

Voices of Returning Citizens on the Sexual Offender Registry

Law and Justice Interim Committee

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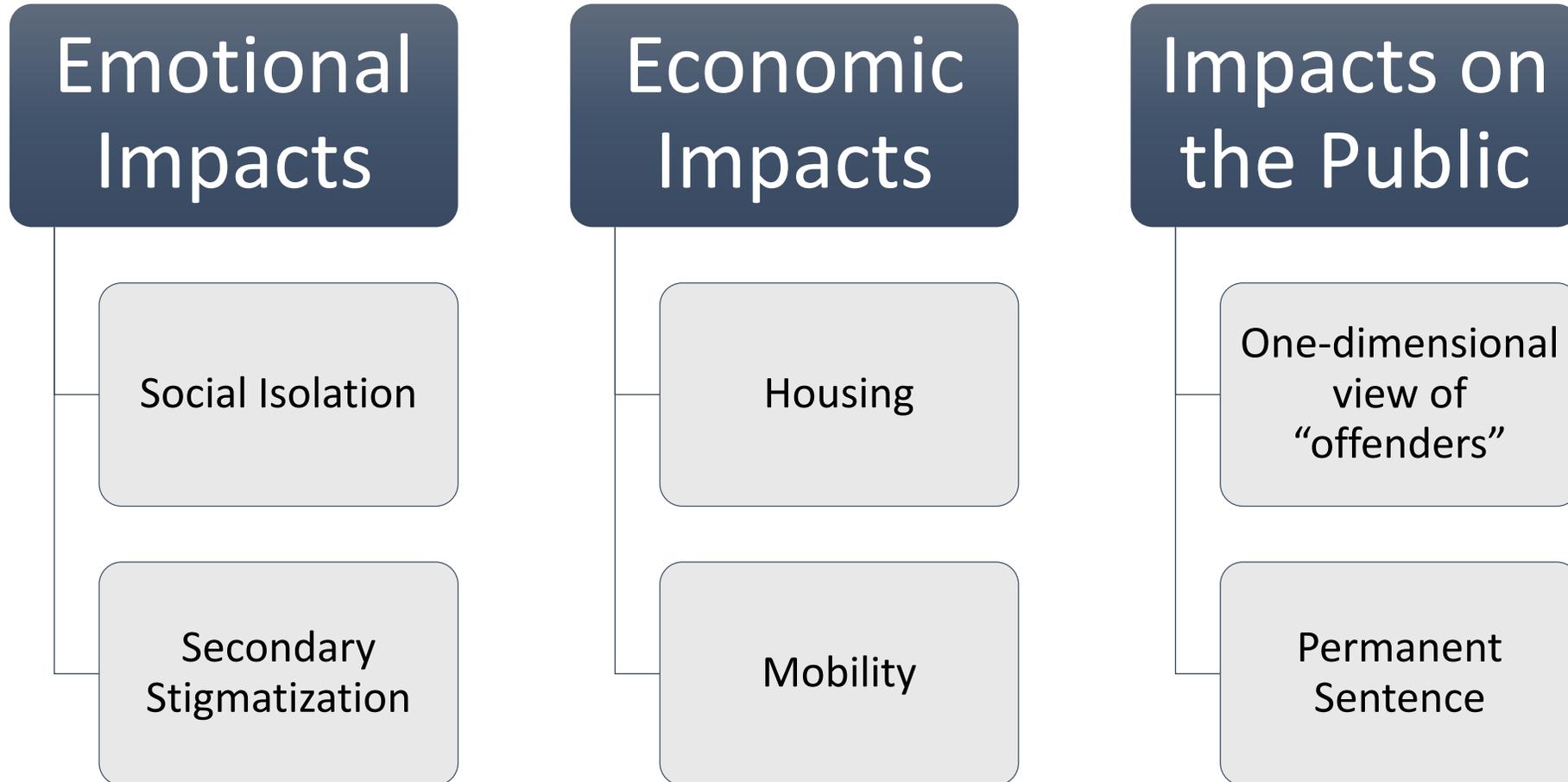
Sexual Offender Focus Group

November 14th, 2019

- Participant Characteristics
 - 13 participants
 - 11 men on registry; 2 female romantic partners
 - Age range: 28-68 years old
 - All participants employed and housed
 - Incarceration length:
 - 37 years combined; 3 years average
 - All 11 men are currently on the S.O. registry as a Tier 1 or Tier 2 offender



Sexual Offender Focus Group: Findings



*Emotional
Impacts: Social
Isolation*

Participants spoke to the damage public notification causes in building social networks of support in the community, meeting basic needs and maintaining mental health.

Social Isolation

“I have a friend who lives in a small town, who talks [to me] about suicide. There’s nowhere he can go that he doesn’t run into somebody he knows. Sometimes he just wants to die. When he’s having those thoughts, just thoughts, he feels he can’t share his fears with a counselor or PO, afraid he will be turned in. So he just cancelled his last meeting. I try to talk with him, [help him].”

*Emotional
Impacts:
Secondary
Stigma &
Family*

Participants spoke eloquently about how their family members, including young children are stigmatized; intimate relationship partners are also publicly advertised as 'associates' of a sex offender, and normal parenting activities are restricted by community notification.

Secondary Stigma & Family

“I’ve seen other people’s stuff, even family members [on the Internet]. There’s information that shouldn’t be out there [because of public notification].”

“My children are in middle school and they’re in sports, but I don’t go to match their games. I would, I really would. But if one of the parents looked me up, I don’t think it would be the best thing for my kids... I don’t know what a dad should do in this situation.”

Economic Impacts: Housing

Participants agreed that the registry's widespread publication online, and in local newspapers, ensures that they will continue to struggle for safe, affordable housing for themselves and their families.

Housing

[when] I went to see other places, I talked to people

We were just trying to find some place to live, and I finally found a private renter. It is incredibly difficult to find a place.

money, and then say “Thank you, No.”

Economic Impacts: Mobility

Participants described how the registry, especially public notification, directly affects opportunities for employment, further training and education, even affordable insurance, limiting their ability to reintegrate.

Economic Mobility

Same with car insurance. Some companies won't touch you. When they see your record they say, "These rates are for normal people, these rates aren't for you."

Impacts on
the Public:
One-
Dimensional
View of
“Offenders”

Participants in the sex offender focus group are Tier 1 and Tier 2, low to moderate risk of reoffending, but find they are all judged by society as dangerous pedophiles. There is no acknowledgment of rehabilitation and change.

One-Dimensional View of “Offenders”

People actually believe it that I’m dangerous in a stadium surrounded by other parents, watching my kids play basketball ... I think the problem is maybe education. The public doesn’t understand who is actually going to commit a sexual offense> Is it the guy who’s been to prison, been through treatment?

Impacts on the Public: Permanent Sentence

Participants were unclear about how to petition for removal, and expressed hopelessness about escaping the “lifetime sentence” of being on the registry.

Permanent Sentence

We're not like drug addicts; they relapse because they don't think

Once you're on the registration, you're pretty much on it for the rest of your life, even if you did get off, the internet is so awesome these days, that your name is always out there.

WORKS, AND DRUG TREATMENT DOESN'T WORK.