



Criminological Highlights: **Children and Youth**

We gratefully acknowledge the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General for funding this project.

Volume 2, Number 2

October 2014

This issue of *Criminological Highlights: Children and Youth* addresses the following questions:

1. Are members of minority groups who come into contact with the police more likely to be arrested than white suspects?
2. Can a pre-school program for disadvantaged children show benefits 40 years later?
3. Are serious delinquents likely to persist in offending after being placed in custody?
4. How should you interpret statements about criminal justice interventions that appear to be too good to be true?
5. What kinds of people favour ‘tough on young offenders’ policies?
6. When drug offenders get jobs, are they likely to slow down their drug use and crime?

Criminological Highlights is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is currently being published. These summaries of high quality, policy related, published research are produced by the Centre for Criminology & Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto. The *Children and Youth* edition constitutes a selection of these summaries (from the full edition) chosen by researchers at the National Center for Juvenile Justice and the University of Toronto. It is designed for those people especially interested in matters related to children and youth. Some of the articles may relate primarily to broad criminal justice issues but have been chosen because we felt they also have relevance for those interested primarily in matters related to children and youth. Each issue of the *Children and Youth* edition contains “Headlines and Conclusions” for each of 6 articles, followed by one-page summaries of each article.

Criminological Highlights is prepared at the University of Toronto by Anthony Doob, Rosemary Gartner, Maria Jung, Alexandra Lysova, Natasha Madon, Katharina Maier, Holly Pelvin, Andrea Shier, Jane Sprott, Adriel Weaver and Scot Wortley. The *Children and Youth* edition is compiled by Melissa Sickmund at NCJJ and Anthony Doob and Rosemary Gartner at the University of Toronto. Views – expressed or implied – in this publication are not necessarily those of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, the National Center for Juvenile Justice, or the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Full issues of *Criminological Highlights* are available at www.criminology.utoronto.ca and directly by email. Email Anthony.Doob@utoronto.ca or Rosemary.Gartner@utoronto.ca if you would like to be added to the email distribution list. The *Children and Youth* edition is also available from www.ncjj.org and www.ncjfcj.org

A meta-analysis of 27 independent findings demonstrates that minority suspects who come in contact with the police are more likely to be arrested than white suspects.

“The results are not mixed. Race matters [in police decisions on whether to arrest]. [The] finding is consistent with what most of the American public perceives, and that finding holds over time, research site, across data collection methods, and across publication types. Furthermore, controlling for demeanour, offense severity, presence of witnesses, quality of evidence at the scene, the occurrence or discovery of a new criminal offence during the encounter, the suspect being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, prior record of the suspects, or requests to arrest by victims does not significantly reduce the strength of the relationship between suspect race and arrest” (p. 498). Even though the overall average size of the effect might seem to be relatively small, “because of the interconnectedness of decisions made in the criminal justice system, even small racial differences that occur at many points in the criminal justice process will compound and produce profound effects further along in the system” (p. 498).

..... Page 4

A targeted pre-school program had beneficial effects for the next 40 years.

Other studies have demonstrated that investment in the lives of children early in their lives can have crime reduction effects (*Criminological Highlights* 1(5)#6, 4(2)#1) along with other benefits. The detailed data from this study, and from others, suggest that the effects of interventions in the lives of young children can be long-lasting and some of the beneficial effects may not be evident until decades after the end of the program. It appears, however, that necessary ingredients for success in this program were that it involved “fully qualified or well-supervised teachers using a proven curriculum model, engaging parents as partners, and regularly assessing program implementation and children’s development” (p. 404).

..... Page 5

A study of serious delinquents demonstrates that most serious delinquents – even high rate offenders - did not persist in their delinquent careers after being found delinquent. Furthermore long stays in prison did not reduce reoffending and for some youths appeared to increase the likelihood of future offending.

