles are likely to eventually get off of the registry if there are no subsequent offenses, and may even be able to get removed early,

the damage done from the collateral consequences and stigma will create a lifetime worth of issues that are difficult to navigate. Knowing that these harmful collateral consequences exist, and there's no evidence to support that the registry is effective at deterring or managing juvenile sex offenders and lowering recidivism (Batastini et. Al, 2011; Caldwell & Dickenson, 2009; & Sandler et. al, 2017), there is still a reliance on this practice to promote public safety and security.

Juvenile Sex Offender Recidivism

Juveniles have low recidivism rates in general, and juvenile sex offenders have low rates for sexually reoffending even when compared to their non-sex offending peers (Caldwell, 2007). Research also shows that the sex offender registry has little to no impact on sexual recidivism rates (Caldwell & Dickinson, 2009), but does increase the likelihood of additional and unnecessary charges. These often stem from technicalities surrounding registration requirements or new general criminal offenses. With the already low recidivism rates, juvenile sex offenders likely to recidivate decreases even more when they participate in treatment. While there are myths about sex offenders not being able to be rehabilitated, this has been disproven. In fact, juveniles are amenable to treatment and can be quite successful if treatment is completed. The court has consistently ruled that juveniles are susceptible to rehabilitation due to how they differ greatly from adults in the areas of immaturity, vulnerability, and changeability. As such, treatment is promising. Studies have concluded that the effect of treatment on recidivism was statistically significant (Letourneau & Borduin, 2008; Reitzell & Carbonell, 2006; Worling, Littlejohn & Bookalam, 2010). Treatment, when successfully completed, has found to reduce recidivism by up to 9.7% for juvenile sex offenders (Przbylski, 2015).

Summary of Relevant Studies

The research that has been produced regarding the sex offender registry, overall, has supported the notion that this practice is ineffective, particularly for juvenile sex offenders. Though it is known that juveniles are unlikely to be deterred by the registry, that they face numerous collateral consequences and irreparable harm that can stigmatize them and affect them for a lifetime, and that they are much different from adult offenders cognitively and developmentally, juveniles are still subjected to registration requirements in Virginia. The data tells us that juveniles can be effectively managed in their communities without the use of registration requirements, particularly when treatment is made available to them. Despite this information, Virginia has yet to move towards reform of our current sex offender management system and juveniles sex offenders continue to be lumped in with adult sex offenders.

The rationale behind this, and the theoretical framework for this study, is largely contributed to moral panic theory. Moral panic theory asserts that “a condition, episode, person, or groups of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen, 1972).” As the idea of the ‘dangerous sexual predator’ emerges during a period of moral panic, the public’s attitudes towards sex offenders, including juvenile sex offenders, will take a negative shape. Consequently, the public saw harsh legislation being passed, which includes our current system of sex offender management, to satisfy the public’s desire to control this population and have a sense of safety and security. Seeing that attitudes of the public towards sex offenders are a contributing factor to our current sex offender management system, and that this system is particularly harmful to juvenile sex offenders, it was necessary to re-examine the attitudes held by the public to see if they have evolved over time as more truthful and promising research has been published.

Closely related to moral panic and another dimension to the theoretical framework of this study is Social Reaction Theory. The general public have assigned negative labels to this group of offenders, which also plays a role in how their attitudes towards this population are formed on both a conscious and subconscious level. Registered juvenile sex offenders will inherently receive this negative label that will play a role in further stigmatizing them. Furthermore, juveniles sex offenders may feel the effects of disintegrative shaming and the consequences that come with this. As stated previously, it was important to examine the current attitudes towards sex offenders that Virginians hold to see if they still align with the effects of moral panic and the negative labeling that has come about as a result.

There is some research available that examines perceptions of and attitudes towards sex offenders. Notable studies that hold relevance to this research will be cited below. Robbers (2009) gathered data on 153 registered sex offenders via qualitative analysis in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study concluded that sex offenders have a difficult time transitioning back to society and being successful due to the negative label that accompanies them from being registered. Robbers (2009) also concluded that sex offenders face a form of disintegrative shaming fueled by the negative treatment that they receive from the general public. This study supports the theoretical framework of the harmful effects of negative labeling that comes from the public and stigmatizes the sex offenders.

A later study examined the effects of labels on sex offender policies. The researchers in this study gathered data on 498 participants and compared them to a control group of 502 participants. The control group received “neutral” terminology and statements regarding sex offenders, whereas the experimental group received statements that obtained negative labels about adult and juvenile sex offenders. The study concluded that using the negative labels of

“sex offender” and “juvenile sex offender” prompted higher support for registration requirements and restrictions (Harris & Socia, 2014) when compared to the control group who received neutral terminology. This supports the assumption that labels can influence the attitudes that individuals hold towards juvenile sex offenders which, in turn, influences policy and legislation pertaining to sex offenders.

Salerno et. al (2010) found that there is support for the juvenile sex offender registry across several groups, however, some groups support this more than others. They gathered data on “lay people,” family law attorneys, and prosecutors. The data revealed that prosecutors and “lay people” held more punitive attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and a higher support in the registry than family law attorneys. Family law attorneys did still support registry laws, but they favored them more for adult sex offenders. The perception of threat of juvenile offenders on public safety was still present with varying offender ages and types of offenses. Moral outrage and perception of threat that were present were fueled by the common misperceptions that are held about sex offenders.

Another study regarding attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders examined the specific impact of education levels on attitudes. 168 people participated in the study. The researchers found that as education level increased, attitudes became more positive and oriented with the realities of juvenile sexual offending. For example, individuals with higher levels of education were less likely to support the juvenile registration, didn't support the registry as an effective sex crime control method, and they were more likely to believe that juvenile sex offenders could fully understand their actions (Stevenson et. al, 2011). While this study looked particularly at the impact of education, it still gives insight to understanding how attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders might be formed.

A study done by Campregher & Jeglic (2016) examined attitudes of juvenile sex offenders be subjected to adult sex offender registration requirements. 978 participants were placed in two different groups. One group was asked to picture a juvenile generic sex offender, and the other group read through different vignettes pertaining to specific juvenile sexual offenders. Each group then responded to a subsequent questionnaire to gauge attitudes towards this population. The study concluded that participants who were asked to just picture a generic juvenile sex offender actually held more punitive views and perceive them as more likely to be dangerous and to recidivate.

Janssen (2021) gathered data from the public to determine if there is support for juvenile sex offender registration, and under what conditions they should be required to register. The researcher provided vignettes to the participants that varied in severity of offense and characteristic of the offender such as age and sex. The study found that participant responses were determined by specific characteristics. For example, participants were less likely to support registration and restrictions if the juvenile offender was female, younger, or had a minor or moderate offense. In addition, participants were likely to believe incorrect statements about juvenile sex offenders, such as them being likely to reoffend in the future, even though previous research indicates that this is not accurate. Overall, the study found that the public might not agree with the registration of juvenile sex offenders.

A recent study investigated the level of agreement or disagreement that the public holds regarding juvenile sex offender registration. The researcher assessed the public's perception by using a 24-item questionnaire that used a 4-point Likert scale to rate responses. It was hypothesized that females and respondents with children would be in more support of juvenile sex offender registration. 34 English-speaking California residents participated in the study. The

results indicated that there is overall support for the registry, however, there was no significant difference between male and female respondents as initially hypothesized. Participants with children did show to be more supportive of juvenile sex offender registration than those participants without children (Williams, 2017).

Much of our sex offender policy that exists today is a product of fear of the sex offender population. The policies are protective and preventative in nature, with a support for reducing victimization and supporting those that have fallen victim to the various forms sexual assault. It may be assumed that victims of sexual assault are in support of the current sex offender management practices that exist. One study looked at a comparison between victims ($n = 129$) and nonvictims ($n = 841$) on this topic. Overall, victims of sexual assault held more positive views of sex offenders than nonvictims did. Victims were more likely to support forms of mandated treatment for sex offenders and were less likely to support the current community notification system. Being educated about sex offenders also predicted attitudes towards this group regardless of whether the participant was a victim or a nonvictim (Spoo et. al, 2017).

While there is some information available regarding juvenile sex offenders, there is an overall lack of information examining community attitudes towards this population. Much of the research pertaining to attitudes towards sex offenders is strictly pertaining to adult offenders. Given the vast differences between adult and juvenile sex offenders, juvenile-specific studies on attitudes were most relevant to this dissertation and more research was needed in this area. There was a need to explore Virginian attitudes specifically to narrow the focus this issues and control for any geographical differences that may be present for residents of different states. Looking at Virginia specifically allowed the researcher to tailor the data to Virginia's current system as well

as the current social and political climates in the Commonwealth. The gap in the literature suggested a need to explore this topic further.

