

Sex Offender Myths vs Facts

Myth:

Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers.

Fact:

Most sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim or the victim's family, regardless of whether the victim is a child or an adult.

- According to a study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2004), where 9,700 sex offenders were tracked, only 7% of such crimes against children were perpetrated by strangers.
- The majority (93%) of molestations of children are not committed by strangers but by people who are known and trusted within or about the family.

Myth:

Most sex offenders re-offend.

Fact:

Re-conviction data suggest that this is not the case. Further, re-offense rates vary among different types of sex offenders and are related to specific characteristics of the offender and the offense.

Recently the Bureau of Justice Statistics published a study which tracked 9,700 sex offenders for three years, 2001-2004. Their findings concluded:

- Only 5.3% of these people imprisoned for sex crimes were rearrested for a subsequent sex offense.
- Where a child was involved, the re-arrest rate dropped to 3.3%.
- Between two adults, the sexual re-offense rate was 2.2%.

Myth:

Treatment for sex offenders is ineffective.

Fact:

Treatment programs can contribute to community safety because those who attend and cooperate with program conditions are less likely to re-offend than those who reject intervention.

- The Campbell Collaboration analysis of 22,000 individuals found that treatment reduced recidivism by 37%.
- Oshkosh Correctional's meta-analysis from 79 separate studies of over 11,000 sex offenders found that people who participated in treatment programs had a 59% reduction in re-arrests.
- By 2005, most all preventative programs showed that re-arrest rates were being reduced by greater than half. With some of the latest deep aversion and victim empathy regimens, reductions were reported as high as 91%.
- There is now a credible concurrence that "treatment works" and that new programs are becoming increasingly more successful.

The mission of **Illinois Voices** is to educate the public, the media, law enforcement, educators, faith-based organizations, and legislators regarding the facts of sexual abuse based on current research. We support the prevention of child sexual abuse through carefully structured laws that target violent, forced, and/or dangerous predatory acts of sex against children. Existing laws encompass a wide range of offenders and require the exact same resources be used for both violent, dangerous offenders and those whose offenses were neither violent, forced, nor dangerous.

Current laws, as structured, are not keeping our children safe. They are, in fact, costing taxpayers millions of dollars to prosecute, monitor, incarcerate, and severely punish many individuals who are of no danger to children, society, or the communities in which they live. We believe that laws which will truly benefit the safety of our children, and society in general, must differentiate between those who are dangerous offenders and those who are not. Current laws are based on hysteria and myths. We are here to provide educational information about the truth behind this hysteria and the "stranger danger" myth gripping this nation with fear, and ruining the lives of many people who are not the monsters we have been led to believe.

For further information, statistics, articles, stories, and more, we welcome you to visit www.ilvoices.com.



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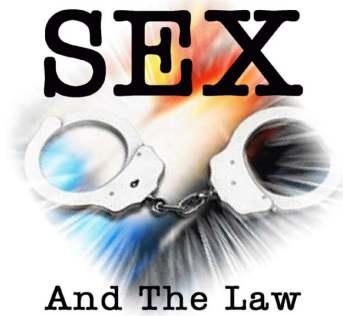
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Those Without a Voice."



**You Know the Myths.
Now Learn the Truth.**

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And The Law

Our Current Sex Offender Laws Do Not Differentiate Between Violent and Non-Violent Crimes

If you believe the only way you can become a “sex offender” is to hurt a child or rape someone, you are wrong. The following is a list of offenses that can land you on the sex offender registry:

- Teen consensual sex (when there is a 2-, 3-, or 4-year age difference);
- Children as young as nine who are accused of sexual harassment in schools for arguably harmless conduct, including “playing doctor;”
- Urinating in public;
- Adult prostitution (adults who sell sex to other adults);
- Exposing genitals in public (even without realizing someone is watching);
- Teens sharing pornographic magazines with other teens;
- Teens emailing or texting nude or partially nude photos of themselves or others;
- Teens posting nude or semi-nude photos of themselves on MySpace or other social networking sites;
- Older teens asking younger teens if they want a ride;
- Parents taking innocent pictures of their children in the bathtub or in bathing suits;
- Viewing pornographic websites that may contain younger girls, even though their disclaimer states they are of age.