“The considerable heterogeneity in offending patterns in the immediate years after court involvement challenges the political rhetoric in juvenile justice and the popular and scientific fixation on identifying lifelong antisocial personality problems. These results do *not* support the view that serious offenders are headed toward a life of crime. Most, in fact, had very low levels of involvement during the entire 3-year follow-up period. Furthermore, for these youths, “incarceration may not be the most appropriate or effective option, even for many of the most serious adolescent offenders. Longer stays in juvenile facilities did not reduce reoffending; institutional placement even raised offending levels in those with the lowest level of offending” (Paper 2, p. 3).

..... Page 6

When criminal justice interventions appear to be ‘too good to be true’ it is probably because the results being described *are* too good to be true.

This study demonstrates that good design does matter: favourable results in criminal justice research are more likely to be shown in inadequately designed studies than in studies with adequate designs. The presence of a randomized or comparable control group is almost always a necessary condition for drawing any inferences about the efficacy of a criminal justice intervention. Studies without adequate designs cannot be taken seriously.

..... Page 7

Americans who are most likely to favour highly punitive measures for young people who commit crime also are likely to hold strong anti-Black attitudes and to be members of the Tea Party Movement.

“Prior research demonstrates the widespread typification of crime, especially youth crime, as a black phenomenon.... Thus the results in this study provide support for group threat theory by demonstrating that favourable attitudes to coercive crime control policies, which scholars have long suggested ‘provide white Americans with a means to control or subordinate black people’ ... are greater among Tea Partiers – individuals who hold especially negative views about blacks and who are presumably the most anxious about the Obama presidency” (p. 183). But in addition to Tea Party membership, those respondents who expressed resentment about favourable treatment of Black Americans were especially likely to express punitive attitudes towards youth who offend.

..... Page 8

Providing work opportunities to heavy drug users reduces their offending, but does little to reduce cocaine and heroin use.

Clearly the long term success of any transitional job program such as this one depends in large part on the ability of the labour market to absorb the workers at the end of the program. What is notable about this program, however, is that “it provides strong evidence for a causal relationship between work and arrest” (p. 124): arrests for robbery and burglary were reduced significantly. “The program accomplished these reductions by providing income that would not otherwise be available through legitimate channels” (p. 124). The results support a harm reduction approach that gauges success beyond simple abstinence from all drugs. “Supported employment programs for heavy substance users represent a promising model for reducing predatory crimes such as robbery or burglary” (p. 125).

..... Page 9

A meta-analysis of 27 independent findings demonstrates that minority suspects who come in contact with the police are more likely to be arrested than white suspects.

Researchers interested in the effect of race on the decision by police to arrest a suspect typically attempt to control for legal factors such as the strength of the evidence against the accused, the seriousness of the offence, the criminal record and any mandatory policies that might exist in the jurisdiction. Defining arrest as “taking a person into custody for the purpose of charging him/her with a criminal offence”, this study examines all available high quality studies carried out in the U.S. between 1966 and 2004.

A thorough search of published and unpublished sources located studies involving 27 independent data sets. Obviously these studies varied on a number of dimensions including whether the data were recorded by an observer, the police officer, or victims, whether the study focused on juveniles or people of all ages, and whether the study controlled for such factors as the amount of evidence, type of offence, the demeanour of the offender, the seriousness of the offence, the suspect's prior record, and whether the victim made a request to the officer on whether to arrest the accused. The meta-analysis allows one to determine whether the inclusion of these variables affects the relationship between race and arrest rate.

Because some studies reported more than one estimate of the impact of race on arrest decisions, four different estimates were used: the average effect size, the largest, the smallest, and what was judged to be the methodologically best estimate of the effect. Nevertheless, the results are remarkably similar: between 19 and 24 of the 27 studies (depending on which effect size is included) show effects supporting the conclusion that minorities are more likely to be arrested

than whites. Pooling across the 27 studies there was a significant effect of race. On average the arrest rate for whites was about 20%; for minorities it was about 26%. Studies varied, of course, on how adequately they controlled for legally relevant factors. However, the adequacy of the controls for legally relevant factors was not related to the race effect: even in the best studies, Blacks were more likely to be arrested than Whites. Similarly, those studies that attempted to control for the demeanour of the suspect showed effects as large as those that did not.

