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# The Effectiveness of Sex Offender Residency Restrictions in Alabama and Oklahoma: Are We Preventing Crime in the Heart of Dixie and the Sooner State?

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### Abstract

This study examined the legal impact of Megan's Law and residency restrictions in Alabama and Oklahoma. Both states incorporated a 2,000 foot buffer zone, where convicted sex offenders, once released, must live in accordance with this distance, away from areas where children tend to congregate. The legislation's intent is to remove the offender from the equation, making any suitable targets harder to access. Two simple interrupted times-series (ITS) designs were utilized to measure monthly arrest rates of rape and robbery for both states. Eight Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) models were developed to analyze the legal impact of residency restrictions. For each state, two ITS models examined the start of the data (January 1984) to the month prior of residency restriction enactment, using Megan's Law enforcement dates as interruption time points assessing monthly rape arrest rates. Two additional models for each state analyzed the start date of Megan's Law through December 2012 with the enactment dates for residency restriction legislation as the interruption points examining any change in monthly rape arrest rates. The same time frames were used to examine a nonequivalent dependent variable of robbery, selected as a means of control, where the nature of the crime is equivalent to rape as both are categorized as Part I index crimes—however, no impact should occur as the legislation was designed for decreasing sex crimes. The visual and statistical inspection of the models indicated no significant impact for either state when residency restrictions were enforced. The monthly arrest rates for rape in both states displayed a slight decrease when the legislation was first enforced; however, this was a temporary change as arrest rates eventually continued to increase. In the examination of the nonequivalent dependent variable, two models displayed a decrease in the amount of robberies directly after legislation was enacted, but these decreases were statistically insignificant. The two additional models displayed an increase in monthly robbery arrest rates, yet these increases also were statistically insignificant. Plausible reasons for this policy impact along with recommendations of alternative ways to treat sex offenders are offered.

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Mothers of sex offenders worry constantly about their future. Their support is also key to increasing chances that they won't reoffend. "We are very sensitive to the burdens that these kinds of restrictions place on offenders and their families. However, sex offender registry requirements are not imposed because of who somebody is, but because of what they've done," said Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which pushed for the Adam Walsh Act. "Congress and virtually every state have taken very careful steps to ensure that all sex offenders are not treated alike," he said.