

Survey shows limited use of sex offender registry

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Texas has the second largest sex offender registry in the country, but relatively few people are accessing it or using it to develop protective actions against future sex crimes, a study by the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University found.

Texas began its sex offender registry in 1991 to inform citizens about sex offenders living and working in communities throughout the state and to encourage the public to adopt [preventive measures](#) against [sex crimes](#). The Texas Department of Public Safety maintains the registry and as of October 2012 there were more than 72,600 active offenders listed. The registry, which can be searched by name, address, zip code, county or institute of higher education, is located at <https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/SexOffender>.

In "Familiarity with and Uses of Sex Offender Registries," a report on a research study that utilized an [online survey](#) of 652 individuals from a Texas university found that while 74 percent of participants were familiar with the state's sex offender registry, only 43 percent have ever accessed the service. The main reasons for using the registry were curiosity, followed by concern for their safety or the safety of children.

Of those who had used the registry, only 17 percent took any protective measures, such as regularly locking doors, advising others about a registered sex offender living in the neighborhood, or not walking alone in the neighborhood. Protective measures for children, including not allowing children to stay home alone or go outside unsupervised, were

relatively uncommon, but may be reflective of the age and familial status of those surveyed.

Crime [victims](#) were more likely to use [sex offender registries](#) and take protective measures, but it was the victims of identity theft that were the most active users, with sexual assault victims using it least, the study found.

"This study revealed two areas in which findings were contrary to the hypothesized results: minimal effect on registry use when sex crimes occurred in neighborhood and sex offenders lived in neighborhood, and sexual assault victims accessed the registry less than victims of other crimes," the study found.

There was little or no difference in the reported use of the registry if participants knew of [sex offenders](#) living in their neighborhood or if a sex crime occurred while they were living there, although participants were more likely to use the registry when they knew someone in the neighborhood had been arrested on a sex offense. Most respondents learned about the sex offender registry through word of mouth, internet searches or television reports.

As a result of these findings, the Crime Victims' Institute recommended that strategies be developed to increase awareness about the sex offender registry and what residents can do to protect themselves if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood. The full report can be found at <http://www.crimevictimsinstitute.org/publications/>

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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