Conclusion: “The results are not mixed. Race matters [in police decisions on whether to arrest]. [The] finding is consistent with what most of the American public perceives, and that finding holds over time, research site, across data collection methods, and across publication types. Furthermore, controlling for demeanour, offense severity, presence of witnesses, quality of evidence at the scene, the occurrence or discovery of a new criminal offence during the encounter, the suspect being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, prior record of the suspects, or requests to arrest by victims does not significantly reduce the strength of the

relationship between suspect race and arrest” (p. 498). Even though the overall average size of the effect might seem to be relatively small, “because of the interconnectedness of decisions made in the criminal justice system, even small racial differences that occur at many points in the criminal justice process will compound and produce profound effects further along in the system” (p. 498).

Reference: Kochel, Tammy Rinehart, David B. Wilson, and Stephen D. Mastrofski. Effect of Suspect Race on Officers' Arrest Decisions. *Criminology* 49(2), 473-512.

A targeted pre-school program had beneficial effects for the next 40 years.

Few knowledgeable people believe that the best way to reduce crime is through investments in the criminal justice system. Even though harsh penalties including imprisonment do not appear to be effective means of addressing crime (see the collections of *Criminological Highlights* on these subjects at <http://criminology.utoronto.ca/criminological-highlights>), a reasonable question might be: what else can be done? This paper demonstrates that investments in a two year pre-school program for “at risk” children can have lasting effects.

Children from low socioeconomic status African-American families who showed low intellectual performance at age 3-4 were recruited into the study and were then randomly assigned either to receive a pre-school program or no program. Program children attended school daily for 2.5 hours for two years. In addition, the teachers in the children’s school visited the program children’s homes once a week to talk to parents and engage them in the education process. The goal of the program might be described as focusing school and family efforts on the development of the child’s cognitive and social skills. The control group received the normal educational and social services available to anyone in the community. The participants and control group have now been followed for 40 years in order to see whether the experiences had long term effects.

People who had been randomly assigned to the program group at age 3-4 were more likely to graduate from high school (or equivalent) than children in the control group. Compared to the control group, at age 40 the program group was more likely to be employed, have higher incomes, and own their own homes. In

addition, by age 40, the program group was less likely to have been arrested for violent, property or drug crimes. Generally speaking these effects held for both males and females. Furthermore, the program participants were less likely to have been sentenced to prison or jail and, generally speaking, were less likely to have spent long periods on probation or in prison.

It appears that the preschool experience improved participants’ early childhood intellectual experience. This in turn, improved commitment to schooling at age 15 and performance in school as a teenager. Higher educational achievement led to higher earnings and less involvement in crime. Obviously, there were criminal justice savings from the program. For example, 52% of the control group was sentenced to at least some time in jail or prison compared to 28% of the program group. 23% of the control group was sentenced to prison for more than 2 years, compared to only 12% of the program group. In 2013 dollars, the program cost \$20,019 per participant. An analysis suggests that much more than this was saved in criminal justice costs alone.

Conclusion: Other studies have demonstrated that investment in the lives of children early in their lives can have crime reduction effects (*Criminological Highlights* 1(5)#6, 4(2)#1) along with other benefits. The detailed data from this study, and from others, suggest that the effects of interventions in the lives of young children can be long-lasting and some of the beneficial effects may not be evident until decades after the end of the program. It appears, however, that necessary ingredients for success in this program were that it involved “fully qualified or well-supervised teachers using a proven curriculum model, engaging parents as partners, and regularly assessing program implementation and children’s development” (p. 404).

Reference: Schweinhart, Lawrence J. (2013). Long-term Follow-up of a Preschool Experiment. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 9, 389-409.

A study of serious delinquents demonstrates that most serious delinquents – even high rate offenders - did not persist in their delinquent careers after being found delinquent. Furthermore long stays in prison did not reduce reoffending and for some youths appeared to increase the likelihood of future offending.