Education is Power

Parents have to teach their children that strangers present only the smallest percentage of the danger that exists for them. Most children are molested by someone known to them and teaching a child to talk about such things is much more important.

Prime time TV, every magazine cover, even little girls’ underwear, is creating an over-sexualized culture where girls believe their sexuality determines their value and boys believe the same about girls. From the messages written on the seats of girls’ sweat pants, to the music videos portraying submissiveness, to TV shows that go further and further to show every graphic detail of a violent sex crime, the sexual culture of our society is poisonous and breeds an environment that encourages sexual misconduct. Gruesome, glamorized sexual violence is everywhere, from video games that give points for having sex with and killing young women, to the crime shows that win top ratings every week. Parents must have frank discussions with their children who are bombarded by these sexual and violent messages every day—from the grocery store checkout to the radio. If parents don’t tell a child how to think about those things, the advertising industry will.

Our obsession with, and horror about, sex have paradoxically generated both great sexual freedom and Draconian laws which unfortunately have several (largely unintended) negative consequences. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Legal age of consent is out of sync with normal sexual development and adolescents are given conflicting and many confusing messages about sexual behavior. For example, they can generally consent to abortion and obtain birth control at age 12 but cannot consent to sex until 16 or 18 (depending on the state; in Illinois, the age of consent is 17). As a result, many are being convicted of felonies for developmentally normal behaviors and having to register as sex offenders for the remainder of their lives.
2. Prepubescent children are being ostracized (and occasionally even criminalized) for sexual behavior that is often normal, or at worst, an annoying means of attention seeking.
3. Mandatory child abuse reporting laws, originally designed to protect children, have been expanded to identifying offenders, making it virtually impossible for them to enter treatment on their own initiative without first suffering severe legal consequences.
4. Under the guise of “protecting our communities,” without a shred of empirical support and in spite of significant empirical evidence to the contrary, sex offenders who served their sentences are being forced to leave their homes (and sometimes families) because they live too close to schools, playgrounds or parks. In most instances destabilizing these people is patently unfair, and in some cases this tends to make them more, rather than less, dangerous.

When You Look at the Online Sex Offender Registry, Do You Think Everyone Listed has Molested a Child or Raped Someone?

Research from the Human Rights Watch—titled *No Easy Answers*—has found that sex offender registration, community notification, and residency restriction laws are ill-considered, poorly crafted, and may cause more harm than good:

- The registration laws are overbroad in scope and overlong in duration, requiring people to register who pose no safety risk;
- Under community notification laws, anyone anywhere can access online sex offender registries for purposes that may have nothing to do with public safety. Harassment of and violence against registrants have been the predictable result;
- In many cases, residency restrictions have the effect of banishing registrants from entire urban areas and forcing them to live far from their homes and families.

Research prepared with Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice—titled *Megan’s Law: Assessing the Practical and Monetary Efficacy*—found the following points highlight the major findings of the three phases of the study:

- Megan’s Law has no effect on community tenure (i.e., time to first re-arrest).
- Megan’s Law showed no demonstrable effect in reducing sexual re-offenses.
- Megan’s Law has no effect on the type of sexual re-offense or first-time sexual offense (still largely child molestation/incest).
- Megan’s Law has no effect on reducing the number of victims involved in sexual offenses.
- Sentences received prior to Megan’s Law were nearly twice as long as those received after Megan’s Law was passed, but time served was approximately the same.
- Significantly fewer sexual offenders have been paroled after the implementation of Megan’s Law than before (this is largely due to changes in sentencing).
- Costs associated with the initial implementation as well as ongoing expenditures continue to grow over time. Start-up costs totaled \$555,565 and current costs (in 2007) totaled approximately 3.9 million dollars for the responding counties.
- Given the lack of demonstrated effect of Megan’s Law on sexual offenses, the growing costs may not be justifiable.