SB 87

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Residential proximity to schools and daycare centers: Influence on sex offense recidivism

An empirical analysis

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Study Background and Purpose

Residential restrictions for sex offenders have become increasingly popular despite a lack of empirical data demonstrating that offenders' proximity to schools or daycare centers contributes to recidivism. Using a matched sample of recidivists and non-recidivists from Florida (n = 330), we investigated whether sex offenders who lived closer to schools or daycare centers were more likely to reoffend sexually than those who lived farther away.

Methodology

Of the sex offenders listed on Florida's sex offender registry in 2004, 165 were re-arrested for a new sex crime in 2004-2006. A group of 165 non-recidivists, matched to the recidivists on relevant risk factors (prior convictions, age, marital status, predator status), was also identified. The offenders' addresses were mapped using GIS software, as were the locations of all schools and daycare centers. Mapping was conducted using individual property boundaries to the extent available. The offenders lived in counties throughout the state of Florida. For each offender the straight-line shortest distance to the nearest daycare center and school were determined. Buffers of 1,000 and 2,500 feet around each offender's residence were also determined to count the number of daycare centers and schools within these buffers.

Results

No significant differences were found in the distances that recidivists and non-recidivists lived from schools and daycare centers. We compared the proportions of recidivists and non-recidivists who lived within common buffer zones. Offenders who lived within 1,000, 1,500, or 2,500 feet of schools or daycare centers were no more likely to reoffend sexually than those who lived farther away. There was a virtually non-existent correlation between reoffending and proximity to schools ($r = .004$; $p = .940$) or daycares ($r = -.043$; $p = .433$). When the distances to schools and daycares were entered along with risk factors into a logistic regression model, neither proximity measure was a significant predictor of recidivism.

Conclusions

Proximity to schools and daycares, with other risk factors being comparable, explains virtually none of the variation in sexual recidivism. Sex offenders who lived within closer proximity to schools and daycare centers did not reoffend more frequently than those who lived farther away. These data do not justify the widespread enactment of residential restrictions for sexual offenders. The time that police and probation officers spend addressing housing issues is likely to divert law enforcement resources away from behaviors that truly threaten our communities in order to attend to a problem that simply does not exist. Residence restrictions greatly diminish housing options for sex offenders, resulting in increased homelessness, transience, and instability, undermining the very purpose of registries and exacerbating known risk factors for criminal recidivism. Residence restrictions decisions should be made on an individualized risk management basis and not legislated.

Table 1: Sex offenders and proximity to schools

N = 330	%	Median	Mean
White	63%		
Minority	37%		
Offender	74%		
Predator	23%		
Minor victim	96%		
Distance to daycare		1780	5182
Within 1000 feet	23%		
Within 1500 feet	42%		
Within 2500 feet	61%		
Distance to school		2442	4962
Within 1000 feet	13%		
Within 1500 feet	26%		
Within 2500 feet	51%		

Table 1 presents data about the offenders and their proximity to schools and daycare centers. The mean represents the average distance, in feet. The median represents the midpoint value; half the offenders lived closer than the median and half lived farther away. More than half of registered sex offenders and predators live within 2500 of a school or daycare center, demonstrating that the majority of residential properties are within close proximity to such venues (many were "grandfathered" -- they had established their residence before various laws went into effect).

This sample was generated by identifying recidivists and then creating a matched sample of non-recidivists. The sample is not, therefore, representative of the sex offender population in Florida, and is actually a more high risk group than a randomly selected sample would be.

Figure 1: Distance to schools & daycares and recidivism

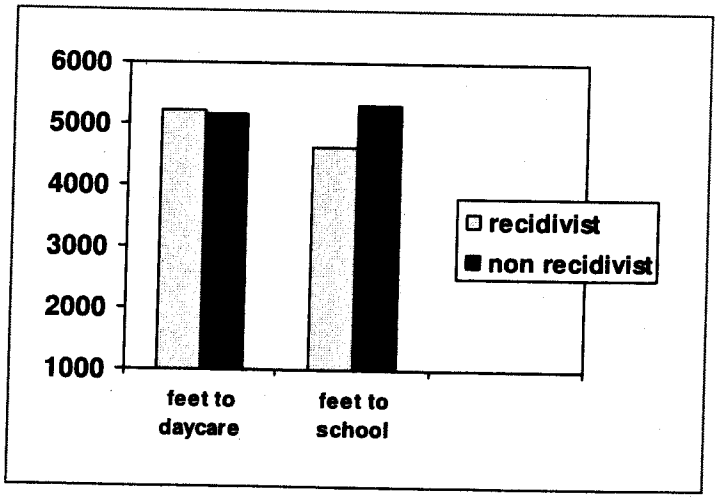

Figure 1 represents no statistically significant differences between recidivists and non-recidivists in terms of their average residential proximity to schools and daycare centers. In other words, sex offenders who lived within closer proximity to schools and daycare centers were no more likely to reoffend than those who lived farther away.

Figure 2: Group comparisons between recidivists and non-recidivists based on distance.