Some political rhetoric would lead one to the conclusion that youth crime can effectively be addressed by identifying serious adolescent offenders, and then treating or incapacitating them. The difficulty, as many studies have shown, is that even defining who is a persistent or serious offender is problematic, and those who are labelled as serious or persistent do not necessarily persist (e.g., see *Criminological Highlights* 1(3)#7) 11(3)#1). These papers examine the offending patterns, over a 3-year period, of 1,354 serious young offenders, age 14-18, from two U.S. cities.

All of the youths in this study had been found guilty of a serious crime (mostly serious crimes against the person) and for most of the youths, this was not their first appearance in court. They (and a parent) were interviewed shortly after they were adjudicated as delinquent and roughly every 6 months thereafter and their self-reports of offending were recorded.

The youths were divided into 5 distinct groups on the basis of their 3-year offending patterns. 24% of these serious offenders were low rate to start with and almost never offended again. 34% of the youths had offended at a relatively low rate in the beginning of the period, but their offending rates declined over time. About 18% started with a moderate rate and continued offending at this rate throughout the 3-year follow-up. 15% started off with high rates of offending but declined to a very low rate over the 3 years. Finally, 9% started off with high rates of offending and remained relatively high.

For four of these five groups – all except those with initially low rates of offending - the more time the youth spent in the community rather than in custody, the higher the rate of offending, a result not surprising given that ‘time in the

community’ equates with ‘opportunity to offend’. For the stable low rate offenders, however, (24% of the original sample) more time in institutional care was associated with *higher* rates of offending. Incarceration for them, it would seem, increased subsequent offending. In addition, ‘time in custody’ did not differentiate the two groups that started off with high rates of offending. The two high rate offending groups – those starting high and dropping off dramatically across the three year period (14% of the total sample) and those starting high and persisting with high rates of offending (9% of actual offending) — spent almost exactly the same amount of time in custody.

Hence the data show that “even within a sample of juvenile offenders that is limited to those convicted of the most serious crimes, the percentage who continue to offend consistently at a high level is very small... [Moreover] our ability to predict which high-frequency offenders desist from crime and which do not is exceedingly limited...” (p. 469-470) even though the researchers had a total of 22 measures on the youth (including psychological assessments), the youth’s family background, and peers.

Conclusion: “The considerable heterogeneity in offending patterns in the immediate years after court involvement challenges the political rhetoric in juvenile justice and the popular and scientific fixation on identifying lifelong antisocial personality problems. These results do *not* support the view that serious offenders are headed toward a life of crime. Most, in fact, had very low levels of involvement during the entire 3-year follow-up period. Furthermore, for these youths, “incarceration may not be the most appropriate or effective option, even for many of the most serious adolescent offenders. Longer stays in juvenile facilities did not reduce reoffending; institutional placement even raised offending levels in those with the lowest level of offending” (Paper 2, p, 3).

Reference: Mulvey, Edward P., Laurence Steinberg, Alex R. Piquero, Michelle Besana, Jeffrey Fagan, Carol Schubert, and Elizabeth Cauffman (2010). *Development and Psychopathology* 22, 453-475. Mulvey, Edward P. Highlights from Pathways to Desistance. OJJDP Juvenile Justice Fact Sheet, March 2011.

When criminal justice interventions appear to be ‘too good to be true’ it is probably because the results being described *are* too good to be true.

Previous research that has examined the quality of research designs used to evaluate crime prevention interventions has shown that weaker research designs tend to show stronger effects (see, for example, *Criminological Highlights*, 4(2)#8). For example, simple “before vs. after” research designs that control for almost nothing (e.g., that do not control for other independent events occurring at the same time, trends that have nothing to do with the intervention, selection of different people or locations into the ‘treatment’ and ‘control’ groups, regression effects, maturation effects) tend to show stronger effects of a crime prevention intervention than do studies that have adequate controls.

