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A Qualitative Case Study of Police Officers' Perception of Sexual Offender Registration

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Walden University

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Tracy Veri

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2016

Abstract

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by

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MS, Shippensburg University, 2008

BS, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

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Abstract

Although many research studies about sexual offender registration exist, there is no qualitative study on the perspective of police officers whose job duties include the implementation of Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) laws. The purpose of this case study was to explore specific police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration. Six police officers were hand selected for face-to-face interviews based on their unique job duties that included responsibilities and training related to the implementation of the sexual offender registration and community notification protocols. Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study. According to study findings, the majority of the police officers in this study supported sexual offender registration despite the lack of research that supports its effectiveness. Data gathered from conducting face-to-face interviews with the identified police officers revealed that 5 out of 6 police officers believed that SORN policies had a positive impact on enhancing community safety, and half of the police officers felt that SORN policies reduced recidivism. All of the police officers in the study called for more formal training and education about SORN. Also, these police officers identified money and human power as barriers to proactive efforts or effective management of the sexual offenders who lived in their jurisdiction. Finally, the police officers in this study suggested the use of specialized officers or the creation of a task force as a method to better address the sexual offenders in the community. Exploring these options could have far-reaching implications for positive social change for the law enforcement community and society as a whole.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and my very best friend. A special feeling of love and appreciation goes out to my loving parents, Lee and Marsha Porter, whose words of encouragement and unfaltering support kept me strong throughout this journey. I am forever thankful to my husband, Brian, and my children, Dylan, Nicholas, and Madison, who have sacrificed and whole-heartedly supported me throughout the entire doctorate program. I also dedicate my work to my sweet niece, Morgan, whose ambition and curiosity to learn is inspiring. I give special thanks to my best friend, Chastity Bucher. You have always believed in me and encouraged me to follow my dreams. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents Nick and Genevieve Trempus. I have no doubt that both of you are always with me clearing my path to success and happiness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The effectiveness of sexual offender registration is a controversial subject. Some assert the mere existence of the sexual offender registration system offers a sense of security and protection to many communities (Ackerman, Sacks, & Osier, 2013; Bratina, 2013). Community support of sexual offender registration correlates directly to a fear of sexual offenders; however, this support is not a born from empirical evidence (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith, Craun, & Foster, 2009). Overall, sexual offender registration has not been proven to be effective in enhancing community safety (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009).

This study focuses on how police officers perceive sexual offender registration. There is a need to ascertain police officers' perspectives of sexual offender registration (Powell, Day, Benson, Vess, & Graffam, 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Police duties associated with sex offender registration are time consuming and expensive (Powell et al., 2014; Vess, Day, Powell, & Graffam, 2013). Because this system has not been proven effective in reducing recidivism or in improving community safety, police officers may have some insight into this topic (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). By conducting this study, I was able to obtain information about sexual offender registration directly from police officers who had duties that included sex offender registration investigations and community notifications. This study was conducted in order to explore the potential impact that the sexual offender registration system has on law enforcement and the community. This

study can provide beneficial information to the community and law enforcement officials. Investigating this issue from the perspective of the police officer is essential to develop more effective and efficient policing practices and prevention strategies for the community in relation to sexual offender registration and the offenders themselves.

In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the study. In the background portion, I will explore the research literature and the gap in knowledge related to the study. In the problem statement, I will outline the research problem in question and the gap that exists in the current research. Next, I will provide the purpose of the study, the research question, and the theoretical framework that provides the foundation for the study. In the remaining portions of this chapter, I will outline definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of the study. Finally, a summary will provide an overview of the information in this chapter.

Background

People have different perceptions of sexual offender registration (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009). However, there is an absence of police officers' perceptions who implement sex offender registration and notification (SORN) practices (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). These police officers make up a significant group of people whose perceptions could be valuable to research (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). This group of people could provide intimate, in-depth knowledge about sexual offender registration effectiveness and community safety issues that can only be provided by police officers (Kernsmith et al., 2009). Many of the studies that currently exist include some law enforcement views

(Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). However, these views were gathered quantitatively and did not include the police officers directly involved with SORN practices (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Therefore, there was a gap in knowledge in reference to the perspectives of police officers whose daily job duties include implementing the tasks mandated by the legislation that created the sexual offender registration system and protocol (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). These police officers can provide knowledge that could impact the communities they serve by forging the way to create positive social change (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury, Mustaine, & Payne, 2011). Therefore, this study was conducted in order to explore the potential impact that the sexual offender registration system has on law enforcement and the community. Furthermore, this study can provide information that is beneficial to the community and law enforcement officials.

Problem Statement

It was estimated that 700,000 registered sexual offenders live throughout the United States (Logan, 2011). According to Pennsylvania Megan's Law (PSP, 2015), there were 223 registered sexual offenders in Butler County, Pennsylvania. Of those sexual offenders, there were 20 sexually violent predators, 52 Tier 1 offenders, 29 Tier 2 offenders, and 122 Tier 3 offenders (PSP, 2008). Of those 223 registered sexual offenders, one was listed as transient, one individual was an absconder, and three were considered noncompliant (PSP, 2015). The most time consuming sexual offenders for police officers include the sexually violent predators and Tier 3 offenders (PSP, 2008). These two categories of registered sexual offenders are required to update their

registration information, minimally, on a quarterly basis (PSP, 2008). That means that 142 individuals routinely impact the law enforcement resources relative to SORN. Additionally, the transient offender must update his demographic information on a monthly basis (PSP, 2008). Maintaining an accurate account of all registered sexual offenders can be an arduous task for police officers. Butler County, Pennsylvania has limited amounts of full-time police officers, and there are a small number of officers who handle SORN. Because police duties associated with sex offender registration are time consuming and expensive, small numbers of police officers may have a difficult time properly maintaining sexual offender registration (Powell et al., 2014; Vess et al., 2013).

Sexual offenders determined to be sexually violent predators by the court are most likely to reoffend (Boccaccini, Rufino, Jackson, & Murrie, 2013; Chevalier, Boccaccini, Murrie, & Varela, 2015; Neller, & Petris, 2013; Tewksbury, Jennings, & Zgoba, 2012). Typically, those designated as a sexually violent predator have an “underlying mental illness or abnormality” (Chevalier et al., 2015, p. 210). These abnormalities and illnesses call for increased treatment, monitoring, and supervision (Boccaccini et al., 2013; Chevalier et al., 2015). When these sex offenders serve their sentences and complete their probation, the only method of accountability remaining comes from mandated counseling, efforts the police can put forth towards spot checks, and managing registration requirements (Boccaccini et al., 2013; PSP, 2008). Boccaccini et al. (2013) explained that “early identification of offenders who are at an increased risk for treatment noncompliance may help treatment providers direct more resources to those most at risk for program failure and subsequent reoffending” (p. 1390). Police officers’ insight could

lead to more effective policing and supervision strategies that could aid in reducing the likelihood of recidivism among sexually violent predators.

This study can provide insight into the involvement of the police from their perspective. This information could aid in the development and adoption of more effective strategies relative to SORN practices. There has been a call for more studies about sex offender registration from the vantage point of police officers (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). No researcher has qualitatively examined sexual offender registration from the perspective of police officers who implement SORN. This study could add insight on why sexual offender registration is thought of as a panacea when this system does not enhance public safety and does not reduce recidivism (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Additionally, this study may provide prevention or improvement strategies for sex offenders for law enforcement (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration using a case study design. The case study design for this research study included identifying a small group of police officers to study their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes about sexual offender registration (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). Six police officers were hand selected for face-to-face interviews based on their unique job duties that included responsibilities and training related to the implementation of the sexual offender registration and community notification protocols.

(Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). Specifically, I selected police officers who had some responsibility with investigating sexual offenders, as well as implementing sexual offender registration and community notification protocols. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to gather in-depth, comprehensive information from the participants (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). This study met the criteria for a collective case study because I sought to gain a deeper understanding of sexual offender registration from the vantage point of more than one police officer (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do certified police officers who investigate sexual offenders perceive the effectiveness of SORN policies?

RQ2: How do certified police officers describe the barriers to effective management of recidivism of sex offenders and/or sexually violent predators under SORN policies?