Significance

As stated previously, much of the sex offender legislation and policies that exist today were shaped by high levels of fear from the public and moral panic that was fueled by inaccurate information and misperceptions about sex offenders and sexual offending. Unique policy was developed as a reflection of the attitudes and negative labels that society holds about sex offenders. It is well known that juvenile sex offenders suffer numerous collateral consequences from having to place themselves on the registry, even though the existing data shows that they have low recidivism rates, have the ability to change and reform their character, and are amenable to treatment.

This research is significant for a couple reasons. First, it helps fill the clear gap that still exists regarding attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. There have been several studies produced regarding attitudes towards sex offenders, however, juvenile sex offenders differ greatly from adults and it's necessary that this population be studied separately. Next, this research is timely. Criminal justice reform is on the agenda for many states across the nation, including Virginia. Examination of current sex offender management policies and practices is well overdue. Though Virginia recently shot down a bill to end the civil commitment of sex offenders, it was necessary to examine this realm of sex offender policy to see if there is any change to public support of the registry, or if attitudes have become more accepting as society familiarizes themselves with credible and factual information regarding juvenile sex offenders.

Research Questions

To further examine this area of need the researcher focused on attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and attitudes and understanding towards problematic areas such as the registry, safety, treatment, and misperceptions about sex offenders. The research questions for this study are listed below:

RQ1: Does attitude towards juvenile sex offenders predict support for the juvenile sex offender registry?

RQ2: Does political affiliation predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders?

RQ3: Does having a child predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders?

RQ4: Does sexual victimization history predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders?

RQ5: Does political affiliation predict support for the juvenile sex offender registry?

RQ6: Does having a child predict support for the juvenile sex offender registry?

RQ 7: Does sexual victimization history predict support for the juvenile sex offender registry?

Attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders was measured using the *Attitudes Towards Juvenile Sex Offenders (ATSO) – Juvenile Stem Scale*. The ATSO provides thirty-six statements that reflect an individual's attitude towards the sex offender population. This scale has been used widely and is validated (Whitehead, 2009). Support for the juvenile sex offender registry was measured using the *Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registry (SJSOR) Scale* that the researcher developed for this study. This scale provides numerous statements that indicate the level of support that an individual has towards the juvenile sex offender registry. Political affiliation is defined by the political party that the participant endorses. Participants were able to choose from the options of Democrat, Republican, Independent, or other. Parenthood was defined as an individual who presently has or previously had legal guardianship over another individual, whether that be

through a biological or legally defined relationship. Sexual victimization was defined as any individual who has experienced any unwanted sexual contact. Political affiliation, parenthood, and sexual victimization history were all measured on the demographic questionnaire.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research methodology was a quantitative study with a survey design. The survey design allowed the researcher to look at descriptions of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population by studying samples associated with that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using a survey design, the researcher answered both descriptive questions and questions about the relationship between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey design was initially based on a convenience sample of 385 participants with a goal of an 80% response rate. The survey was created by the researcher.

To begin, permission was granted by the IRB before data was collected. Prior to participants taking the survey, the purpose of the study was disclosed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey was distributed electronically by Qualtrics. To maintain privacy and anonymity, the survey did not request the disclosure and any personally identifiable information. This helped to promote confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants of the study.

The focus of this study was to examine community attitudes regarding juvenile sex offenders and registration in Virginia, to determine if attitudes still reflect public support for juvenile registration and restrictions and an overall negative opinion of sexual offenders. Using a survey design allowed the research to gather and analyze the data to see if any comparisons or correlations exist between attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and support for the registration of juvenile sex offenders.

Participants

The study was comprised of residents from the state of Virginia. Participants met the criteria for participation as follows: they currently resided in the Commonwealth of Virginia, they were able to understand English, and they were at least eighteen years of age. The goal for

the number of participants in the study was initially 385. While 385 was less than ten percent of Virginia's overall adult population, this target number was more feasible due to the barriers of the willingness to participate, access to technology, and having a Facebook account to complete the survey.

The researcher arrived at the initial sample size of 385 by using the Raosoft sample size calculator. The estimated number of adults residing in Virginia, based on available Census Bureau information, was inputted into the calculator with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. After controlling for these needs, the recommended minimum sampling size was initially 385. Once the survey was distributed, the trends in response rates were considerably low and did not show any indication of increasing significantly overtime. As time passes after an initial Facebook post, the likelihood of the post showing on another users' Facebook decreases. This reduced the likelihood that the post would be seen and, in turn, reduced the amount of users that could respond to and share the post to others.

The researcher used G*Power to derive a more realistic sample size given the limited time available to obtain survey participation. The researcher inputted the information into G*Power for a multiple regression with seven predictors. The absolute minimum number of participants needed to run the data analyses was determined to be 150. The goal was set to obtain between 150-385 participants for the study. This sample size was determined to be more realistic for the study due to the method of distribution. Noting the minimum sample size allowed the researcher to reach the goal for this study prior to their Qualtrics account expiring.

The sampling method used to achieve these responses was a convenience sample. Qualtrics was used to administer the survey and collect the data from respondents. Using

Qualtrics allowed the researcher to distribute an anonymous link for respondents to complete the survey via the social media platform Facebook. The researcher relied on other Facebook users to “share” the link on their own page or within appropriate groups. This method of distribution allowed the researcher to reach a wider audience and have a better representation of Virginia in the sample. Qualtrics was programmed to filter out any participants who did not meet the minimum criteria listed above. The platform also allowed the researcher to download the results directly into SPSS to analyze the data.

Participants taking the survey were provided with an informed consent form. The informed consent form outlined that the study was voluntary, and that all of the submissions were anonymous. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point. If the participants did not meet the minimum requirements of eligibility for the survey, they received a notice providing this information and were redirected out of the survey. After reviewing the informed consent and checking for eligibility, participants who agreed to the study and met the minimum requirements were put through to the survey for their full completion. Participants did not receive any form of compensation for their participation in this study.

Instrumentation

Qualtrics was used to send out the survey collect the data. The method of distribution was via a survey link that was provided on the social media platform Facebook. The researcher provided the survey link on their Facebook which was shared to their friends list and made public for others to access. The researcher requested that other Facebook users share the survey link on their Facebook for others to access in order to reach a wider audience that the researcher did not have access to on their own. Sharing the survey link on Facebook allowed the researcher

to reach a convenient sample, and for the survey link to be distributed across Virginia over various social connections.

The instruments of measure for this study consisted of a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix A), the Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders (ATSO) scale – Juvenile Stem version (Appendix B), and the Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (SJSOR) scale (Appendix C). The ATSO scale is a validated (Whitehead, 2009), widely known, and regularly cited scale that has been used to assess attitudes towards sex offenders. A lower score on the ATSO scale indicated positive attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders, while a higher score indicated negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders.

The SJSOR scale is a new scale developed by the researcher for the purpose of measuring support for the juvenile sex offender registry. Using a 5-point-Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree allowed the researcher to score the survey responses for data analysis. Positively worded questions were implemented to provide a balance and were reversed-scored. A higher overall score indicated acceptance, or support, of juvenile sex offender registration and a lower overall score indicated rejection, or a lower level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. A demographic questionnaire preceded the ATSO scale and SJSOR scale questions to gather pertinent information. These demographic questions were used to gather more data to support the associated theories and hypotheses within the study, and to see if there were any differences in responses within the sample, which would be determined by comparing the mean scores within groups. The demographic questions also measured the independent variables that were used in the Multiple Regression analyses.

Proposed Research Design & Methodology

The research methodology was a quantitative study with a survey design. This survey design allowed the researcher to look at descriptions of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population by studying samples associated with that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using a survey design, the researcher was able to answer both descriptive questions and questions about the relationship between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey design was based on a targeted convenience sample of 385 participants with a goal of an 80% response rate. The absolute minimum number of participants needed for this study was determined to be 150.

To begin, permission was granted by the IRB prior to data collection. Before participants took the survey, the purpose of the study was disclosed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey was distributed electronically by Qualtrics. To maintain privacy and anonymity, the survey did not request the disclosure and any personally identifiable information. Participants that consented to the study were prompted to begin the survey. They had full control over their decision to complete the survey or not, as well as how long they took to answer the questions.

Data Analysis

All of the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Base GradPack 20 software package. Descriptive statistics were run to look at the mean, median, mode, and frequencies of the data collected. Data from the Demographics Questionnaire that gathered information on the independent variables were reported as percentages. This allowed the researcher to report percentages regarding demographics in the sample, as well as percentages of certain beliefs or attitudes held regarding juvenile sex offenders and registration requirements in Virginia. The researcher also compared means within groups to determine mean scores for the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and SJSOR scales dependent on participant self-

identification. For example, mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores for respondents that self-identified “Republican” and mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores for respondents that self-identified as “Democrat” were compared. Means were compared for all independent variables in relation to both ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and SJSOR scale scores. Comparing means was used to test the hypotheses that the researcher formed prior to data collection for this study.