There is a large body of research evaluating the effectiveness of various surveillance methods – e.g., closed circuit television (CCTV) and improved street lighting – on crime. A review of only high quality studies in these areas suggests, for example, that CCTV is effective in certain situations (e.g., in automobile parking lots) and that improved street lighting is more effective in reducing property than violent crimes.

In recent years, there have been 5 systematic reviews of public area surveillance studies that looked at a total of 136 separate evaluations. Each of these studies was coded as finding the intended positive effect (that the intervention reduced crime), no effect (or an effect that was reported as being not statistically significant) or a negative effect (supporting the conclusion that the intervention was harmful). Overall 49% of the studies showed the intended positive effect, 43% showed no effect, and 7% showed a negative effect.

A common problem with research in this area is in not having an adequate control or comparison group: 37% of the studies did not have a comparison group, and an additional 19% had a non-comparable control group.

Of the 60 studies that had a control group that was comparable to the group that received the intervention, 37% showed crime reducing effects of the intervention. Of those studies with no control or a non-comparable control, 59% presented results that suggested that there were crime reducing effects of the intervention.

The difficulty, of course, is that often the interventions that are studied are implemented in a manner that makes it difficult or impossible to evaluate them adequately. In addition, those responsible for criminal justice interventions whose careers may well be affected by the outcome of evaluations of what they are doing may not have the motivation to carry out studies with fully adequate controls.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that good design does matter: favourable results in criminal justice research are more likely to be shown in inadequately designed studies than in studies with adequate designs. The presence of a randomized or comparable control group is almost always a necessary condition for drawing any inferences about the efficacy of a criminal justice intervention. Studies without adequate designs cannot be taken seriously.

Reference: Welsh, Brandon C., Meghan E. Peel, David P. Farrington, Henk Elffers, and Anthony A. Braga (2011). Research Design Influence on Study Outcomes in Crime and Justice: A Partial Replication with Public Area Surveillance. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 7, 183-198.

Americans who are most likely to favour highly punitive measures for young people who commit crime also are likely to hold strong anti-Black attitudes and to be members of the Tea Party Movement.

In the US, there are contradictory explanations of the strong anti-Obama views of members of the American “Tea Party Movement” (TPM). TPM supporters suggest that their complaint about government is not related to race (or the fact that the US president is Black), but instead reflects their opposition to the size of the US government and its specific policies (e.g., the government’s support for publicly funded health care). On the other hand, racial threat theorists suggest that the TPM is driven largely by race issues.

Other research has suggested that those who view crime as being disproportionately committed by Blacks are likely to be more punitive (see *Criminological Highlights* 1(1)#7, 10(3)#5, 13(1)#4). This paper examines the relationship of support for the TPM and racial resentment (the view that Black Americans are currently treated more favourably than they deserve) to the view that the US should “get tough” in its youth justice policies.

A representative sample of 961 adult Americans were interviewed on the telephone during the summer of 2010. They were asked to indicate their support for various youth justice policies such as “Trying more juvenile offenders in adult court”, “Locking up more juvenile offenders”, and “Putting violent juvenile offenders in adult prisons” (p. 174). Racial resentment was measured by the level of agreement with statements such as “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites” or “Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up.

Blacks should do the same without any special favours” (p. 176). Respondents were also asked if they consider themselves to be members of the TPM. In addition, data on various other control measures including income, gender, political ideology, perceived risk of being a victim of crime, and TV viewing were obtained.

Not surprisingly, people who identified themselves as being conservative, those who said they were at risk from crime, those who watched a lot of local news on TV, and those who did not think that offenders could be rehabilitated were more likely to favour punitive youth policies. On the other hand, older respondents, those with high levels of education and crime victims were less likely to favour punitive policies.

However, above and beyond those effects, those harbouring strong feelings of racial resentment towards blacks and those who considered themselves to be tea party members were more likely to support harsh youth justice penalties. Part – but not all - of the relationship between TPM membership and support for harsh youth justice policies appears to be mediated by racial resentment.