Theoretical Framework

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. According to the cognitive dissonance theory, individuals encounter cognitive dissonance when two "psychologically conflicting cognitions" battle (Matthey & Regner, 2011, p. 115). Cognitive dissonance takes place when an individual's inner views contradict with another behavior or idea causing confusion within that person (Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). People will circumvent any conflicting action between the conduct they are comfortable with and the conduct that they ultimately commit to taking (Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). Otherwise, an individual may find

himself or herself in a position to act or to behave in some way that goes against his or her core thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors. This deviation between beliefs and actions will lead to an unsettling state, causing cognitive dissonance (Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). Matthey and Regner (2011) revealed that people will hold onto their beliefs despite any new information that contradicts these beliefs. Upon receiving information that challenges their attitudes and belief systems, people will continue to choose to adhere to their attitudes instead of changing their beliefs (Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). This theory was used to examine police officers' perceptions about sexual offender registration. Despite the evidence that sexual offender registration has not been empirically proven to be effective, most police officers will support SORN (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Additionally, these police officers have to follow the costly and time consuming protocols set forth by the legislation regardless of the available research outlining the ineffective nature of the registration system (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Chapter 2 will provide a more extensive description of the theoretical framework, as it relates to the study.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I interviewed police officers who were purposefully selected based on their job duties. A qualitative case study approach was used because the goal of the study was to investigate this subject matter from a specific vantage point for the purpose of gaining intimate knowledge (Yin, 2013).

Definitions

In the following section, I provide definitions for applicable terms related to the study.

Law enforcement: General term used to describe policing and policing practices.

Police officer: Certified law enforcement official actively working for a police department whose job duties include sex offender registration investigations and notifications.

Registered sex offender: A registered sex offender is an individual with a conviction of a sexual offense classified under one of the three identified tiers that requires him or her to register his or her pertinent information on a structured basis (PSP, 2008).

Sexually violent predator (SVP): A sexually violent predator is an individual with a conviction of a sexual offense classified under one of the three identified tiers who has been assessed and recommended to be sexually violent by the Sexual Offender Assessment Board and then subsequently declared a sexually violent predator by the court (PSP, 2008). These individuals are then required to remain in counseling and to register for life (PSP, 2008). These individuals have an increased likelihood of reoffending (Boccaccini et al., 2013; Chevalier et al., 2015; Neller & Petris, 2013).

Sexual offender notification: Sex offender notification is the process of police officers walking door-to-door in a community handing out flyers with demographic information relative to sexually violent predators (PSP, 2008). As per the Pennsylvania State Police (2008), the following individuals or agencies will receive information

relative to a sexually violent predator: neighbors; any direct victims of the SVP; the director or other designees of the local children and youth service agency of the county where the SVP lives; the superintendent of each school district (including all nonpublic school entities) in the area (within 1 mile) where the SVP lives; all certified daycare centers, preschools, and any in-home daycares within the area where the SVP lives; and all postsecondary education facilities within 1,000 feet of an SVP's home (PSP, 2008).

Assumptions

The main assumptions of the study included that all interview notes were transcribed and coded accurately (Yin, 2013). The next assumption was that all participants answered truthfully, and all interviews were administered in the same manner and with consistency (Yin, 2013). The final assumption was that potential researcher biases were identified, managed, minimized, or eliminated (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem addressed in this study included police officers' perceptions of sexual offender registration as it pertains to public support of this system despite its ineffectiveness and a lack of potential ideas and concepts to uncover possible prevention or improvement strategies for law enforcement (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). The study was delimited in terms of the study sample. Participation in this study was delimited to police officers who were tasked with duties associated with sexual offender registration investigations and community notifications throughout Butler County, Pennsylvania. The previously mentioned delimitation influenced the generalizability of results (Yin, 2013). Purposive

sampling compromised the ability to apply the findings of the study to other populations. Therefore, any results obtained from this study would only be generalizable to police officers with sex offender registration and notification duties who work in Butler County, Pennsylvania.

Limitations

There are several limitations to a qualitative study. First, the amount of time and frequency of the interviews could impact the results (Yin, 2013). Next, there may be restricted generalizability in that the results could be limited geographically (Yin, 2013). The same results may not be generated in a different demographic area. Next, the sample of participants was not representative of a variety of ethnic backgrounds due to purposive sampling (Yin, 2013). Specifically, participants were hand selected based on job duties, which affected my ability to have equal representation of gender, race, and ethnicity in the participant sample. Also, sampling size could be weak in that there is no set standard for qualitative studies (Yin, 2013). Overall, the results of the study were limited in interpretation and were not further reinforced by quantitative inquiry (Trafimow, 2014). Any researcher bias that could influence study outcomes was identified, managed, minimized, or eliminated through mindfulness and researcher accountability (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Significance

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain knowledge and understanding about police officers' perception of sexual offender registration. Interviews with police officers were beneficial to help understand if this group of people

supported sexual offender registration despite the lack of proven effectiveness towards enhancing public safety (Ackerman, Sacks, & Osier, 2013; Bratina, 2013; Moskowitz, 2013; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Sexual offender registration is time consuming and costly (Vess et al., 2013). The identified population of police officers articulated issues surrounding costs of implementation in comparison to actual or perceived benefits of sexual offender registration (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011).

Researchers have not conducted studies that include information from the population of police officers who directly implement SORN practices. Through interviews with police officers who have direct involvement with sexual offender registration procedures and protocols, new insight can be gained in relation to their perceptions of recidivism, safety, costs versus benefits, inconsistent practices and policies, deterrence, and suggestions about potential improvements (Ferrandino, 2012; Page, Hill, & Gilbert, 2012; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011).

This knowledge could help researchers to compare police officers' perceptions with the perceptions of criminal justice and other human research professionals (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Having the ability to obtain information from a direct source could offer a deeper understanding of sex offender registration (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Information from police officers who implement SORN could be beneficial to

researchers' understanding of the problem (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011).

Summary

The continued growth of the sexual offender population and ongoing concerns related to police officers' ability to effectively manage this population necessitates further inquiries to better understand the sex offender registration system and SORN policies (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; PSP, 2008; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Vess et al., 2013). There is a need to ascertain police officer perspectives of sexual offender registration (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Police duties associated with sex offender registration are time consuming and expensive, and this system has not been proven effective in reducing recidivism or improving community safety (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Prior researchers have overlooked police officers and the insight they have into sexual offender registration (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). This qualitative examination of police officers' perceptions of sexual offender registration added to the literature because I obtained the knowledge directly from those who are implementing the registration system among the sexual offenders in the community. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive look at the current literature and an overview of ideas pertinent to the problem, purpose, and theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Sexual offender registration is at the forefront of the news and is spurring controversy in both professional and community arenas (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Kleban & Jeglic, 2012; Kulpa, 2011; Maurelli & Ronan, 2013; Melcher, 2012). Many people have strong feelings and opinions related to sexual offenders (Melcher, 2012). Melcher (2012) asserted that these strong feelings and opinions have laid the foundation for legislative involvement and community support in relation to sexual offender registration. The intent of sexual offender registration is to add a layer of supervision and safety from convicted sexual offenders to the public (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Iacono, 2011; Kulpa, 2011; Maurelli & Ronan, 2013; Melcher, 2012). However, researchers have found no support that sexual offender registration leads to increased safety to the community (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Miller, 2014). Prior researchers have highlighted findings relative to perceptions of sexual offender registration. However, no scholar has qualitatively examined sexual offender registration from the vantage point of police officers who implement SORN. There has been a call for more studies that include information about sex offender registration from the vantage point of police officers (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013).

In this qualitative study, I explored police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration using a case study design. A small group of police officers participated in an interview for the purpose of gathering data about their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes on sexual offender registration. All police officers who participated in the study

were hand selected based on their job duties. Police officers who had daily responsibilities to investigate sexual offenders, as well as to implement sexual offender registration and community notification protocols, were chosen for participation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to allow for an in-depth, comprehensive examination of the topic.

In the following chapter, I provide a comprehensive overview of current research in relation to sexual offender registration. I also present the theoretical framework that provided the foundation for the study along with the history and current state of affairs relative to sexual offender registration. Finally, a summary will provide an overview of the information in this chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

Research was conducted using several sources of information. The Walden online library provided the vast majority of the resources used for this literature review. A multidisciplinary database (Academic Search Complete), Pro-Quest, and more specific resources such as Criminal Justice databases (Pro-Quest Criminal Justice and Sage Premier) was accessed to obtain articles. The following search terms were used to find peer-reviewed articles for this literature review: *sex offender registration, sexual offender registration, Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, SORN, police officer, law enforcement, Adam Walsh Act, Megan's Law, and cognitive dissonance*. I also reviewed the reference lists from these articles to locate additional resources.

Theoretical Framework

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. According to the cognitive dissonance theory, individuals encounter cognitive dissonance when two psychologically conflicting cognitions clash (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011, p.115; Salti et al., 2014). Otherwise, cognitive dissonance occurs when a person's inner views contradict with another behavior or idea causing confusion within that person (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). According to cognitive dissonance theory, most people will work around any conflicting action between the conduct they are comfortable with and the conduct they ultimately commit to taking (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011, p.115; Salti et al., 2014).