To test the relationship between the variables, multiple regression analyses and Pearson’s R were used. Using multiple regression analyses allowed the researcher to see the influence that two or more variables had on a dependent variable. Pearson’s R was used to determine how strong the relationship was between two variables. The significance level for this analysis was listed at .05. This is the recommended level and suggests that the researcher is 95% confident that statistics used are in the set range that is in place for the sampled groups (George & Mallery, 2016). The researcher was able to determine whether there were any significant influences or correlations when looking at these analyses.

Pilot. The researcher first completed a pilot study on the SJSOR scale, which is intended to measure levels of support for the juvenile sex offender registry, since this is a new scale that was developed by the researcher for this specific study. The pilot study was completed to test the reliability of this newly developed scale. To test this, the researcher used the measure on a small convenience sample of 32 student participants. A reliability analysis was conducted on the SJSOR scale based on the data obtained from the 32 student participants in the pilot study. The value for Cronbach’s Alpha was $\alpha = .83$, which indicates good internal consistency. After determining that the SJSOR scale was reliable it was then used in the larger study.

The hypotheses for this study are listed below:

H1: Participants with lower ATSO scale scores will score higher on the SJSOR scale.

H2: Participants identifying as Republican will score lower on the ATSO scale.

H3: Participants with children will score lower on the ATSO scale.

H4: Participants with sexual victimization history will score lower on the ATSO scale.

H5: Participants identifying as Republican will score higher on the SJSOR scale.

H6: Participants with children will score higher on the SJSOR scale

H7: Participants with sexual victimization history will score higher on the SJSOR scale.

The independent variables in this study were attitudes towards sex offenders, age, gender, ethnicity, parenthood, political affiliation, educational attainment, marital status, sexual victimization history, sex offender status, and relationship to sex offender. Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders was interval and all other independent variables are nominal. These independent variables were measured since they may impact individual attitudes towards current policies and practices that are in place regarding juvenile sex offenders. For example, it was hypothesized that community members that were sexually victimized might show a higher level of support of current registration and restriction practices than community members that have no sexual victimization history. The main dependent variable in this study was support for the registry. The dependent variable was measured through a series of Likert-scale style questions on the newly developed SJSOR scale that was determined to be reliable in the pilot study that was completed prior to collecting data for the main study. The dependent variable in this study was interval since it was measured on a 5-point-Likert-scale. Attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders also served a function as a dependent variable for some analyses.

Summary

This chapter covered the specifics of using a quantitative study with a survey design for this research. The survey design allowed the researcher to look at descriptions of trends,

attitudes, and opinions of a population by studying samples associated with that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using a survey design, the researcher answered both descriptive questions and questions about the relationship between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey used for this research consisted of a Demographic Questionnaire, the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale, and the SJSOR scale. The SJSOR scale was determined to be reliable in a pilot study prior to completing the data collection and analysis for the main study. The researcher aimed to get between 150-385 respondents for the study. Discussion of the independent and dependent variables was provided, hypotheses for the study were noted, and the data analysis was outlined. The following chapter provides the findings from the data analyses that were completed.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and juvenile sex offender registration in Virginia. While previous studies have examined the juvenile sex offender population, at this time, no research has been conducted in this specific area related to juvenile sex offenders and registration. Data regarding participant demographics, attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders, and level of support for juvenile sex offender registration was collected by administering a survey. The researcher chose to distribute the survey by using the social media platform Facebook, which allowed the survey to be shared across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Participant demographics were gathered at the beginning of the survey using a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix A). Attitudes were measured by the 36-item Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders – Juvenile Stem Version scale (Appendix B). Level of support was measured using the 12-item Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration scale (Appendix C), which was newly developed by this researcher. All of the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Base GradPack 20 software package. The outcomes of the analyses that were conducted are provided below.

Participant Demographics

At the conclusion of the data collection period there were 198 participants that fully completed the survey for this study. The data gathered regarding demographics was compared to the information available from the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) that pertained to Virginia, when applicable. An overwhelming majority of participants for this study were White, totaling 83.3% of respondents. The Census Bureau statistics show that 60.6% of Virginians are White. In comparison, 18.6% of Virginians are Black, 10.5% are of Hispanic or Latino origin, 2.1% are

American Indian, 7.1% are Asian, 0.3% are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 9.1% are classified as “Other.” This study was comprised of 6.1% Black or African American participants, 5.1% Hispanic or Latino participants, 1.5% Native American or American Indian participants, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander participants, and 3% “Other.”

Looking at the age variable, 5.1% of respondents were 18-24 years old, 25.3% were 25-34 years old, 23.7% were 35-44 years old, 23.2% were 45-54 years old, 13.6% were 55-64 years old, and 9.1% were 65 years of age or older. The researcher could not locate data from Virginia that was broken down in a comparable fashion for reporting purposes. The closest comparable data found is noted in the next chapter. Virginia is comprised of approximately 50.8% female and 49.2% male residents. The researcher could not find any statistics for Virginia residents that fall outside of this distinct gender binary. The study was made up of 83.3% of participants that identified as female, 14.6% of participants that identified as male, and 2% of participants that identified as non-binary.

The Pew Research Center (2014) estimated that in Virginia approximately 43% of adults lean Republican, 39% lean Democrat, and 18% have no lean. Of the individuals who participated in this study, 33.3% were Democrat, 21.7% were Republican, 28.3% were Independent, and 16.7% were “Other.” There was a diverse distribution for educational level of respondents in this survey, with 27.3% having a High School diploma or GED, 11.6% having an Associate Degree, 29.3% having a Bachelor’s degree, 20.7% having a Master’s degree, 6.6% having a PhD or other terminal degree, and 4.5% having an unlisted level of education. Most respondents were married ($n = 59.6\%$), with 21.2% being single, 1.5% being widowed, 13.6% being divorced, and 4% being separated. A majority of respondents had children ($n = 69.7\%$), while 28.3% did not. Only 2% of respondents chose to not disclose their parenthood status. Comparable and specific data

for Virginia was not found for the categories of educational attainment, marital status, and parenthood.

The end of the Demographic Questionnaire asked participants to provide information regarding sexual victimization, sex offender status, and relation to sex offenders. Of the 198 participants, 30.3% reported a history of sexual victimization, 63.6% reported no history of sexual victimization, and 6.1% declined to report their history. A majority of respondents reported that they are not sex offenders ($n = 98\%$), with 1.5% reporting that they do have sex offender status, and 0.5% declining to reveal their status. Most respondents reported not having a family relation or close friend relation with a sex offender ($n = 85.9\%$) while 13.1% did have a family relation or close friend relation with a sex offender, and 1% declined to provide this information.

Reliability

Prior to conducting further analyses that use results from the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and the SJSOR scales, the researcher conducted a reliability analysis on each scale. During the initial pilot study ($N = 32$), the SJSOR scale value reported for Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .83$, which indicated good internal consistency. The reliability analysis was conducted again to ensure accuracy for the larger study ($N = 198$). The SJSOR scale value reported for Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .92$, which indicates excellent internal consistency. The researcher determined that the SJSOR scale was reliable.

The ATSO scale has been used in several studies and has consistently been determined to be reliable (Harper & Hogue, 2014). The Juvenile Stem Version of this scale hasn't been applied to other studies nearly as much as the original version has. Out of precaution and to ensure accuracy, the researcher conducted a reliability analysis on this scale as well. The ATSO-

Juvenile Stem Version scale value reported for Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .97$, which also indicated excellent internal consistency. The researcher determined this scale to be reliable. After determining that both scales were reliable, the researcher moved forward with analyzing the data.

Validity

Hogue (1993) established construct validity of the ATSO scale in his initial study. A later study examined the validity of the ATSO more in depth by looking at the various types of validity. Whitehead (2009) used a factor analysis to establish construct validity of this instrument. The same study also examined the correlation between the ATSO and the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version. There was a strong correlation between each of the measures that suggested participants hold similar attitudes towards juvenile and adult sex offenders. Both the original and juvenile-stem versions of the ATSO are considered to be valid.

The SJSOR is a newly developed scale designed to measure support for juvenile sex offender registration. The researcher determined that the SJSOR scale has face validity. As face validity is established through observation, (George & Mallery, 2016) the researcher determined that the questions on this scale do appear to measure support on a surface level. The researcher also compared the questions on the SJSOR scale to other studies that have measured levels of support for sex offender registration. Studies measuring support for registration have used questions pertaining to approaches of sex offender management, similar to the questions on the SJSOR scale used in this study (Call & Gordon, 2016; Kernsmith et. al, 2016). The correlation coefficients in the scale also support validity.

Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders-Juvenile Stem Version Scale

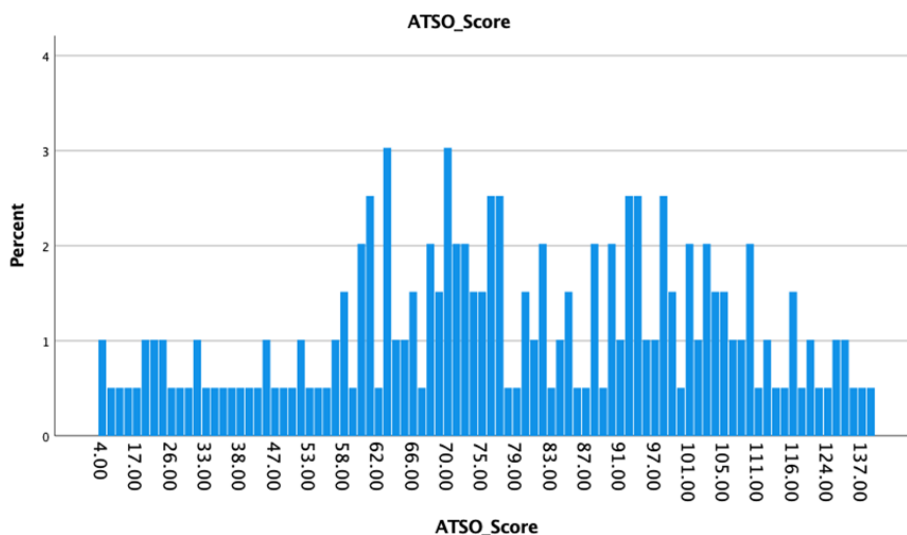
The ATSO scale was originally developed by Todd Hogue as a variation of an earlier Attitudes Towards Prisoners (ATP) scale. The new variation replaced references to prisoners with references to sexual offenders instead (Hogue, 1993). The ATSO is a 36-item scale that provides statements in which the participant can rate from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” for a total of five different rating options. The options are scored and reverse-scored with values ranging from 1-5, with an initial total possible score of 180. The ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version (Appendix B) provides a variation to the original ATSO by placing the word “juvenile” in front of “sex offenders” to effectively gauge attitudes specifically towards the juvenile sex offender population.

Hogue noted that, prior to data analysis, a constant of 36 should be removed to make the possible score range from 0-144. Higher scores indicate that the individual has more positive attitudes towards sex offenders, while lower scores indicate that the individual has more negative attitudes towards sex offenders. The researcher removed a constant of 36 from all ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores to reflect the desired 0-144 score range and to promote consistency amongst studies that use this measure. Several studies have not removed this constant, thus making some of the data incomparable.

The ATSO scores from this study ranged between 4-142. Table 1 shows the distribution of scores for the ATSO-Juvenile Stem version. The distribution is skewed left ($n = -.386$), with a mean score of 77.4 across all respondents. The distribution being left-skewed indicates that the mean is less than the median. Comparing the mean score to this distribution it appears that, while the scores slightly lean more towards being aligned with negative attitudes, it is not overwhelmingly negative. Though the distribution is skewed to the left, many respondents are

still falling close to the middle, or neutral, ground while several others have considerably high scores that indicate a more positive attitude towards juvenile sex offenders.

Table 1
ATSO Score Distribution



The data was broken down to compare the mean scores across different groups for each of the independent variables for this study. Table 2 shows the mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores across political affiliations as follows: Democrat ($n = 90.09$), Republican ($n = 65.76$), Independent ($n = 76.62$), and other ($n = 68.60$). Participants that self-identified as Republican had the lowest average score amongst the political affiliations that were examined in this study.

Table 2
Mean ATSO Score Based on Political Affiliation

Report

ATSO_Score			
Political_Affiliation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Democrat	90.0909	66	23.12822
Republican	65.7674	43	20.27294
Independent	76.6250	56	26.17672
Other	68.6061	33	36.34809
Total	77.4192	198	27.68846

Table 3 shows the mean ATSO scores for the parenthood variable as follows: Parent ($n = 77.47$), Non-Parent ($n = 78.71$), and no disclosure of parental status ($n = 57.50$). On average respondents with children scored lower than respondents without children. Though the means were close, participants with children had more negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders on average than participants without children.

Table 3
Mean ATSO Score Based on Parenthood

Report

ATSO_Score			
Parenthood	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes	77.4710	138	27.30209
No	78.7143	56	27.75327
Prefer not to say	57.5000	4	40.26992
Total	77.4192	198	27.68846

Table 4 shows the mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores as follows: Sexual victimization history ($n = 79.18$), no sexual victimization history ($n = 76.85$), and prefer not to say ($n = 74.50$). Participants who reported having a history of sexual victimization held more positive attitudes on average towards juvenile sex offenders when compared to participants without a sexual victimization history as well as those that did not disclose that information for this study.

Table 4

Mean ATSO Score Based on Sexual Victimization

Report

ATSO_Score			
Sexual_Victimization	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes	79.1833	60	31.30684
No	76.8571	126	25.82579
Prefer not to say	74.5000	12	29.39233
Total	77.4192	198	27.68846

Though no hypotheses were formed around the remaining independent variables, the mean scores within these categories were still computed to note in the results. For the variable of age, 45-54 years old had the most positive attitudes on average ($n = 81.39$) while 18-24 years old had the most negative attitudes on average ($n = 59.40$). The variable of gender showed the mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores as follows: Male ($n = 76.79$), female ($n = 77.84$), and non-binary ($n = 64.50$). For ethnicity, individuals identifying as Black or African American had the most positive attitudes on average ($n = 86.16$) while Native American or American Indian had the most negative attitudes on average ($n = 34.00$) towards juvenile sex offenders. Mean scores for level of educational attainment are as follows: High school or GED ($n = 68.94$), Associate degree ($n = 71.56$), Bachelor's degree ($n = 81.91$), Master's degree ($n = 83.41$), PhD or other terminal degree ($n = 87.61$) and other ($n = 72.22$). For marital status, the mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores for respondents who were single ($n = 78.14$) and married ($n = 78.40$) were very close, while the mean scores for the other categories indicated more negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders on average. The variable of sex offender status showed that the mean score for sex offenders ($n = 102.66$) was considerably higher than respondents who were not sex offenders ($n = 77.07$) and participants who chose to not disclose their status ($n = 69.00$). Respondents that had a family or close friend relation with a sex offender held the most negative

attitudes on average ($n = 76.34$) compared to those without a close relation to a sex offender ($n = 77.54$) and respondents who chose to not disclose that information ($n = 80.5$).

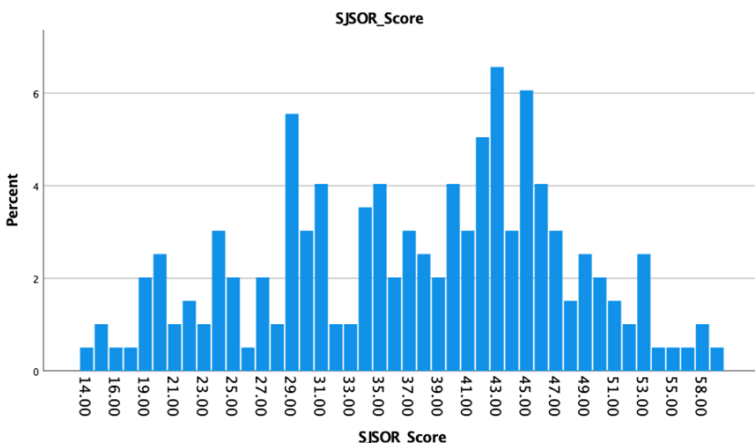
Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration Scale

The Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (SJSOR) scale (Appendix C) is a new scale that was developed by the researcher for this study. The SJSOR is a 12-item scale that measures the level of support that individuals have for juvenile sex offender registration. The 12 statements provided allowed the participant to rate them anywhere from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” for a total of five different rating options. The SJSOR was previously determined to be reliable through an earlier pilot study that was conducted by the researcher.

Positively worded and negatively worded statements were used for the SJSOR. The options were scored and reverse scored as appropriate with point values ranging from 1-5. Statements 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 were the negatively worded items that were reverse scored. Participants could have received a total possible score of 60 on the SJSOR scale. A higher score indicated a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration practices. A lower score indicated a lower level of support for juvenile sex offender registration practices.

Descriptive statistics were produced to see the overall data for SJSOR scores across all participants. The SJSOR scores for this study ranged between 14-59. Table 5 shows the distribution of scores for the SJSOR scale. The distribution is skewed left ($n = -.261$) with a mean score of 37.36 across all respondents. The distribution being left-skewed indicates that the mean is less than the median. While the distribution is skewed, there appeared to be a good variation of levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration.

Table 5
SJSOR Score Distribution



The data was broken down to compare the mean scores across different groups. Table 6 shows the mean SJSOR scores for political affiliation as follows: Democrat ($n = 32.69$), Republican ($n = 42.74$), Independent ($n = 36.62$), and other ($n = 40.96$). Republicans exhibited a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average, while Democrats exhibited a lower level of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average.