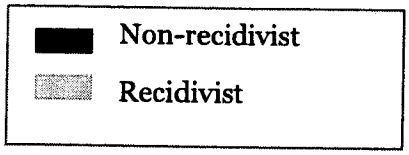

Figure 2 indicates that recidivists were no more likely to live within 1,000, 1,500, or 2,500 feet of schools or daycare centers than those who did not reoffend.

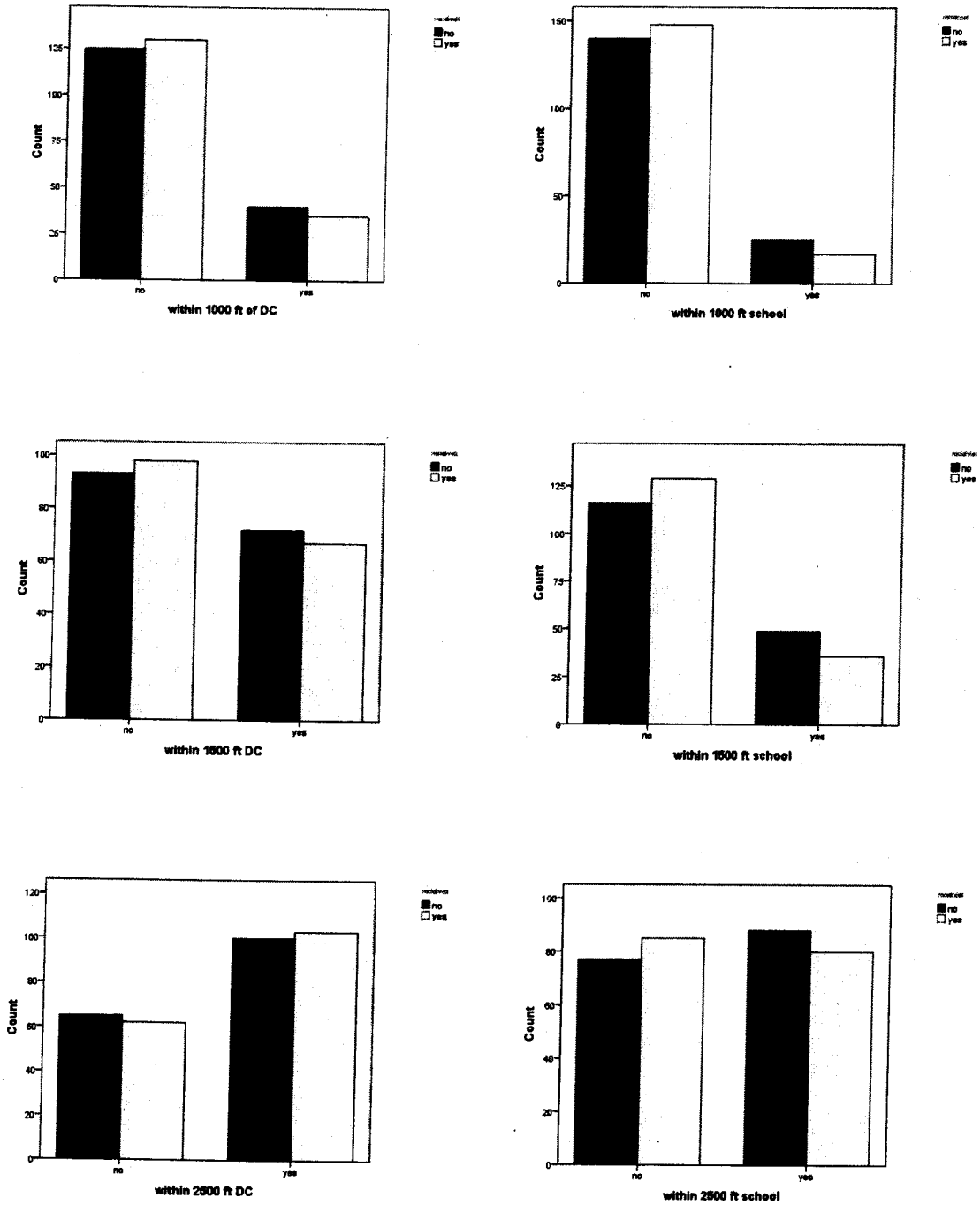

Table 2: Number of schools and daycare centers within close proximity to recidivists and non-recidivists

Count	Daycares within 1000 feet		Daycares within 2500 feet		Schools within 1000 feet		Schools within 2500 feet	
	Non-Recidivists	Recidivists	Non-Recidivists	Recidivists	Non-Recidivists	Recidivists	Non-Recidivists	Recidivists
0	116	115	65	57	123	127	68	77
1	31	28	30	35	26	25	35	51
2	12	12	14	19	13	10	35	21
3	5	7	17	21	2	2	12	11
4 or more	1	3	39	34	1	1	15	5
Sum	165	165	165	166	165	165	165	165

Table 2 presents data about the number of schools and daycare centers located within close proximity to the offenders. Recidivists did not systematically live within close proximity to a greater number of schools or daycare centers.

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AUTHORS' NOTE

This report is a summary of a research article submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

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