The underlying concepts of cognitive dissonance were tested and reinforced by Glock and Kneer (2009) with people who smoked cigarettes. In this study, regardless of being cautioned about the dangerous side effects attributed to cigarette smoking, most smokers chose to carry on this behavior (Glock & Kneer, 2009). The knowledge about health-related consequences of smoking did not change smokers' attitudes or behavior (Glock & Kneer, 2009). Smokers chose to alleviate dissonance by ignoring the health risks to maintain their behavior (Glock & Kneer, 2009). Glatz, Stattin, Kerr (2012) also applied the cognitive dissonance theory to a study dealing with parents whose child drank alcohol. In a longitudinal study of 494 teenagers, Glatz et al. revealed that parents whose children repeatedly became drunk lowered their expectations of teen drinking over time to reduce stress and conflict between the beliefs and attitudes about alcohol versus their

child's behavior. The parents found it easier to change their beliefs about their teens' drinking instead of changing their beliefs about their children's character (Glatz et al., 2012). Those parents who were empathetic to their children and chose to resolve the dissonance by subscribing to an alternative believe about their children drinking alcohol had less stress (Glatz et al., 2012). Other parents in this study did not budge on their opinions relative to drinking and experienced higher amounts of stress trying to redirect their children's behavior (Glatz et al., 2012).

The notions of cognitive dissonance relate to the current study. People who believe sexual offender registration improves community safety or reduces sexual recidivism may continue to embrace those thoughts and ideas, despite being informed that their beliefs are factually unfounded (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Information taken directly from legislative acts or research studies may not deter people from supporting sexual offender registration in its current form. According to Festinger, people tend to support sexual offender registration because they want to believe this system offers security and protection (as cited in Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). The purpose of this study was to see if this same theory applied to police officers' perceptions of sexual offender registration.

Literature Review

Prior to the Adam Walsh Act (AWA), each state had discretion on how to handle sexual offender registration (Iacono, 201; Zucker, 2014). The Sexual Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) associated with the AWA mandated that all

states create and maintain sex offender registries (Dearinger, 2011; Iacono, 2011). In theory, many believe that if the personal information of violent or repeat sexual offenders is made public, communities can access this information in order to develop safety nets (Ackerman et al., 2013; Miller, 2014). However, strangers do not commit the large majority of sexual assaults (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Miller, 2014). The perpetrators of most sexual assaults know or are close to their victim (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Miller, 2014). Furthermore, sex offenders have a low recidivism rate; therefore, many question the overall effectiveness and necessity of having a sexual offender registration system (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Miller, 2014).

Day, Carson, Boni, and Hobbs (2014) explored the sexual offender registration system's impact on reducing incidents of rape and found that rapes throughout six of the 10 states studied had no statistically significant decreases; three showed decreases, and one state experienced an increase in rape incidents (Day et al., 2014). Maurelli and Ronan (2013) shared similar research experiences relative to rapes before and after sexual offender registration laws. Using secondary research from all 50 states, Maurelli and Ronan found that over half (32 states) had no noticeable change in the number of rapes after sexual offender registration was enacted. However, sexual offender registration could be a deterrent based on the type of offender, victim awareness scenarios, or policing methods (Day et al., 2014; Maurelli & Ronan, 2013). Additional research exists about perceptions of sexual offender registration on behalf of sexual assault victims, the general public, legislators, sexual offenders, family members of sexual offenders, and parole board members (Craun & Simmons, 2012; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Murphy &

Fedoroff, 2013; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2012; Tewksbury et al., 2011). However, the majorities of these studies are older than 5 years and are outdated or irrelevant.

SORN is required by the federal government through two of the more recognized legislative acts known as Megan's Law and the AWA (Ackerman et al., 2011). Megan's Law was enacted in the United States in 1996 as a result of tragedies that included the sexual assaults and killing of children like Jacob Wetterling and Megan Kanka (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Day et al., 2014; Leonard, 2014). Legislation mandating SORN have evolved and changed due to additional tragedies and different court actions (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Day et al., 2014). The AWA was enacted at the federal level in 2006 and in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in December of 2011 (Ackerman et al., 2013; Dearing, 2011; Handler, 2011; Iacono, 2011; Melcher, 2012). The AWA enhances some of the requirements of Megan's Law (Ackerman et al., 2013). Specifically, the AWA changes the type of information that is registered by the offenders, makes the data available to the public online, and includes additional offenses requiring registration for adults (Ackerman et al., 2013). The changes to SORN that took place in 2006 created more stringent registration requirements for many sexual offenders (Visgaitis, 2011). These more restrictive requirements called for additional types of sex offenders to register, were retroactive, and lengthened the time frame of registration for some offenders (Visgaitis, 2011). For example, the retroactive portions changed some offenders from a 10-year registration requirement to lifetime quarterly updates (Visgaitis, 2011).

Sexual offenders are divided into three tiers based on the convictions of the crimes (Day et al., 2014; Iacono, 2011; PSP, 2008; U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2012). The tiers are broken down into three registration cycles (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). Tier 1 is a 15-year registration commitment requiring one annual update (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). Tier 2 is a 25-year registration commitment requiring two updates, one every 6 months (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). Tier 3 is a lifetime commitment to registration with quarterly updates (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). Additionally, sexually violent predators are responsible for quarterly registration, and transient sexual offenders have a monthly commitment to update their registration (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008).

In addition to the offender being classified and placed into a tier determining registration frequency, each offender is required to be evaluated by the Sexual Offender Assessment Board. The purpose of this assessment is to determine if the offender has more severe issues or abnormalities that may result in him or her being labeled a SVP (Melcher, 2012; PSP, 2008). Those classified as an SVP are subject to additional restrictions and lifetime counseling requirements (Melcher, 2012; PSP, 2008). Some of the information required to be registered by each convicted offender include the following: pictures of the offender, the offender's primary address (and potential alternative addresses), employment addresses, vehicle information (any vehicles the offender owns or has access to drive), boats, ATVs, recreational vehicles, aliases, other Internet identifiers, scars, and tattoos (Ackerman et al., 2013; Day et al., 2014; Iacono, 2011; Maurelli & Ronan, 2013; PSP, 2008; U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2012).

This information was deemed necessary and required by law to be reported so the public can access the registry and use these data to put safeguards in place (Ackerman et al., 2013). When any of the information changes, the offender has 72 hours to report to an approved booking center and report the changes in person (Iacono, 2011; Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). These updates are necessary in addition to the required number of annual, biannual, or quarterly updates (Newburn, 2010; PSP, 2008). Failure to register or update any information correctly can result in a new felony arrest (one charge for each piece of data not reported; Iacono, 2011; PSP, 2008). There are over 700,000 men and women who register as sexual offenders in the United States (Ackerman et al., 2013).

Concerns about Sexual Offender Registration

Prior to AWA, each state had discretion about how to implement their sexual offender registration, and all did so with deviations (Ferrandino, 2012). Prior to the AWA being passed, some states used risk assessments to determine which offenders register, while some placed all sex offenders on mandated registration schedules (Ackerman et al., 2013). This led to inconsistency relative to offender classification, how information is reported, and irregularity in reference to offender maintenance and compliance efforts (Day et al., 2014; Ferrandino, 2012). AWA called for the tier-based system based on convictions (Ackerman et al., 2013; Iacono, 2011).

Ferrandino (2012) claimed that the sexual offender registration system does not require some information that could be considered important or critical for safety precautions. For example, details of the crime, information about the victims, and other safety recommendations may help some to assess safety concerns and to implement

protocols differently (Ferrandino, 2012). Housing restrictions should be a mandated component of the sexual offender legislation and registration policies (Bratina, 2013).

Sexual offender notifications of SVP are believed to reduce recidivism despite the lack of supporting empirical evidence that they do (Day et al., 2014; Miller, 2014). Notifying community members about sexual offenders has amplified recidivism in some instances (Day et al., 2014). Notifications interrupt the successful transition into the communities causing instability that leads to reoffending in many cases (Day et al., 2014; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Also, sexual offender registration has no proven effect on recidivism reduction or increased community safety (Bratina, 2013; Kleban & Jeglic, 2012). Bratina (2013) asserted that fear of sexual offenders causes public attention that leads to laws being created based on the fears of the public, and the end result is that the protocols may not be all that effective. Attention and public fear influence sex offender laws and policies (Bratina, 2013; Day et al., 2014). Outcries for strict legislative response to sexual offenders are due to fear that is a result of media attention, exaggeration, and when children are the victims (Handler, 2011). A lack of scientific evidence of effectiveness does not sway those who fear sex offenders from supporting sexual offender registration (Kleban & Jeglic, 2012). Kleban and Jeglic (2012) explained that despite treatment having a proven effect on reducing sexual offender recidivism, public opinion demands harsh consequences.

Powell et al. (2014) asserted that states are spending millions of dollars each year on sexual offender registration. These costly efforts deserve examination in order to identify more effective ways to use and maintain sexual offender registration.