Table 6
Mean SJSOR Score Based on Political Affiliation

Report			
SJSOR_Score			
Political_Affiliation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Democrat	32.6970	66	9.59161
Republican	42.7442	43	8.05367
Independent	36.6250	56	9.29039
Other	40.9697	33	10.26671
Total	37.3687	198	10.06731

Parenthood was expected to have an impact on SJSOR scores. Table 7 shows the mean SJSOR scores for parents as follows: Parent ($n = 37.89$), non-parent ($n = 35.37$), and no disclosure of parental status ($n = 47.00$). While the average scores were close, respondents with

children showed a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average than respondents without children.

Table 7
Mean SJSOR Score Based on Parenthood

Report			
SJSOR_Score			
Parenthood	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes	37.8986	138	9.92107
No	35.3750	56	10.19369
Prefer not to say	47.0000	4	6.68331
Total	37.3687	198	10.06731

Sexual victimization was examined in relation to SJSOR scores as well. Table 8 shows the mean SJSOR scores as follows: Sexual victimization history ($n = 36.98$), no sexual victimization history ($n = 37.62$), and no disclosure of sexual victimization history ($n = 36.41$). Participants who reported having a history of sexual victimization exhibited a lower level of support towards juvenile sex offender registration on average when compared to participants without a sexual victimization history and those that did not disclose that information.

Table 8
Mean SJSOR Score Based on Sexual Victimization

Report			
SJSOR_Score			
Parenthood	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Yes	37.8986	138	9.92107
No	35.3750	56	10.19369
Prefer not to say	47.0000	4	6.68331
Total	37.3687	198	10.06731

While no hypotheses were formed around the other independent variables, the mean scores for the SJSOR scale within these categories were still computed to note in the results. For the variable of age, 25-34 years old exhibited the lowest levels of support on average ($n = 35.58$)

with 18-24 years old exhibiting the highest levels of support on average ($n = 41.90$). The variable of gender showed the mean SJSOR scores as follows: Male ($n = 37.31$), female ($n = 37.38$), and non-binary ($n = 37.00$). The average scores across gender were consistent regardless of which category the respondent identified as. For the variable of ethnicity, groups exhibiting the highest levels of support on average were Native American or American Indian ($n = 42.33$) and other ($n = 42.83$) with the groups exhibiting the lowest levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average being Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 36.00$) and white ($n = 36.79$). The mean SJSOR scores for level of educational attainment are as follows: High school or GED ($n = 40.18$), Associate degree ($n = 40.21$), Bachelor's degree ($n = 35.87$), Master's degree ($n = 35.78$), PhD or other terminal degree ($n = 32.76$) and other ($n = 36.66$). For marital status, respondents who were single showed the lowest level of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average ($n = 35.57$) while respondents who widowed showed the highest level of support on average ($n = 41.66$). On average, respondents who were sex offenders exhibited lower levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration ($n = 31.33$) compared to respondents who were not sex offenders ($n = 37.43$) and those who chose to not disclose their status ($n = 42.00$). Respondents that had a family or close friend relation with a sex offender had lower levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration on average ($n = 35.80$) compared to those without a close relation to a sex offender ($n = 37.54$) and respondents who chose to not disclose that information ($n = 42.50$).

Multiple Regression Results

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to answer the posed research questions for this study by determining if there were any predictive relationships within the data collected. The

first multiple regression looked at whether political affiliation, parenthood, and sexual victimization history could predict ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores. A 95% confidence interval was used for the analysis. Overall, the model was a good fit and the independent variables, as a group, were determined to be significant to predict ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores: $F(3, 194) = 4.254, p < .006., R^2 = .062$. The ANOVA is shown in table 9 below to reference the model being significant.

Table 9
ATSO Score Analysis of Variance

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9322.359	3	3107.453	4.254	.006 ^b
	Residual	141707.848	194	730.453		
	Total	151030.207	197			

a. Dependent Variable: ATSO_Score

b. Predictors: (Constant), Sexual_Victimization, Political_Affiliation, Parenthood

The independent variables were examined alone to determine their significance. Parenthood ($p = .975$) and sexual victimization ($p = .495$) were insignificant in predicting ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores. Political affiliation ($p < .001$) was determined to be the only significant predictor for ATSO scale scores. The Coefficients output is shown in table 10 below for reference.

Table 10
ATSO Score Coefficients

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	95.487	8.769		10.889	<.001	78.193	112.782			
	Political_Affiliation	-6.152	1.767	-.244	-3.481	<.001	-9.638	-2.666	-.244	-.242	-.242
	Parenthood	.118	3.808	.002	.031	.975	-7.392	7.628	-.031	.002	.002
	Sexual_Victimization	-2.378	3.479	-.048	-.684	.495	-9.239	4.483	-.047	-.049	-.048

a. Dependent Variable: ATSO_Score

The significance and strength of the correlations between each independent variable and ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores were also determined from the multiple regression. Parenthood had a small, negative correlation with ATSO scores ($r = -.031, p = .331$), however, this was insignificant and likely occurred due to chance. Sexual victimization also had a small, negative correlation ($r = -.047, p = .257$) that was insignificant and likely occurred due to chance. As a result, parenthood and sexual victimization being predictive factors for ATSO scores cannot be applied to the population. Political affiliation had a small, negative correlation ($r = -.244, p = .000$) with ATSO scores. This correlation is significant and can be applied to the population. Political affiliation can predict attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders, whereas parenthood and sexual victimization history cannot. The Correlations output is shown in table 11 below for reference.

Table 11
ATSO Score Correlations

		Correlations			
		ATSO_Score	Political_Affiliation	Parenthood	Sexual_Victimization
Pearson Correlation	ATSO_Score	1.000	-.244	-.031	-.047
	Political_Affiliation	-.244	1.000	.135	-.004
	Parenthood	-.031	.135	1.000	.009
	Sexual_Victimization	-.047	-.004	.009	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	ATSO_Score	.	<.001	.331	.257
	Political_Affiliation	.000	.	.029	.480
	Parenthood	.331	.029	.	.449
	Sexual_Victimization	.257	.480	.449	.
N	ATSO_Score	198	198	198	198
	Political_Affiliation	198	198	198	198
	Parenthood	198	198	198	198
	Sexual_Victimization	198	198	198	198

The second multiple regression looked at whether political affiliation, parenthood, sexual victimization history, and attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders could predict SJSOR scale scores. A 95% confidence interval was used for the analysis. Overall, the model was a good fit and the independent variables, as a group, were determined to be significant to predict SJSOR

scale scores: $F(4, 193) = 84.209, p < .001, R^2 = .628$. The ANOVA is shown in table 12 below to reference the model being significant.

Table 12
SJSOR Score Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12693.176	4	3173.294	84.209	<.001 ^b
	Residual	7272.910	193	37.683		
	Total	19966.086	197			

a. Dependent Variable: SJSOR_Score
b. Predictors: (Constant), ATSO_Score, Parenthood, Sexual_Victimization, Political_Affiliation

The independent variables were examined alone to determine their significance. Political affiliation ($p = .283$), parenthood ($p = .140$) and sexual victimization ($p = .563$) were insignificant in predicting SJSOR scale scores. ATSO score ($p < .001$) was determined to be the only significant predictor for SJSOR scale scores. The Coefficients output is shown in table 13 below for reference.

Table 13
SJSOR Score Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	60.942	2.528		24.105	<.001	55.956	65.928			
	Political_Affiliation	.445	.414	.049	1.076	.283	-.371	1.261	.231	.077	.047
	Parenthood	-1.282	.865	-.065	-1.482	.140	-2.987	.424	-.034	-.106	-.064
	Sexual_Victimization	-.458	.791	-.025	-.579	.563	-2.018	1.102	.011	-.042	-.025
	ATSO_Score	-.285	.016	-.785	-17.496	<.001	-.317	-.253	-.793	-.783	-.760

a. Dependent Variable: SJSOR_Score

The significance and strength of the correlations between each independent variable and SJSOR scale scores were also determined from the multiple regression. Parenthood had a small, negative correlation with SJSOR scores ($r = -.034, p = .316$), however, this was insignificant and likely occurred due to chance. Sexual victimization had a small, positive correlation ($r = .011, p = .441$) that was insignificant and likely occurred due to chance. As a result, parenthood and

sexual victimization being predictive factors for SJSOR scores cannot be applied to the population. Political affiliation had a small, positive correlation ($r = .231, p = .001$) with SJSOR scores. This correlation is significant and can be applied to the population. ATSO score had a large, negative correlation ($r = -.793, p = .000$) with SJSOR scores. The correlation between ATSO score and SJSOR score is the strongest amongst all the variables tested in both multiple regressions that were conducted. Political affiliation and ATSO score can predict level of support for juvenile sex offender registration, whereas parenthood and sexual victimization history cannot. The Correlations output is shown in table 14 below for reference.

