SEX OFFENDER RESIDENCY CLUSTERING ANALYSIS IN IOWA

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ABSTRACT

Sex offender residency restrictions laws (SORR) have been an issue of much political debate in the area of constitutional rights and public safety. This thesis examines the impact of SORR laws on sex offenders in the state of Iowa. The research explores the unintended consequences of Iowa's offender residency restriction law, 692 A. This thesis is important because it shows how the patterns and trends influence the overall geography and distribution of sex offenders in the state of Iowa.

The first part of my methodology used a GIS geocoding approach to accurately map the sex offender's addresses. The second part of the methodology used point density and spatial autocorrelation surface maps to show the overall distribution of sex offenders in relationship to one another. The third part of the methodology used buffers around schools and licensed day cares to create the 2,000 ft exclusion zone mandated by Iowa's SORR laws.

The results found that SORR laws in Iowa create clusters of sex offenders. Sex offenders are being confined to specific areas in cities and towns in Iowa. The study found sex offenders are being isolated to hotels, motels, apartments, campgrounds, trailer parks, and homeless camps to avoid breaking the 2,000 ft exclusion law. Downtowns areas and outskirts of cities are the largest areas of confinement. The study also found that approximately 47 percent of sex offenders are in violation of the exclusion zone because of the high number of licensed child care facilities.