Moskowitz (2013) reported that residents of the state of California supported the sexual offender registry after misleading and critical data were omitted and disguised relative to the intent and potential benefits. Tewksbury et al. (2012) addressed the potential influence that sexual offender registration has on recidivism. Most sexual offenders do not recidivate; therefore, registration may not be helpful (Tewksbury et al., 2012). There are too many variables to consider before researchers can make claims relative to registrations' usefulness (Tewksbury et al., 2012).

Plea bargaining, legislative changes, and other inconsistencies weaken the integrity and the constitutionality of the sexual offender registration system (O'Keefe, 2010). Plea bargaining may minimize danger or remove people from the mandate of registration (Newburn, 2010). Under these circumstances, the convicted charges as indicated by the registry may not portray an accurate illustration of an offender's inclination for hurting others or potential threat of reoffending (Newburn, 2010). Hazardous risks may be camouflaged or removed by plea bargaining (Newburn, 2010).

Collateral Consequences of Sexual Offender Registration

Laws that are too general can cause undo harm to the offender (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). This could include financial struggles and emotional duress, which could compromise a person's ability for successful treatment and remove needed family support systems (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Ackerman et al. (2013) explained that sexual offenders who are required to register suffer from collateral consequences that were not the intent of the original laws. For example, these offenders struggle to obtain housing and employment

and are often separated from family support systems (Ackerman et al., 2013; Miller, 2014). These factors can contribute to reoffending behavior of some sexual offenders (Ackerman et al., 2013). Bratina (2013) explained that states that have housing restrictions for sexual offenders require that sexual offenders remain specified distances from places where children typically congregate. Although there may be good intentions behind these restrictions, researchers have not supported housing policies in reducing recidivism or enhancing safety (Bratina, 2013). Furthermore, stringent housing restrictions increase the potential for reoffending in that individuals without stability and easy access to human services resources are more likely to recidivate (Bratina, 2013).

Viera (2011) argued that the original intent of the statute creating sex offender registration was not to allow offender information to be available to the public. There were some allowances proposed to provide this information to places like schools, daycares, and other entities that have direct contact with children (Viera, 2011). The data made available to the public may cause undue and excessive harm (extended periods of registration) to the offenders or discrimination and bullying (Newburn, 2010; O'Keefe, 2010; Viera, 2011). The public may not need or benefit from sex offender registration because sexual abuse incidents within a victim's family or organizations, such as child care facilities, can be sequestered (Bratina, 2013). Additionally, most sexual offenders pose a low risk to offending (Bratina, 2013). There is a reduced need to keep track of the offenders because they pose less of a threat to outsiders (Bratina, 2013).

National/International Issues Relative to Sexual Offender Registration

Many other countries use sexual offender registration models to reduce recidivism, track offenders, and provide a level of safety and security to its citizens (Day et al., 2014; Vess et al., 2013). Day et al. (2014) explained that Australia has similar problems with sex offender registration when compared to the United States. Specifically, regulations and registration practices vary at all levels of government, which may negatively impact the overall effectiveness of the legislation (Day et al., 2014). Despite sexual offender legislation being defined by many as “flawed,” an international sexual offender registration system based on what the United States has to offer has been considered (Viera, 2011, p. 1517). Those who support this endeavor believe it would be easy to insert the system the United States has in place into other countries (Newburn, 2010). However, others claim that changes need to be made due to differences in international philosophies to avoid problems before such a transition could take place (Newburn, 2010). Possible problematic areas in implementing U.S. sexual registration systems in other countries include the U.S. laws being too general and lengthy (Newburn, 2010). Furthermore, community notification has created collateral consequences leading to the maltreatment of the offenders (Newburn, 2010). Finally, residency restrictions may make it difficult for offenders to be with family (Newburn, 2010). Sex offender registration is expensive, time consuming, lacks the merit to be considered a deterrent, and is not proven effective overall (Vess et al., 2013). Collateral consequences and cost versus benefits analysis have led many to question why money is being invested into sexual offender registration (Vess et al., 2013). Some argue that sexual offender

registration is a useful tool that could be used to help assist the police with arrests (Vess et al., 2013). However, there is little to no input from police officers who implement sexual offender registration (Powell et al., 2014; Vess et al., 2013).

Constitutionality Issues Relative to Sexual Offender Registration

Portions of Megan's Law and the AWA have been challenged or labeled as unconstitutional since the law's inception (Dearinger, 2011; Handler, 2011; Iacono, 2011; Nathan, 2013). According to Dearinger (2011), *United States v. Crowell* was the first court case that challenged the constitutionality of the AWA as it pertains to an offender's Eighth Amendment rights. The Crowell case challenged pretrial supervision conditions relative to the AWA, and the court recognized this scenario as unconstitutional. Multiple other challenges relative to Fifth and Eighth Amendment rights came after the Crowell that included the *United States v. Vujnovich*, *United States v. Torres*, *United States v. Gardner*, *United States v. Kennedy*, and *United States v. Arzberger* (Dearinger, 2011).

In each case, excessive bail and other pretrial provisions were under examination (Dearinger, 2011). There were inconsistent responses in these court's rulings, and ultimately the courts did not resolve the legislation issues behind the AWA as it relates to the pretrial conditions outlined in the Bail Reform Act of 1966 (Dearinger, 2011). Specifically in question were individual assessments of the alleged perpetrators as required by the Bail Reform Act in comparison to the blanket rules of the AWA (Dearinger, 2011). Overall, the courts left the word "excessive" up for individual interpretation and failed to address fundamental differences between the Bail Reform Act and the AWA that could bring clarity to the law (Dearinger, 2011). Dearinger (2011)

suggested corrective legislation to change portions of the AWA Amendments that do not coincide with the previously established Bail Reform Act.

Handler (2011) asserted that the AWA is excessive and that this legislation is a prime example of how fear of sexual offenders has played a part in poorly thought out legislative responses. Specifically, pretrial release conditions that include house arrest or civil commitment protocols cause many to believe the laws are stretching their authority (Handler, 2011). Some states were keeping prisoners due for release when a valid address could not be provided for registration purposes (Leonard, 2011). Later, determinations were made establishing sexual offenders could not be denied release from prison due to financial issues that prevented them from securing housing or a lack of housing in general (Leonard, 2011). Under these circumstances, homeless sexual offenders required to register must provide some physical location where they will sleep or spend time such as a landmark or other public area (Leonard, 2011).

Multiple court cases have been heard relative to Fifth and Eighth Amendment rights (Dearinger, 2011). Bratina (2013) reported that there are attempts to address the challenges associated with sex offender registration in order to reinforce more effective consequences and safety concerns. Handler (2011) compared the AWA to portions of the Bail Reform Act of 1984 citing unconstitutionality of specific pretrial restrictions being imposed on sexual offenders.

Summary and Conclusions

Research relative to perceptions of sexual offender registration exists among the following groups: sexual assault victims, general public, legislators, sexual offenders,

family members of sexual offenders, and parole board members (Craun & Simmons, 2012; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Murphy & Fedoroff, 2013; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2012; Tewksbury et al., 2011). However, there is little to no research available on police officers' perceptions of sexual offender registration (Powell, et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). There is a need to investigate improved prevention policies, increased public awareness, and more empirically proven approaches to managing sexual offenders in the community (Bratina, 2013; Day et al., 2014; Kleban & Jeglic, 2012). Furthermore, Tewksbury et al. (2011) suggested that SORN laws create obstacles and more work for law enforcement officials. The police officers identified in the study could provide information on how to improve policies, educate the public, and offer ideas that may create a more effective sex offender registration system. Exploring police officers' perceptions about sexual offender registration could provide information relative to more effective prevention efforts. Additionally, exploring said knowledge from police officers who have direct contact with sex offender registration could increase researchers' understanding for human services professionals, other law enforcement personnel, legislative bodies, and society in general. These officers have direct knowledge of this system in ways that others have no ability to access. This missing information could shed light on the system that could allow for opportunities to create social change.

The objective of this qualitative case study was to explore police officers' perceptions of sexual offender registration in Butler County, Pennsylvania. This research contributed to the current body of literature by adding new, updated information from a

population that has not yet been studied. The results of the study provided an expanded view of the study topic that could provide better understanding of sexual offender registration. This new found knowledge could be used to enhance practices or protocols for police officers, law enforcement officials in general, and the community. In Chapter 3, I will present the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration using a case study design. In the following section, I will describe the research methodology I used for the study. This chapter on methodology will include a discussion of the following: the research question, design and rationale, my role as the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, the procedures for participant selection and data collection, the data analysis plan, and the ethical considerations and procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The following was the research question for this study: How do police officers who investigate sexual offenders perceive the effectiveness of SORN policies? The case study design is used to explore a particular issue in detail within a real-world context (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013, p. 16). Police officers were purposefully chosen through established criteria in order to gain their knowledge about their experiences of sexual offender registration (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). This study meets the standards for a collective or multiple case study because I sought to gain a deeper understanding of sexual offender registration from the vantage point of more than one police officer (Frels et al., 2013; Yin, 2013). Specifically, six police officers were hand selected for face-to-face interviews based on their unique job duties that included responsibilities and training related to the implementation of the sexual offender registration and community notification protocols. This included but not limited to sex offender registration,

community notification, conducting “spot-checks”, and answering tips and requests from the Megan’s Law Unit. In this multiple case study design, I chose a small group of police officers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes about the sexual offender registration system. Yin (2013) stated that it is crucial to hand select participants in multiple case study designs in order to effectively achieve the goal of replication. Yin stated that selecting the number of participants in a qualitative study is comparable to conducting the same number of experiments in quantitative research. For example, selecting six participants for this study is similar to conducting six experiments in a quantitative study (Yin, 2013).