Table 14
SJSOR Score Correlations

		Correlations				
		SJSOR_Score	Political_Affiliation	Parenthood	Sexual_Victimization	ATSO_Score
Pearson Correlation	SJSOR_Score	1.000	.231	-.034	.011	-.793
	Political_Affiliation	.231	1.000	.135	-.004	-.244
	Parenthood	-.034	.135	1.000	.009	-.031
	Sexual_Victimization	.011	-.004	.009	1.000	-.047
	ATSO_Score	-.793	-.244	-.031	-.047	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	SJSOR_Score	.	<.001	.316	.441	<.001
	Political_Affiliation	.001	.	.029	.480	.000
	Parenthood	.316	.029	.	.449	.331
	Sexual_Victimization	.441	.480	.449	.	.257
	ATSO_Score	.000	.000	.331	.257	.
N	SJSOR_Score	198	198	198	198	198
	Political_Affiliation	198	198	198	198	198
	Parenthood	198	198	198	198	198
	Sexual_Victimization	198	198	198	198	198
	ATSO_Score	198	198	198	198	198

Summary

This chapter detailed the results of the analyses conducted on the data that was collected for this study. The researcher was able to address all of the hypotheses as well as answer all of the research questions that were posed. *RQ 1*: Attitude towards juvenile offenders do predict level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. *RQ 2*: Political affiliation does predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders. *RQ 3*: Parenthood does not predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders. *RQ 4*: Sexual victimization history does not predict attitude towards juvenile sex offenders. *RQ 5*: Political affiliation does predict level of support for juvenile sex

offender registration. *RQ 6*: Parenthood does not predict level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. *RQ 7*: Sexual victimization history does not predict level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. These research questions were answered by conducting multiple regression analyses to determine if a predictive relationship existed between the independent variables and the dependent variable(s). The research questions and hypotheses are discussed and expanded on in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Sexual offenders and sex offender registration has continuously been a controversial topic throughout this nation for many years. While a majority of sexual offenders are adults (Finkelhor et. al, 2009), juveniles still account for a portion of sexual offenses committed. Juveniles have been viewed as distinctively different from adults in areas such as judgment, cognitive capability, and ability to self-regulate which has prompted a rehabilitative approach for many different types of juvenile offenders, rather than a punitive one. The focus on rehabilitation over punitive measures has resulted in a separation between adults and juveniles in our justice system. Despite this, adult sex offender registration requirements and restrictions have been applied to many juvenile sexual offenders as well. This research study was conducted as an effort to gather information regarding community attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and juvenile sex offender registration in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a state that has implemented juvenile sex offender registration requirements. The goal was to produce information that can guide discussions on balancing the need for community safety with the ethical treatment of juvenile sexual offenders.

Data Interpretation

Demographic Questionnaire. Demographic information was gathered for this study and compared to data that was available for Virginia to provide a basis for how the sample related to the overall population. When looking at the variable of ethnicity, participants that self-identified as “white” made up most of the sample and were over-represented compared to the most recent ethnicity breakdown of Virginians. While the white population was over-represented in the study, the minority populations were under-represented in all relevant categories. The ethnicity of participants in the study was not reflective of the general population in Virginia.

While the researcher was unable to locate data that recorded the age breakdown in the exact same manner as this study, there was information from the Census Bureau that showed the age distribution in Virginia with different age ranges. The pattern of age distribution for this survey appeared to closely mirror the pattern of age distribution in Virginia. The age representation of this sample may be a good representation of the population in Virginia. It is important to note, however, that age might also have an impact of the likelihood of having a Facebook account. For example, individuals that are 65+ years old may be less likely to have a Facebook account, and therefore would be unable to have access to and participate in the study.

Assuming that the inclusion of statistics regarding residents that fall out of the gender binary would not overwhelmingly change the data reflecting the Virginia “male” population, then males were significantly under-represented in this sample. Making the same assumption for the Virginia “female” population, females were over-represented in this sample. Seeing that Virginia doesn’t report statistics for individuals outside of the gender binary it is likely that their statistics are based on sex, whereas the researcher for this study asked for self-reported gender identity instead to promote inclusivity and respect participant identities. The researcher determined that the gender identity representation in this study cannot be applied to the Virginia population.

Relevant statistics for the political affiliations of Virginians was a bit dated. It’s important to note that Virginia has increasingly become more of a “blue” state over the past several years and this data from 2014 may not accurately reflect the current political affiliation representation in Virginia. The political affiliation percentages in this sample may more closely resemble the current political affiliations for the population in Virginia. At a minimum, the sample provided a

good representation of the political affiliation options that were available. It could be concluded that this sample is representative of the population regarding political affiliation.

Comparable and specific data for Virginia was not found for the categories of educational attainment, marital status, and parenthood. There is no significant interpretation for this demographic information. For the remaining questions, the researcher determined that it was unnecessary to see if any comparable data was available in Virginia pertaining to sexual victimization and sex offender designation. While it is possible that this information is available, it is unlikely to reflect the true extent of both sexual offending and sexual victimization as these crimes are underreported (NSVRC, 2015). Comparable data for sex offender relation is not available.

ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale. While the distribution of ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores is skewed to the left, the data may still be promising. A study conducted by Whitehead (2009) assessing counselor in training attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders produced an overall mean score of 86.1 on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale. The overall mean score for this study was lower ($n = 77.4$). This might signify that attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders have become more positive over time. No other studies could be located that used the Juvenile Stem Version and reported the overall mean score. There's a need for more research that uses the Juvenile Stem Version to determine if attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders are changing.

It is also difficult to make a comparison between attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders versus attitudes towards sex offenders. There are several variations of the ATSO available where the questions have been altered to fit a specific population, or a new but closely related scale had been developed. In addition, many studies either do not report the overall mean scores due to a

differing data analysis plan, or they fail to remove the constant as suggested by Hogue (1993), which makes the data incomparable. Another factor to consider is that many researchers opt to use the revised 21-item short form of the ATSO.

The mean scores were compared within groups to address the hypotheses that were formed prior to data collection. The researcher hypothesized that participants identifying as Republicans would score lower on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale, displaying a more negative view of juvenile sex offenders when compared to Democrats and Independents. This hypothesis was based off the notion that political figures aligning with the Republican party commonly support more “get tough” strategies and legislation, which may be interpreted as reflecting a more negative attitude and perceptions towards offenders overall. This may be amplified with various types of sexual offenders considering that sex crimes elicit high levels of fear and moral outrage from the public (King, 2019). This hypothesis was supported as the compared means showed Republicans scoring the lowest ($n = 65.76$) on average across the political affiliations on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale.

It was hypothesized that respondents with children would score lower on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version than respondents without children. This hypothesis was formed after carefully considering the history of sex offender legislation in the U.S. Much of the sex offender legislation that was initially produced and is still in existence today came after brutal sexual violence where strangers victimized children, an uncommon practice of sexual offenders. The crimes involving Megan Kanka and Adam Walsh sparked fear across the nation, prompting the public to have an increased interest in keeping their children safe. While the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version measured attitudes specifically towards juvenile sex offenders, the researcher still anticipated that parents would hold more negative attitudes towards this population than those

without children. This hypothesis was supported as parents scored lower ($n = 77.47$) on average on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale than non-parents ($n = 78.71$). Though the hypothesis is supported, it is interesting to see how close the mean scores were between these two groups.

While sexual victimization is underreported, and it is possible that this variable was not accurately represented amongst respondents, it was an important component to examine. The researcher hypothesized that participants with a sexual victimization history would score lower on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version when compared with participants without a sexual victimization history. The researcher anticipated that those with a sexual victimization history would have a more negative attitude towards juvenile sex offenders due to their previous experiences, regardless of the age of the offender. This hypothesis was refuted after examining the mean scores on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version for respondents with a sexual victimization history ($n = 79.18$), and respondents without a sexual victimization history ($n = 76.85$). The researcher was not expecting this outcome, however one study examined victim attitudes towards sexual offenders and found that victims had a more positive attitude towards sex offenders overall (Spoo et. al, 2017).

While no other predictions were made for the remaining variables, there were two other noteworthy observations when comparing means. 1) The variable of education indicated that, on average, the higher level of education an individual has the more positive attitude they will exhibit towards juvenile sex offenders. In other words, as educational level increased, there was also an increase in the mean score for the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version. 2) It can be reasonably expected that the results would reflect individuals of sex offender status having more positive attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. The mean ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version score ($n = 102.66$) was considerably higher than respondents who were not sex offenders ($n = 77.07$) and

respondents who chose to not disclose their status ($n = 69.00$). This accounted for the biggest difference in mean scores between groups. As the number of sex offender participants in this study was low, it would be interesting to see the mean scores when more sex offenders are in the sample.

SJSOR scale. Though the data is skewed, there appears to be numerous participants who align with a lower level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. With that being said, the distribution clearly shows that there are also numerous participants who align with a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. It was important for the researcher to examine this further to get a clearer indication of which individuals were more likely to fall within the area of lower support, versus which individuals were more likely to fall within the area of higher support based on mean scores for each subcategory.