Conclusion: “Prior research demonstrates the widespread typification of crime, especially youth crime, as a black phenomenon.... Thus the results in this study provide support for group threat theory by demonstrating that favourable attitudes to coercive crime control policies, which scholars have long suggested ‘provide white Americans with a means to control or subordinate black people’ ... are greater among Tea Partiers – individuals who hold especially negative views about blacks and who are presumably the most anxious about the Obama presidency” (p. 183). But in addition to Tea Party membership, those respondents who expressed resentment about favourable treatment of Black Americans were especially likely to express punitive attitudes towards youth who offend.

Reference: Pickett, Justin T., Daniel Tope, and Rose Bellandi (2014). “Taking Back Our Country”: Tea Party Membership and Support for Punitive Crime Control Policies. *Sociological Inquiry* 84(2), 167-190.

Providing work opportunities to heavy drug users reduces their offending, but does little to reduce cocaine and heroin use.

Providing work opportunities to offenders or those involved in drugs is always controversial, especially in periods of relatively high unemployment. Programs that provide jobs to those seen as undeserving – drug offenders for example – may need to justify themselves by providing evidence that they reduce crime. The question raised by this paper is whether providing jobs to recently incarcerated, unemployed, heavy drug users reduces crime and drug use.

Work might reduce people's involvement in crime as a result of a number of different factors. Those receiving jobs may have less time to engage in criminal activities. Work may increase informal social controls, by strengthening the social ties that those who are given jobs have with non-offenders. However, while some studies show favourable impacts of work programs, the effect is not uniform for all groups (see *Criminological Highlights* 4(3)#6, 6(3)#6, 6(5)#7).

This study uses data that were collected in the 1970s. Members of a group of drug-involved offenders were randomly assigned to an experimental group who were offered "supported work", or subsidized jobs (typically in construction or manufacturing). They, and the control group that were not offered jobs, were also involved in drug treatment programs. All participants had been incarcerated and all were unemployed.

More than half of both groups completed the three year follow-up period without using drugs. However, the proportions of the two groups that reported using drugs during this three year follow-up were similar. In other words, the supported work program "had little effect on relapse to cocaine or heroin use" (p. 113).

However, the 'supported work' group was significantly less likely to be arrested for any crime, including robbery or burglary. Differences in arrest rates showed up after about 9 months and the size of the difference increased over time. At the end of the 18 month period (during which the members of one group were guaranteed jobs under the supported work program) 26% of those offered subsidized jobs had been arrested for any crime compared to 32% of the control group. Only 7% of those who received subsidized jobs were arrested for robbery or burglary compared to 13% in the control group. The difference between the two groups continued to the end of the 3-year follow-up period. Other analyses suggest that the difference is, in large part, due to the difference in the income available to members of the two groups.

Although the data suggest that providing jobs reduced offending, the jobs program had little impact on drug use. Data from another more contemporary study using interviews with drug users suggested that combining drug use with work was very difficult. However, even though it was difficult, work was seen as necessary to keep from returning to a life of selling and using drugs. What may have happened is that "the basic controls and

structure provided by the supported work program may in fact have held drug use in check, while the income provided by the program curtailed involvement in systematic economic crime" (p. 122).

Conclusion: Clearly the long term success of any transitional job program such as this one depends in large part on the ability of the labour market to absorb the workers at the end of the program. What is notable about this program, however, is that "it provides strong evidence for a causal relationship between work and arrest" (p. 124): arrests for robbery and burglary were reduced significantly. "The program accomplished these reductions by providing income that would not otherwise be available through legitimate channels" (p. 124). The results support a harm reduction approach that gauges success beyond simple abstinence from all drugs. "Supported employment programs for heavy substance users represent a promising model for reducing predatory crimes such as robbery or burglary" (p. 125).

Reference: Uggen, Christopher and Sarah K. S. Shannon (2014). Productive Addicts and Harm Reduction: How Work Reduces Crime – But Not Drug Use. *Social Problems* 61(1), 105-130.