Concerns relative to the case study design include some of the following: a lack of structure and thorough research, potential lengthiness, and a difficult ability to compare to other types of research (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014; Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). Lastly, the use of a small number of participants in a case study may compromise the ability to generalize the findings or may minimize the reliability of a research study (Chenail, 2010; Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). However, the small number of participants is offset by the benefits of the intimate environment of the case study design, and this study provided the opportunity for meaningful information to surface. I considered alternative approaches; however, the purpose of the study and the research questions called for the use of a case study approach (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

It was imperative that I not influence the participants in the study during the interview process (Sanjari et al., 2014; Yin, 2013). Sanjari et al. (2014) explained that researchers in qualitative studies must outline their roles and their ability to maintain the integrity of the qualitative process. I have 15 years of experience interviewing in an investigatory manner, and I hold a certification in forensic interviewing. I did not manage, supervise, or have any power over the participants in the study. My role as an interviewer in this qualitative study included gathering a summary of any work or personal history about the police officers in the study (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). Also, it was important to develop clear and concise information on sexual offender registration as well as to establish an understanding of the phenomenon being studied for officers who participated in the study (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). Each officer was informed that the topic of interest directly related to my professional career only (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). I explained the selection process, the interview protocol, data analysis plan, and the reporting of the findings protocol to the participants (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). I also took all of the necessary precautions to guarantee each participant's confidentiality, and I provided each police officer details on the secure maintenance and storage of all of the information gathered (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). I carefully identified any potential biases or experiences in order to improve the trustworthiness and integrity and transparency of the research (Sanjari et al., 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The sample for the study was made up of six police officers from different police departments located in Butler County, Pennsylvania. There were approximately 23 different police departments in Butler County. Most of these police departments were small in size with a limited number of full-time police officers. There were roughly four departments that were larger and had regular full-time officers. Some of the regular full-time officers in the larger departments had duties that involved sexual offender registration, compliance monitoring, and community notifications. Police officers from each of the larger departments participated in the interviews. The police officers who participated in the study were all adults, with at least 5 years of experience, and had some responsibilities involving the implementation of sex offender registration and community notifications for sexually violent predators. These police officers were contacted via the telephone in order to schedule an appointment to meet with each of them individually at their convenience. The interviews took place at a location of the police officers' choice.

Balancing the concepts of sampling strategy and determining sample size for qualitative research is important and necessary to establish boundaries for the study (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Sanjari et al., 2014, Yin, 2013). One distinct characteristic of qualitative research includes having the ability to hand select participants, known as purposeful sampling, without the use of random sampling techniques (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2013). Purposeful sampling may have a limited ability to show statistical significance; however, this practice is an advantage to qualitative

studies (Robinson, 2014; Trafimow, 2013; Yin, 2013). Purposive sampling allows a researcher to gather data directly from the sources that are experiencing the same phenomenon (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2013). Therefore, the participants in this research study were purposefully selected on criteria that were critical to the study (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Some consider portions of qualitative research vague by nature, and this applies to the sample size (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014). There are no set rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Sample size requires consideration in the following concepts: the purpose and of the study, the risks and rewards of the study, helpfulness, reliability and credibility, time constraints, and any resources accessible to the researcher (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Therefore, the sample size can be as large or as small as necessary to have a representative amount of participants from the study population that will also allow for generalizing the findings of the study (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Dworkin (2012) discussed saturation of the research data as an important consideration. Saturation takes places when no new themes or ideas emerge within the information (Dworkin, 2012). However, consideration should also be given to other constraints of the study, including time constraints, budgetary issues, or other demographics of the study population (Dworkin, 2012; Robinson, 2014).

Instrumentation

Interviewing was the method of instrumentation for this study. Many precautions were taken to avoid influencing the participants in the study during the interview process (Sanjari et al., 2014; Yin, 2013). Having a certification in forensic interviewing and 15

years of experience interviewing in an investigatory manner helped me to minimize any potential issues relative to reliability or validity of this data collection instrument.

Interviewing was the best instrumentation method to maintain alignment with the research questions of the study. Interviewing allowed for an intimate exploration of sexual offender registration through the eyes of police officers (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013, p.16). Police officers were chosen purposefully to allow them to share their current knowledge and experiences of sexual offender registration (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Data Collection

I was the only person collecting and managing the data throughout the data collection process. This process started by contacting each police officer via the telephone in order to schedule an appointment to meet with all of them individually. The location of the interviews was at the discretion of the police officer to allow for the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed (Yin, 2013). Face-to-face, semistructured interviews made up of open-ended questions were the primary methods used to collect data for this study. I managed interview transcripts (both handwritten and audio recordings with a Smartpen) and journal entries to help ensure accuracy (Tessier, 2012). Precision record keeping through note taking, journaling, and audio transcription were critical in order to properly preserve and maintain the data (Tessier, 2012). Tessier (2012) explained that there is a debate over primitive versus technological methods to data collection and analysis. Length and duration of the interviews changed due to the police officer's schedule. Police officers were interviewed until saturation occurred (Dworkin, 2012). There was no need for follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis Plan

After completing all data transcription, I first prepared for coding by sorting the data in order to identify any themes or keywords that surfaced (Yin, 2013). Organizing data began by grouping all question responses (all Question 1 responses with Question 1, etc.) Next, I sorted through the sentences, line by line, making it easier to scan and to spot share themes or thought patterns for coding purposes (Yin, 2013). I used a Smartpen for note taking and recording. I hand coded and organized all data due to the small amount of study participants. The absence of the use of computer software does not take away from the fact that proper note taking, journaling, and hand coding can maintain the credibility, reliability, and validity of the study (Tessier, 2012).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Yin (2013) reported that internal validity is strengthened when the case study can show a lack of false relationships and the elimination of alternative explanations. Credibility is shown in the certainty of the information collected and the accuracy of the explanation given by the researcher (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Yin, 2013). The credibility of a study increases when the researcher accurately recounts the experiences through his or her researcher role and with the ability to authenticate any research findings (Cope, 2014). Achieving credibility is also accomplished through precise data collection and analysis, as well as prolonged commitment to building rapport with the study participants (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013). Properly identifying themes and patterns and data saturation are two ways of increasing internal validity (Dworkin, 2012; Yin, 2013).

Additionally, participant selection along with minimizing maturation or history can also help to increase the credibility of the study (Yin, 2013).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the results and conclusions that can pertain to other people (Cope, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012; Yin, 2013). Therefore, if others can relate to the study as it translates through rich descriptions and accurate findings, study will achieve transferability (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Dependability

Dependability starts with the data collection process (Yin, 2013). Asking the most appropriate questions, being an attentive listener, having a flexible plan and superior knowledge of the study topic, eliminating biases, and removing ethical concerns can all help increase the dependability of the study (Yin, 2013). To ensure reliability within this study, a review of all transcriptions, journal entries, field notes, and coding techniques was conducted for accuracy (Yin, 2013). Multiple reviews took place in order to remove or diminish any mistakes (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Confirmability

Acquiring confirmability in this study was achieved by managing interpretation error and researcher bias (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Yin, 2013). Providing thorough descriptions of any assumptions or explanations and demonstrating that all results were data-driven also enhanced confirmability (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Ethical Procedures

In preparation for this study, multiple steps were taken to safeguard the ethical use of human subjects and to obtain institutional review board (IRB) approval (IRB approval number of this study is 12-22-15-0360648). First, all participation in the study was strictly voluntary. There were no threats, promises, coercion, or compensation provided to any study participants. Additionally, all relationships with potential study participants were strictly professional with either party having nothing to lose or gain through participation. All participants were assured from the onset of the study that they had the ability to discontinue their participation at any time. Because I conducted interviews with individuals related to my profession, I followed the appropriate IRB guidelines to safeguard against potentially unethical behavior. All research participants were adults over the age of 21. Each participant provided written consent through a disclosure form that included a description of the study, explanation of criteria for participation, a detailed description of the researcher (including my full name, address, contact information, and any other appropriate proof of identity), the purpose of the study, description of the interview protocols, reinforcement of the voluntary nature of the study, detailed description about confidentiality, and provision of my contact information (Walden University, 2013; Yin, 2013). All interviews were done in a professional manner; any and all research data, personal information, or other observations will be kept confidential. Notes, journals, or coded data do not contain any identifying information of the participants and are being held securely on a laptop that is not only password protected but is in a locked office as well.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed explanation of the research design, rationale, and methodology of the study. I provided details about exploring the research question and theoretical framework through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with police officers responsible for sexual offender registration and notification duties in Butler County, Pennsylvania. Information relative to participation criteria and selection were outlined throughout this section. As reported, data collection and analysis involved the use of documented qualitative practices. Finally, detailed information relative to issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations were also provided in this chapter. In Chapter 4, I present the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration using a case study design. I used the following research questions to ascertain how police officers perceived the effectiveness of sexual offender registration:

RQ1: How do certified police officers who investigate sexual offenders perceive the effectiveness of SORN policies?