The researcher hypothesized that participants identifying as Republicans would score higher on the SJSOR scale, indicating a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration when compared to Democrats and Independents. The researcher formed this hypothesis using the same rationale that was applied to the hypothesis for political affiliation and ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores. This hypothesis was supported seeing that Republicans had the highest mean SJSOR score within this category ($n = 42.74$). The higher average SJSOR score indicating support for registration, aligns with the lower average ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version score indicating a more negative attitude towards juvenile sex offenders.

As the sexual offender registry was initially developed after shocking cases that involved children falling victim to violent sexual crimes, the element of parenthood was important to examine. The researcher hypothesized that participants with children would have a higher level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. This hypothesis was formed using the same

rationale as noted above for the hypothesis regarding parenthood and ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores. Parents scored higher ($n = 37.89$) on average on the SJSOR than non-parents ($n = 35.37$). While the values were close together, similar to what was reported for ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version means, this hypothesis was supported.

It was hypothesized that participants with a sexual victimization history would score higher on the SJSOR scale when compared with participants without a sexual victimization history. This hypothesis was formed based on the same rationale that was noted above regarding sexual victimization and ATSO scores. The researcher also formed this hypothesis based on the sense of security that the sex offender registry gives to the public, even if that sense of security is false. The rationale was that individuals with sexual victimization history would be in support of deterrent and punitive measures put in place for sex offenders, regardless of their efficacy. Respondents with a sexual victimization history actually scored lower ($n = 36.98$) on average compared to those with no reported sexual victimization history ($n = 37.62$). This hypothesis was refuted.

Like the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version score means, level of educational attainment seemed to show a trend. As level of education increased the level of support for juvenile sex offender registration decreased, on average. While this is pure speculation, it may be possible that higher levels of education are related to increased awareness of the differences between juveniles and adults as well as the efficacy, or lack thereof, of the sex offender registry. Similar to the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version as well, respondents who were sex offenders exhibited lower levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration ($n = 31.33$). In fact, sex offenders had the lowest mean score on the SJSOR across all groups. There were a lot of similarities in the

data and trends between the mean scores on the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and the SJSOR scales.

Multiple Regression analyses. The Multiple Regression analyses were conducted to answer the research questions for this study. The first Multiple Regression looked at the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores as the dependent variable, with political affiliation, parenthood, and sexual victimization being the independent, or predictor, variables. Parenthood and Sexual victimization were both insignificant and could not be determined to be predictors for ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores. Political affiliation ($p < .001$) was determined to be the only significant predictor for ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores.

The following research questions were answered in this analysis: *RQ 3* – No, parenthood was insignificant and is not a predictor of attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. *RQ 4* – No, sexual victimization history was insignificant and is not a predictor of attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. *RQ 2* – Yes, political affiliation is significant and is a predictor of attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders. Political affiliation had a small, negative correlation ($r = -.244$, $p = .000$) with ATSO scores. This correlation is significant and can be applied to the population. A negative correlation coefficient means as one variable increases, the other variable decreases. It is not possible to see an “increase” in political affiliation. The negative correlation is due to the way political affiliation is coded, which attributes to the idea of an “increase” (Democrat = 1, Republican = 2, Independent = 3, Other = 4).

The subsequent Multiple Regression looked at the SJSOR scale scores as the dependent variables, with political affiliation, parenthood, sexual victimization, and ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores as the independent, or predictor, variables. Political affiliation, parenthood, and sexual victimization were insignificant in predicting SJSOR scale scores by themselves.

ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale score ($p < .001$) was determined to be the only significant predictor for SJSOR scale scores.

The following research questions were answered in this analysis: *RQ 5* – No, political affiliation was insignificant and is not a predictor of level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. *RQ 6* – No, parenthood was insignificant and is not a predictor of level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. *RQ 7* – No, sexual victimization history was insignificant and is not a predictor of level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. *RQ 1* – Yes, attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders were significant and is a predictor of level of support for juvenile sex offender registration. ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores had a large, negative correlation ($r = -.793, p = .000$) with SJSOR scale scores. The negative correlation coefficient means as one variable increases, the other variable decreases. In this case, as ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale scores increase, SJSOR scale scores decrease. This indicates that individual who have more positive attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders are likely to have lower levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration. Conversely, individuals who have negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders are likely to have higher levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration. The correlation between ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scores and SJSOR scores is the strongest amongst all the variables tested in both Multiple Regressions that were conducted.

Theoretical Perspective

There are two theoretical perspectives that can be applied to help rationalize why there continues to be negative attitudes towards sex offenders, as well as support for sex offender registration. The results of these studies have a big implication for the juvenile sex offender community. Juvenile sex offender registration does not align with our typical, rehabilitation-

oriented Juvenile Justice System. Juveniles are significantly different from adults in areas such as decision making, self-regulation, susceptibility to social pressures, cognitive capability, and behavior regulation (Tolan et. al, 2012). It is also known that juveniles are more prone to desistance and have lower recidivism rates compared to adults (Lussier et. al, 2015). The collateral consequences that juveniles face due to registration and restrictions are extensive and have shown to be damaging to significant life domains such as schooling, mental health, and social interactions (Harris et. al, 2016). Letourneau et. al (2018) conducted a study on the effectiveness of juvenile sex offender registration on deterrence and data was gathered from Virginia along with five other states. They concluded that the registry was ineffective for general deterrence of juvenile sex offenders and produced no public safety benefit. They recommended that juvenile registration policies and practices be eliminated. Though this information has been available to the public, juvenile sex offender registration and restrictions remain in place. Moral Panic Theory and Social Reaction Theory provide some rationale for why our nation continues to see these practices in place for juvenile sex offenders.

Moral Panic Theory. Moral Panic Theory, coined by Stanley Cohen, posits that the media plays a significant role in determining something to be a threat to society. This creates fear throughout the nation, often making the problem feel bigger than its actual scope, and promotes irrationality amongst community members (Cohen, 1972). A string of unusual, violent sex crimes against children were reported heavily by the media, sparking a moral panic about sexual offenders being dangerous and violent predators that are likely to attack children and strangers. While this does happen, it is unusual for sex offenders to victimize strangers (Craun & Theriot, 2008; DiBennardo, 2018). Despite this, “stranger danger” became the focus and the public viewed sex offenders as one of the most feared and heinous groups in society. In response to the

moral panic, and as an attempt to appease the public desire for safety, a series of harsh sex offender legislation was pushed through that led to the creation of what is now our current sex offender registration and community notification system.

As sex crimes continue to occur, it is difficult for this moral panic to fully subside. The public, overall, still holds misperceptions about sex offenders which continue to be fueled by the media through their construction and symbolism of crime and criminals (DiBennardo, 2018). In addition, the sex offender registry and community notification system create a sense of security for the public, even though that sense of security is false. Though it has been established that juvenile sex offenders greatly differ from adults, they are still subjected to the requirements and restrictions that have resulted from these moral panics. Continued negative and misleading media representation of sexual offenders and continued social reinforcement of these negative connotations play a role in shaping public attitudes and perceptions towards this group. The continuation of sex offender registration practices in general may also play a role in reinforcing negative attitudes, perceptions, and fear of adult and juvenile sexual offenders. Until there is a significant shift in media representation and how society defines sexual offenders, it is likely that both adult and juvenile sex offenders will continue to be stigmatized, and sex offender registration and restrictions will continue to be supported.

Social Reaction Theory. Social Reaction Theory, also known as Labeling Theory, can be applied to explain why there are still negative attitudes towards the sex offender population and support for sex offender registration, despite knowing that registration is ineffective, particularly for the juvenile sex offender population. The way society or individuals react to a particular behavior provides the basis for defining an act to be deviant or criminal, and to what degree. Negative reactions to sex crimes and the behaviors of sexual offenders results in

stigmatization, which pushes the sex offender population away from conventional society and causes them to be viewed as outsiders (Schultz, 2014). The negative social reactions towards this group overall are further enhanced by the symbolic labels that are in place, such as the sex offender registry.

The severe negative reactions that society has towards sex offenders can largely be attributed to the series of moral panics over the last several decades surrounding sex crimes and “Sexually Violent Predators (SVPs)” that were fueled by the media. Much of these negative reactions were based on myths and misperceptions of sexual offending (Quinn et. al, 2010). While many of the previous myths and misperceptions surrounding sexual offenders and offending have been debunked, these negative reactions and negative definitions still persist. The media reports crime as a form of entertainment, commonly focusing on extreme cases of sexual offending (DiBennardo, 2018) that are not a representation of what most sexual offending looks like. Public knowledge and intake of extreme cases combined with continued use and existence of the sex offender registry help reinforce the negative reactions and attitudes towards the sex offender population, including juvenile offenders. Moral Panic Theory and Social Reaction Theory help explain why there are still negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and support for juvenile sex offender registration.