RQ2: How do certified police officers describe the barriers to effective management of recidivism of sex offenders and/or sexually violent predators under SORN policies?

This chapter on the results of the study will include a discussion of the following: the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the interviews.

Setting

To my knowledge, there were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their experience at the time of the study that impacted the interpretation of study results.

Demographics

Each participant in the study was a certified police officer with at least 5 years of experience who had direct knowledge of sexual offender registration practices and policies. Actual time employed as a police officer ranged from 10.5 to 20 years. Each

participant was over the age of 21 with the actual age range of the police officers being 34- to-44-years-old. All six participants were Caucasian males.

Data Collection

The sample for the study was made up of face-to-face interviews with six police officers from different police departments located in Butler County, Pennsylvania. I made contact with each police officer via the telephone to schedule an appointment to meet individually. Each police officer was interviewed one time at a location of his or her choice for approximately 45 minutes. Data were recorded by way of handwritten notes and audio recordings with a Smartpen to preserve and maintain data. There were no deviations or unusual circumstances encountered throughout the data collection process. Data collection went as outlined in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

After collecting all data, the information was sorted by grouping all responses with the corresponding question (all Question 1 responses grouped with Question 1, etc.) Next, sorting through the sentences, line by line, I was able to spot repeated words and patterns in the officers' responses. Words and themes such as community safety, recidivism, money and human power, community policing, formal training, and sexually violent predators were frequently used by all of the police officers. Other significant responses and ideas that appeared in all cases included the need for specialized officers or a designated task force as ways to improve effectiveness. All responses were grouped under the reoccurring themes and ideas to synthesize the data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is shown in the certainty of the information collected and the accuracy of the explanation by the researcher (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Yin, 2013). I followed all credibility strategies as outlined in Chapter 3. Credibility was accomplished through precise data collection and analysis, as well as prolonged commitment to building rapport with the study process and participants (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013). Credibility was also achieved through proper identification of themes and patterns (Dworkin, 2012; Yin, 2013). Additionally, data were collected until saturation occurred, which strengthens the internal validity of the study (Dworkin, 2012; Yin, 2013). Proper selection of the study participants was of the utmost importance to the credibility of the study (Yin, 2013). Specifically, purposive selection of the police officers with direct experience of sexual offender registration was a critical component of the credibility of the study.

Transferability

There were no adjustments made to the transferability strategies as described in Chapter 3. Others will be able to relate to the study through rich descriptions and accurate findings, which are described later in the study (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Dependability

There were no adjustments made to the dependability strategies as described in Chapter 3. I used a credible data collection process to maintain dependability of the study (Yin, 2013). I chose open-ended questions and used active listening skills (Yin,

2013). Additionally, having superior knowledge of the study topic, eliminating biases, and removing ethical concerns as planned aided in elevating the dependability of the study (Yin, 2013). A thorough review of all transcriptions, field notes, and coding techniques was repeated numerous times to increase accuracy and to minimize or remove any mistakes (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Confirmability

There were no adjustments made to the confirmability strategies as described in Chapter 3. Acquiring confirmability in the study is achievable by managing for interpretation error and researcher bias (Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012; Yin, 2013). Thorough descriptions of any assumptions and explanations and demonstrating that all results were data driven will also enrich confirmability (Cope, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Results

The first research question in the study asked the following: How do certified police officers who investigate sexual offenders perceive the effectiveness of SORN policies? The responses were broken down into three main themes: community safety, recidivism, and policies and practices.

Community Safety

The responses to the research question yielded that five out of the six police officers felt that SORN had a positive impact on community safety. The only dissenting police officer stated, "Sex offender registration in and of itself is not effective in improving community safety." This officer believed that the community lacked awareness and was "not educated enough on the actual laws and policies." This officer

expressed a belief that the community did not actively use tools such as the “online Megan’s Law website” that are available to them. This officer believed that sexual offender registration cannot have a positive impact on community safety until the community members “routinely check the website and other information made available to the public.” This officer stated that most people only access the registration site “when something unfortunate happens to a friend, relative, or something they hear about in the community.”

The remaining five officers all felt that sexual offender registration was effective in enhancing community safety in their areas. They all attributed this positive effect to direct interactions with people through community policing. All agreed that public awareness was a critical component to the success of sexual offender registration. One officer stated that sexual offender registration “places hundreds of eyes on each sex offender that registers.”

I informed each police officer that researchers have revealed that sexual offender registration has no proven effectiveness on community safety (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009). The five police officers who believed that sexual offender had a positive impact on community safety were surprised by this information. All five cited disbelief in the data citing that smaller studies on specific communities may be needed for more accurate results. All expressed that they know it works in their jurisdiction due to the close ties to the community and community policing practices. These officers all expressed levels of dedication and effort to keeping their community members informed.

Recidivism

Three out of the six police officers stated that sexual offender registration does reduce recidivism in their jurisdictions. These officers believed that community members were aware of who the offenders were and were watching them. These officers all reported receiving phone calls and tips on a regular basis from the people in their communities.

The three dissenting officers declared that sex offender registration did not reduce recidivism in their areas. One officer followed this declaration by stating, “private citizens are not educated enough to look up details on their own.” This officer felt that “people do not know who the sexual offenders are in their neighborhoods.” He felt that “more should be done to increase public awareness.” This officer stated that because of this “lack of awareness,” those sexual offenders who register “do not fear getting caught violating their registration responsibilities or even committing new crimes.” All three officers believed that registration and community notifications did not sway sexual offenders’ decisions about future criminal behavior.

I informed each police officer that researchers have revealed that sexual offender registration has no proven effectiveness in reducing recidivism (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). The three police officers who believed that sexual offender did reduce recidivism were surprised by this detail. Again, these officers cited disbelief in the data citing that smaller studies on specific communities may be a necessity for more accurate results.

Policies and Practices

The most talked about policy and practice of SORN was community notifications that are mandated for SVP. The officers described community notifications as going door to door handing out flyers and attempting to answer questions about to the SVP. Five out of the six police officers believed that this practice was effective and beneficial despite the burden it places on the police departments relative to time, money, and human power. Three out of six officers reported passing out flyers during the day typically from 9:00 o'clock in the morning until noon. Each of these officers recognized that many people are not home during these times; however, this time of the day is when human power is abundant. Later that day and in the days to come these officers fielded a plethora of phone calls as a result of leaving their flyers on doorsteps. The remaining three police officers reported doing SVP notifications in the evenings to personally reach more people. All three officers cited money and human power as an issue; however, they believed that going in the evening was for the greater good of the community. Two of the three officers reported that they sacrificed their evening time to reach more people at home and to allow them to personally talk to the community providing advice and suggestions.

All six police officers relayed that more restrictive policies relative to SVPs should be built into the legislation. These officers all felt it may be time for legislators to revisit and revamp the mandates for both the offenders and for law enforcement. All of the police officers reported a struggle to keep up with policy changes, new court rulings, and the general requirements of the laws. Relative to law enforcement, all six of the

police officers stated that they wished they had more time, money, and human power to put more time into better managing the sexual offender population in their communities. These officers would like to be more proactive than reactive. Three of the police officers mentioned that no one checks up on them, and if certain practices were mandated, it would force them to prioritize some of the duties.

All six of the police officers identified too many loopholes in the legislation as a flaw in the policies and practices of SORN. All six police officers relayed that they rely on the courts and court-related staff for extra supervision and networking. All six officers reported having concern for the safety of others (specifically in reference to SVPs) when court supervision expires. All police officers in the study would like to see more mandates surrounding safety issues included in the legislation.

Five of the six police officers referenced the lack of accuracy about the information found on the public website as a problem with policy and practice. This issue seemed to surround the times when the offenders are incarcerated and moved between correctional facilities. These officers were frustrated that the jails are not updating information when the inmates who register come and go from the facilities. Inaccurate information is problematic, and although these offenders are temporarily out of society, practices and policies should be adhered to by all entities to maintain consistency.