Implications

Current legislation regarding the sex offender population was created in response to public fear and moral outrage towards sex crimes and victimization. Continued negative attitudes towards sexual offenders, particularly juveniles, may decrease the likelihood of reform around the sex offender registration practices and restrictions that are imposed. In Virginia specifically,

juveniles who are convicted in circuit court of a registerable offense and juveniles 13 years of age and older, with judge discretion, are placed on the sex offender registry (Va. Code § 9.1-902). Being labeled as a convicted sex offender and placed on the sex offender registry can pose several problems for juveniles regarding development, socialization, education, mental health, and overall stigmatization (Brost & Jordan, 2017; Cochrane & Kennedy, 2010; Harris et. al, 2016; Letourneau et. al, 2018b).

The findings from this study indicate that Virginians still hold fairly negative attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and show support of juvenile sex offender registration. The distributions from the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version scale and SJSOR scale scores show that the samples are skewed towards the left, noting that the mean scores fell below the median. Each of the mean scores for the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and the SJSOR for the overall sample, ($n = 77.4$, $n = 37.36$), respectively, were greater than both what may be concluded as being positive or neutral for attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders, and neutral or lower levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration. The continuation of juvenile sex offender registration and restrictions will produce harmful effects for juvenile sex offenders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

By continuing these practices, negative labels regarding juvenile sex offenders will continue to be reinforced in Virginia. Juvenile sex offenders placed on the sex offender registry are subject to stigmatization and numerous collateral consequences as a result. These policies have shown to have little to no effect on improving public safety or deterrence. They do have an effect, however, on the relationships, mental health, safety, and likelihood of victimization for registered youth (Letourneau et. al, 2018b). Seeing that there is little to no benefit to public safety, and that juvenile sex offenders are highly amenable to treatment and are likely to desist in

offending before adulthood (Janssen & DeMatteo, 2020), these collateral consequences are not justified. Though data indicates support of registration practices for sex offenders across the board, the examination of juvenile sex offender registration practices in Virginia is warranted.

Limitations

A threat to external validity was selection bias. Selection bias occurs when there is a lack of randomization, thus the sample is not representative of the population(s) that are being examined. The research design minimized this threat by using an anonymous link that was distributed across the Commonwealth of Virginia through various social connections.

Instrumentation can be a threat to internal validity if the instruments being used can result in bias. For this study, the SJSOR was only determined to have face validity. More exploration on the validity of this measure is needed. Both the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version and the SJSOR are reliable. In addition, the researcher removed the constant and scored the ATSO-Juvenile Stem Version as recommended. There was no bias in the instrumentation to the knowledge of the researcher. Being aware of these potential threats allowed the researcher to ensure that these threats were minimized.

Another noteworthy limitation of the study was that data was only gathered on residents of Virginia. While this narrowed the focus to Virginia-specific issues, which can be highly beneficial, the data cannot be applied to populations outside of the Commonwealth. Finally, given the nature of this topic of this research, it proved to be difficult to get the initial goal number of participants. The research could have produced more meaningful results with a higher number of participants in the study. The main limitation to gaining a higher level of participation was time for the study. The researcher had to pause data collection after 11 days of distributing the survey link due to losing access to a Qualtrics account that was at the end of a trial and

expiring. A longer period of availability for data collection likely would have yielded higher participation in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research on this topic is needed. A significant amount of literature is available regarding the collateral consequences and harmful effects of juvenile sex offender registration and restrictions. There is a considerable gap in the research, though, for the specific area of public attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and support for juvenile sex offender registration. It may be beneficial to replicate this study in each state and compare the results. State-specific research was chosen for this study due to states having varying requirements for juvenile sex offender registration, if any requirements exist at all. With this being said, a large-scale study similar to this done on a national level may produce meaningful results.

This research in Virginia should be repeated with the goal of obtaining more participants and having a more meaningful representation of the population. Having the ability to generalize the results in future studies to the general population will provide a better source of information and sounder research. Continuing to understand attitudes towards juvenile sex offenders and levels of support for juvenile sex offender registration is beneficial for reform efforts. In order to see reform for juvenile sex offender registration in Virginia and other states, it is essential to understand how these changes might be received by the public.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age?

- a. 18-24 years old
- b. 25-34 years old
- c. 35-44 years old
- d. 45-54 years old
- e. 55-64 years old
- f. Over 65 years old

What is your gender identity?

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Non-binary
- d. Other

What is your ethnicity?

- a. White
- b. Hispanic or Latino
- c. Black or African American
- d. Native American or American Indian
- e. Asian / Pacific Islander
- f. Other

What is your highest level of education?

- a. Some high school, no diploma
- b. High school or GED
- c. Associate degree
- d. Bachelor's degree
- e. Master's degree
- f. PhD or other terminal degree
- g. Other

Which of the following best describes your political affiliation?

- a. Democrat
- b. Republican
- c. Independent
- d. Other

What's your marital status?

- a. Single, never married
- b. Married
- c. Widowed
- d. Divorced
- e. Separated

Do you have children?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

Do you have a history of sexual victimization?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

Have you ever been convicted of a sexual offense?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

Do you have a family member or close friend who has been convicted of a sexual offense?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

Appendix B

Attitudes Towards Sex Offenders (ATSO) – Juvenile Stem Version

You are asked to express your feelings about each of the following 36 statements by indicating the extent to which you agree with each item. To respond, circle the number to the right of each item that describes the extent to which you agree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers.

Rating Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Juvenile sex offenders are different from most people.
2. Only a few juvenile sex offenders are dangerous.
3. Juvenile sex offenders never change.
4. Most juvenile sex offenders are victims of circumstances and deserve to be helped.
5. Juvenile sex offenders have feelings like the rest of us.
6. It is not wise to trust a juvenile sex offender too far.
7. I think I would like a lot of juvenile sex offenders.
8. Bad prisons conditions just make a juvenile sex offender more bitter.
9. Give juvenile sex offender an inch and they'll take a mile.
10. Most juvenile sex offenders are stupid.
11. Juvenile sex offenders need affection and praise just like anybody else.
12. You should not expect too much from a juvenile sex offender.
13. Trying to rehabilitate juvenile sex offenders is a waste of time and money.
14. You never know when a juvenile sex offender is telling the truth.
15. Juvenile sex offenders are not better or worse than other people.
16. You have to be constantly on your guard with juvenile sex offenders.

17. In general, juvenile sex offenders think and act alike.
18. If you give juvenile sex offenders your respect, they give you the same.
19. Juvenile sex offenders only think about themselves.
20. There are some juvenile sex offenders I would trust with my life.
21. Juvenile sex offenders will listen to reason.
22. Most juvenile sex offenders are too lazy to earn an honest living.
23. I wouldn't mind living next door to a treated juvenile sex offender.
24. Juvenile sex offenders are just plain mean at heart.
25. Juvenile sex offenders are always trying to get something out of somebody.
26. The values of most juvenile sex offenders are about the same as the rest of us.
27. I would never want one of my children dating an ex-juvenile sex offender.
28. Most juvenile sex offenders have the capacity for love.
29. Juvenile sex offenders are immoral.
30. Juvenile sex offenders should be under strict, harsh discipline.
31. In general, juvenile sex offenders are basically bad people.
32. Most juvenile sex offenders can be rehabilitated.
33. Some juvenile sex offenders are pretty nice people.
34. I would like associating with some juvenile sex offenders.
35. Juvenile sex offenders respect only brute force.
36. If juvenile sex offenders do well in prison, they should be let out on parole.

Appendix C

Support for Juvenile Sex Offender Registration (SJSOR) Scale (Likert-Style questions, 5-point) Questions measuring support for juvenile sex offender registration:

You are asked to express your feelings about each of the following 12 statements by indicating the extent to which you agree with each item. To respond, circle the number to the right of each item that describes the extent to which you agree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers.

Rating Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Juvenile sex offenders should be required to adhere to the same registration requirements as adult sex offenders.
2. The juvenile sex offender registry is ineffective.
3. The Tier system for registration (Tier 1 = 15 years, Tier 2 = 25 years, Tier 3 = lifetime) is appropriate for juvenile sex offenders.
4. The collateral consequences of juvenile sex offender registration far outweigh the good.
5. Placing juvenile sex offenders on the registry will help deter juvenile sexual offending.
6. Juvenile sex offenders should not be placed on sex offender registries.
7. Juvenile sex offender registration is essential for reducing recidivism.
8. Juvenile sex offender registration is ineffective at achieving its intended goals.
9. Juvenile sex offender information should be available to the public just like adult sex offender information.
10. Requiring juvenile sex offenders to register is unethical.
11. The juvenile sex offender registry makes me feel safe.
12. I don't need to use the registry to know about juvenile sex offenders in my neighborhood.