Another practice that one officer had a lot of problems is what he called the “sexual offender packet” (this particular officer had one of the highest numbers of contacts with the sexual offenders in the county by virtue of his jurisdiction). This officer

reported that a packet of information was sent to the police department when an SVP registers. According to this police officer, this packet contained the community notification flyers and other demographic information about the SVP. This officer reported that “the sex offender packet has no real details about the offender and his crimes or problems.” The officer relayed that this lack of information placed him in a position to be “ill-equipped to answer any questions asked by the public.” Therefore, he would like to see a “change in the practice of information sharing.” Three of the officers noted that there were no checks and balances in relation to what policies and practices are being followed or not. These officers admitted that a lack of accountability and no apparent consequences for not responding to an inquiry or notification drives some of the police responses to the sexual offenders in their jurisdiction. One officer reported that “on site visits to the station are too costly, so audits are only done one time per year over the phone and with faxes.” Therefore, the lack of set standards and practices has a negative impact on the effectiveness of SORN.

The second research question asked the following: How do certified police officers describe the barriers to effective management of recidivism of sex offenders and/or sexually violent predators under SORN policies? The following themes emerged from this research question: human power and money, a lack of formal training and education, the need for specialized officers, and poor communication.

Human Power and Money

All six of the police officers identified human power and money as the biggest barrier to effective management of recidivism of the sexual offenders in their

jurisdictions. Three of the six police officers noted the issue of daytime community SVP notifications. These three officers recognized that they had no real contact with citizens but reiterated that the daylight hours offer more human power and that other scenarios requiring police attention were quieter during the day. Three out of the six police officers mentioned that SORN laws created more police work, was costly, and was hard on smaller departments. These barriers made it difficult to be proactive and effective in reducing recidivism of the more dangerous sex offenders. Additionally, one officer noted that “in some of the more rural areas notifying residents can take hours because residents are spread so far apart.” In these instances “no one is sure how many residents must be notified.” All six of the police officers stated that they would like to be able to do random spot checks. Specifically, some said that they would like to be able to focus a larger amount of attention on the SVPs who are no longer on probation. Five of the six police officers believed that once the sexual offenders were off probation, they were running free with no accountability due to loopholes in the legislation. Overall, increased financial resources and more officers would allow for more effective management of recidivism.

Formal Training

Another barrier to effective management of recidivism mentioned by all six police officers was a need for more formal training and education for law enforcement. Each of the officers said that (in some fashion) the lack of formal training and education for all types of police departments was problematic. These officers all reported that police officers were not educated routinely on SORN practices or policies. One officer said that

this lack of knowledge was more noticeable in smaller departments. Many times the sexual offenders are ignored because officers do not know what they can and cannot do. Four of the six officers reported that they learned through trial and error and by sharing experiences and information with other officers when they were dealing with situations. These officers were calling for formal training on how to apply the law, rules, and regulations. Furthermore, three of the five police officers would like more assistance from the Pennsylvania State Police Megan's Law Unit, which is located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. These three officers said calling the Megan's Law Unit is not typically helpful in that those who worked there are civilians who are just as clueless. These officers reported that the employees at the Megan's Law unit usually redirect them to the local district attorney's office, and these individuals do not know what to do without investigating either. All officers said that it was difficult to keep up with the changes in the law. More regular, formal training could lessen the burden in this area.

Specialized Officers

Another barrier all six police officers identified is a need for specialized police officers. All of the officers reported that they feel it would be more effective to have fewer people involved, especially when there was no consistency with spot checks and arrests. All of the police officers expressed a belief that specialized probation and other types of supervision was the most effective way to manage sexual offenders. Four of the police officers felt that specialized supervision does more than registration or the police. These police officers offered that specialized officers would better know how to maximize the limited time and resources available to their departments and to assess the

risk level different types of sexual offenders pose to the community. Furthermore, specialized officers could provide consistency with making arrests and aiding in the prosecution of sexual offender registration violators.

Communication

Another barrier to the effective management of recidivism was a lack of communication and time lapse for documentation. Five of the six police officers reported that communication with other police officers happens at a minimum and sometimes results in duplication of effort. These officers recognized that they should reach out to each other more frequently to share and exchange information. Time lapse in receiving documentation from the Megan's Law Unit in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania was identified by three of the police officers as a barrier. One officer explained, "paperwork is exchanged via the postal service instead of electronically." He explained that at times he had "received an investigation request based off of a hotline tip, the unit received two weeks after it was reported." By the time this police officer received the tip, the information was no longer valid or useful. Using the mail as a means to communicate can also cause paper cross over. With sometimes more than a dozen notices being mailed and received weekly, the "time lapse between the event and when the police receive notice is absurd," said one police officer. These investigation requests can be about things like housing and false addresses. This officer further explained, "In situations where these offenders frequently move, more timely notifications are a must to effectively monitor these individuals." Despite all of the barriers, five out of the six police officers fully supported the need for the sexual offender registration system.

Ideas and Suggestions

Throughout each interview, all of the officers offered suggestions and ideas based on their experiences working with sexual offender registration and notification practices. All six police officers expressed there was a need for mandatory training and education for law enforcement. Additionally, all six police officers suggested that law enforcement and other people who directly work with sexual offenders and sexual offender registration be brought to the table when establishing or changing legislation. Most of the officers expressed that the SORN laws look good on paper and are not based on the reality of the how things operate for the law enforcement officials and other individuals tasked with carrying out the laws. These police officers felt that it may be time to revisit the laws and include those with working knowledge in to improve the system. One officer stated that it was “very disheartening to know that the hard work and costly efforts of sexual offender registration may be for nothing.”

Several officers would like to see the use of postal mailings reduced to an absolute minimum and would prefer to receive electronic communications. One officer suggested the use of “mass mailings of postcards to an entire zip code” to replace more evasive and time consuming door-to-door notifications for SVPs. This officer believed that mass mailings in this instance would “include more people and potentially save time and money for police departments who are short on officers and even low on finances.”

All of the officers suggested the use of two Pennsylvania State Troopers or the creation of a task force group could more effectively and efficiently manage all of the sexual offenders in the entire county. The officers believed the specialized troopers or

task force could address the lack of proactive policing, improve communication, and provide consistency. One officer offered that “local police are left to manage people they arrested and prosecuted which could be a potential conflict in that the offenders can accuse the police officer of harassing or targeting them.” Specialized officers or a task force made up of law enforcement and other court-related staff could eliminate this concern as well.

Other ideas and suggestions offered by the officers included the use of social media to help spread awareness, include school and daycare staff in education and training about safety, and to minimize plea bargains that avoid registration. One officer expressed concern that Megan’s law may cause issues with prosecuting child sexual abuse cases. This officer claimed that pleas are negotiated to avoid subjecting minors to testify to minimize more traumatization to the victim. This officer believed that “laws need to change relative to how children can testify, so officers and prosecutors are not painted into a corner.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I provided a detailed explanation of the research questions of the study. The results of the study indicated that five out of six certified police officers who investigated sexual offenders perceived SORN policies as effective in improving community safety. Three out of five of the police officers did not feel that SORN was effective in reducing recidivism of sexual offenders. All of the officers indicated that educating the community and improving community awareness was important to enhancing community safety. One officer said, “Knowledge is power, and knowledge is

what keeps your children safe.” Certified police officers described multiple barriers to effective management of recidivism of sex offenders and/or SVPs under SORN policies. These barriers included the following: human power and money, a lack of formal training and education for law enforcement, absence of specialized police officers, and poor communication and networking.

Each participant yielded suggestions and ideas for improvements based on the police officer’s experiences working with sexual offender registration and notification practices. All six police officers expressed a need for mandatory training and education for law enforcement. Additionally, all six police officers suggested that law enforcement and other people who directly work with sexual offenders and sexual offender registration be brought to the table when establishing or changing legislation. Lastly, all of the officers suggested the use of two Pennsylvania State Troopers or the creation of a task force group that could more effectively and efficiently manage all of the sexual offenders in the entire county. One officer said, “police officers can engage the community, not paperwork.”

The following chapter will provide a comprehensive look at the interpretation and findings and an overview of ideas pertinent to the limitations, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore police officers' perceptions of sex offender registration using a case study design. Police officers were hand selected based on job duties (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). Specifically, the selection of police officers included those who had some responsibility to investigate sexual offenders as well as to implement sexual offender registration and community notification protocols. These police officers were interviewed to obtain direct knowledge of sexual offender registration to study their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

This case study involved a qualitative approach using face-to-face interviews with police officers who were purposefully selected based on their job duties. Face-to-face interviews allowed for a personal and comprehensive examination to take place (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). A qualitative case study approach was used because the goal of the study was to investigate this subject matter from a particular vantage point for the purpose of gaining intimate knowledge (Yin, 2013).

Interpretation of the Findings

Because the majority of current research is quantitative in nature, the findings of this study extended the knowledge within the discipline from a unique perspective. Almost all of the police officers believed that sexual offenders had a higher rate of recidivism. These officers were surprised to find out that sex offenders typically have a lower recidivism rate (Ackerman et al., 2013; Bratina, 2013; Miller, 2014). Additionally,

five of the officers believed that sexual offender registration enhanced community safety. These five police officers were surprised by the research outlining that sexual offender registration has not been proven effective in that area (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009).

One concern addressed by the AWA lay within each state having discretion about how to implement their sexual offender registration, and all did so with deviations (Ferrandino, 2012). All of the police officers in the study suggested that more consistent practices should be in place. These officers recognized the importance of the states to have autonomy. However, the differences in practice and a lack of consistency between the states were viewed as problematic by all of the police officers. Several cited instances where sexual offenders moved to neighboring states to avoid certain consequences or mandated sexual offender registration in Pennsylvania.

Ferrandino (2012) stated that the sexual offender registration system neglects to require some information that could be considered important or critical for safety precautions. More details of the crime, information about the victims, housing restrictions, and other safety recommendations may help some to assess safety concerns and to implement protocols differently. All six police officers mentioned loopholes in the legislative acts. All had concerns about SVPs not having proper restrictions after their probation and parole supervision expired.

Half of the police officers believed that sexual offender registration and sexual offender notifications for SVPs helped to reduce recidivism. Again, these officers were surprised by the lack of supporting empirical evidence (Day et al., 2014; Miller, 2014).

These police officers felt that their connections and rapport with their communities was helpful in reducing recidivism in their areas. These police officers were cautious to lump their communities into the statistics of large studies. Several of the officers were of the opinion that studies of smaller areas may generate a different outcome. They recognized that those findings would not be generalizable to other areas.

Money and human power was the most common theme found in the study. Millions of dollars each year is spent on sexual offender registration (Powell et al., 2014). All six of the police officers spoke about the strain that sexual offender registration protocols placed in their departments. All six of the police officers suggested the use of specialized police officers or the creation of a task force group that could more effectively and efficiently manage all of the sexual offenders in the entire county. The officers believed that the specialized troopers or task force could address the lack of proactive policing, improve communication, and provide consistency.

Many of the officers agreed with the current research that sexual offender registration is a useful tool that can assist the police with arrests (Vess et al., 2013). However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, plea bargaining and legislative changes are problematic for sexual offender registration system (O'Keefe, 2010). Plea bargaining may minimize any danger and concern or remove people from the mandate of registration (Newburn, 2010). Under these circumstances, the convicted charges as indicated by the registry maybe not portray an accurate illustration of a person's inclination for hurting others or potential threat of reoffending (Newburn, 2010). Dangers could be masked or even removed by plea bargaining (Newburn, 2010). One officer recognized that Megan's

law was an obstacle to prosecuting some child abuse cases. This officer reiterated that there needs to be legislative changes in how children can testify during court proceedings to minimize plea bargains that avoid registration. This officer claimed that pleas were negotiated to avoid subjecting minors to testify to curtail more traumatization to the victim. Additionally, all six of the police officers called for more formal training and education as well as updates on legislative changes. These officers felt unsure and ill-prepared to address potential Megan's law violators because they had no firm foundation of the current laws or practices. Portions of Megan's law and the AWA have been challenged or labeled as unconstitutional since the laws' inception (Dearing, 2011; Handler, 2011; Iacono, 2011; Nathan, 2013). These officers were unaware or lacked understanding of how the outcomes of some of the most recent changes in legislation impacted how they can do their job.

Theoretical Framework

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory was the conceptual framework for the study. Cognitive dissonance theorists suggest that individuals encounter cognitive dissonance when two psychologically conflicting cognitions clash (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). Discord takes place when a person's intimate or personal views contradict another behavior or idea, which causes confusion within that person (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). In this study, five out of six of the police officers supported the idea of sexual offender registration despite the research that declares that this system has no positive influence on improving community safety or reducing recidivism.

Five out of the six police officers believed that the sexual offender registration enhanced community safety. Also, three out of five believed that sex offender registration reduced recidivism. After presenting research and facts to the contrary, all five of the police officers still believed in and supported SORN, which is consistent with other studies (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). Therefore, using the concepts of Festinger, I found that the police officers supported sexual offender registration because they wanted to believe this system offered security and protection (Martinie et al., 2013; Matthey & Regner, 2011; Salti et al., 2014). All of the police officers in this study proclaimed commitment, care, and concern for the communities they served.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included the amount of time and the frequency of the interviews (Yin, 2013). Next, there may be limited generalizability of the results and findings (Yin, 2013). The findings of this study were limited geographically to Butler County, Pennsylvania, and the same results may not be generated if the study was duplicated in a different demographic area. Next, the sample of participants in this study was not representative of a variety of ethnic backgrounds and gender (Yin, 2013). Because participants were hand selected based on job duties, gender, race, and ethnicity could not be controlled for in this study. Sample size could be viewed as a weakness despite the lack of set standards for qualitative studies (Yin, 2013). The results of the study were limited to interpretation and were not further reinforced by quantitative inquiry (Trafimow, 2014). Finally, researcher bias could be another limitation of the

study (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013). However, any potential areas for bias were identified, managed, minimized, or eliminated through by mindfulness and accountability measures (Trafimow, 2014; Yin, 2013).

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, several recommendations for future research could be made. For example, more studies that include input from police officers and their perceptions of sexual offender registration could be beneficial to determine if the same results can be replicated in other areas. Also, it may be beneficial to study the importance of providing formal training and education to police officers in this part of the law. Researchers could uncover problems that police officers may face when attempting to enforce sexual offender registration. Additionally, it may be beneficial to ascertain if police officers are not making arrests due to a lack of knowledge on SORN laws. Future research on issues surrounding money and human power could uncover ways to address the most prevalent concern identified in this study. Another potential direction for future research could stem from the second most talked about area in this study, which was the use of specialized police officers who are trained in sexual offending behavior and mandates, or the creation of a task force. Exploration of these ideas could provide a new perspective or foundation for police departments to consider when hiring or training new officers. The use of specialized officers or the creation of a task force may address some of the concerns about community safety and recidivism. Other possible areas for future research could include some of the concepts identified by the police officers in this study,

such as more efficient means of communicating or revisiting the current mandates for SVPs.

Implications

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain intimate knowledge and understanding from police officers about sexual offender registration. The identified population of police officers articulated issues surrounding money and human power that influenced their policing efforts. Money and human power minimize, and in some cases eliminate, any ability for police officers to be proactive with the sexual offender population in their communities. All of the police officers in this study displayed a passion and commitment to the safety of the citizens in their communities. As expected, interviews with police officers who have direct involvement with sexual offender registration procedures and protocols provided new and unique insight into recidivism, community safety, costs, and inconsistent practices and policies of implementing SORN. These police officers were able to provide suggestions about potential improvements that could influence positive social change. This unique knowledge could help to compare police officers' perceptions to the perceptions of criminal justice and other human research professionals (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). This information could provide a foundation for additional quantitative and qualitative studies to further examine the understanding that others have of sexual offender registration. Gathering information directly from the hands-on involvement of police officers who implement SORN could provide a better understanding of the issues that prevent sexual offender registration from being more effective (Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury &

Mustaine, 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2011). These new ideas and suggestions could create a platform that would provide a proactive approach to sexual offenders. A proactive approach to dealing with sexual offenders could provide safety nets to communities that are currently nonexistent. The degree of potential impact for positive social change in this particular instance is vast and far reaching.

Conclusion

There is a steady growth in the sexual offender population and ongoing concerns related to police officers' ability to more effectively manage this population (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; PSP, 2008; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Vess et al., 2013). Some researchers claimed that these circumstances necessitate further empirical inquiries to better understand the sex offender registration system and SORN policies (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; PSP, 2008; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013; Vess et al., 2013). In this study, I uncovered details about how SORN impacts police officers' duties and their ability to address the sex offender population in their jurisdictions. Police duties associated with SORN are time consuming and expensive considering that this system has not been proven effective in reducing recidivism or improving community safety (Bratina, 2013; Kernsmith et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2013). Police officers, by virtue of their chosen professions, have answered the call to protect and serve those who reside in their communities. If there is a way to provide police officers with a more operative, proactive manner to enhance community safety, others must answer the call to protect and serve as well. The police officers in this study indicated that awareness, education, and training

are some of the options available to eliminate dangers and lessen the fear that some people have toward the sexual offenders living in their neighborhoods. Exploring these options could have far reaching implications for positive social change.

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