



Centre for Criminology & Sociolegal Studies  
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# *Criminological* Highlights

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*Criminological Highlights* is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is currently being published. Each issue contains “Headlines and Conclusions” for each of 8 articles, followed by one-page summaries of each article.

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*Criminological Highlights* is prepared by Anthony Doob, Rosemary Gartner, Samantha Aeby, Jacqueline Briggs, Giancarlo Fiorella, Maria Jung, Erick Laming, Katharina Maier, Holly Pelvin, Andrea Shier, and Jane Sprott.

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This issue of *Criminological Highlights* addresses the following questions:

1. Are the harmful effects on children of the imprisonment of a parent short-lived?
2. When are crime prevention programs cost-effective?
3. Does the research evidence suggest that body-worn cameras change police behaviour?
4. Why are victims of violent crimes likely also to commit violent offences?
5. Should cities invest in ‘streetworkers’ to help get people to quit being gang members?
6. What should we think about when creating programs to help ex-prisoners re-enter society?
7. Does sending people to prison deter them from committing offences in the future?
8. Why can’t we assume that a crime prevention program that has been shown to be effective will, in fact, be effective when implemented in a new setting?

**Prison sentences punish more than just the person who is imprisoned: Children who experience the imprisonment of a parent are likely to suffer in a number of social and personal domains when they become young adults.**

It is clear that there are immediate and long-term harmful effects on the children of those who are incarcerated. Incarceration “may harm children through distinct causal mechanisms [such as] less supervision of children, which in turn may result in lower school attendance, reduced emotional attachment and weakened social skills [along with] financial insecurity” (p. 26). Although sentencing laws and practice do not normally explicitly take into account the harmful effects of imprisonment on the offspring of those being sentenced, findings such as these raise serious questions about the overall usefulness of incarceration in circumstances where other punishments could be imposed as alternatives.

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**Though there are not many well-executed studies of the benefits and costs of crime prevention programs, what data there are suggest some types of programs can be considered to pay for themselves.**

One advantage of developmental prevention is that its monetary benefits often go far beyond reduced crime. “On the basis of benefit-cost ratios, the most cost-beneficial developmental crime prevention programs include preschool intellectual enrichment and cognitive-behavioural treatment” (p. 490) both of which are likely to lead to long-term benefits far beyond simple crime reduction. However, situational and community-based programs also have shown monetary benefits. The most important lesson, perhaps, is that crime prevention programs need to be implemented in a fashion that allows for rigorous long-term evaluation. The evaluation itself may be difficult and involve non-trivial investment of resources. Without it, however, ineffective – or even harmful – programs are likely to continue to be implemented.

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**It is not clear that wearing body cameras will reduce the use of force by police.**

Although the experiment carried out and reported here used ‘randomized’ procedures, it cannot be said that the results are conclusive. The method whereby in a given week, a specific officer would sometimes wear a body-worn camera (BWC) and sometimes not means that the experiment was likely always to be a salient part of their thinking. But in addition, the study relies, necessarily, on reports by the police as well as (in the second study) complaints by citizens, rather than any form of objective or disinterested assessment of police behaviour. Thus, we have no way of knowing whether a reduction in complaints about the police – which, in this study, was *not* related to the wearing of BWCs – was because of improved police behaviour or because those who came in contact with the police and would, otherwise, have filed a complaint did not do so for fear that some aspect of their own behaviour (e.g., bad language directed at a police officer) would come under increased scrutiny. On the basis of these two studies and others it seems premature to conclude that this equipment helps reduce the use of force by police.

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**Children and youths who are victimized are more likely, subsequently, to commit violent offences because the victimization experience increases the likelihood that they will anticipate positive feelings about their own violent offending and will decrease their anticipated feelings of shame.**

It was found that “being victimized influences people’s experience and appraisal of subsequent interpersonal conflict situations, which in turn influences the likelihood that they will engage in violent offending in these future situations.... More specifically, the results showed that prior victimization increases the likelihood that individuals anticipate positive feelings about violent offending while reducing feelings of shame.... [Furthermore] feeling good about violence increased the likelihood of engaging in violent offending....” (p. 300). “The effect of victimization on later offending was partially mediated by an altered appraisal of violent situations” (p. 301).

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**Well-intentioned gang streetworker programs designed to help people move out of gangs are more likely to increase offending than to decrease it.**

This program was implemented and monitored carefully. Measurement of gun violence in the two groups was carried out in an equivalent manner. Hence the increase in violence associated with gang streetworkers needs to be taken seriously, especially given the rather mixed findings over the past 60 years of research on this approach to dealing with gang violence. Although it is not known for certain why this 'crime prevention' program *increased*, rather than decreased, serious crime, it is thought that the intervention "may have strengthened gang identify and cohesion by its extensive use of group-based programming" (p. 15). "Given the existing evidence base, jurisdictions suffering from gang violence problems should be advised to avoid implementing gang streetworker programs" (p. 17). More generally the lesson is clear: it cannot be assumed that well-intentioned anti-crime treatments can do no harm.

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**Crafting and evaluating programs that contribute to the peaceful re-entry of prisoners into society need to be taken seriously. Effective programs appear to be those that address directly the factors leading to offending in those most likely to reoffend.**

The problem faced by those concerned with prisoner re-entry is that "re-entry programs are marked by a lack of a clear theoretical model and by a failure to specify which risk factors are being targeted and whether [these identified risk factors] are empirically established predictors of recidivism. In many instances, program advocates seem to rely on liberal common sense that doing something for [former prisoners]... will improve their lives and enable them to escape a life in crime. This intuition may not be fully incorrect, but it ignores the reality that interventions will likely fail or have only modest results when targeting weak predictors of recidivism or targeting them in the wrong way" (p. 555). "Good intentions may have disappointing results" (p. 564). It turns out that in this area, as in many others, there is no good substitute for good data.

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**For some people who are found guilty in criminal courts, it is plausible that they could either receive a prison sentence or they could be given a community based sanction. A U.K. study found that after one year in the community, those who had been sent to prison were more likely to commit an offence.**

"The results of this research add to the growing evidence base [suggesting] that the experience of prison can be criminogenic" (p. 1072). In this study, being sent to prison "was associated with a small but significant increase in the proportion of people reoffending... and a substantial increase in the proportion of individuals being incarcerated.... [These findings are] strikingly similar to others found in England, the US, the Netherlands, and Switzerland" (p. 1070).

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**Two long-term childhood psychosocial interventions into the lives of 7 year olds showed almost no positive effects on delinquency, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviour when the children were 13-15 years old, even though the programs had previously been evaluated by their designers.**

Various explanations might be offered for the failure of the two programs to show favourable effects. One possibility is that they were universal rather than targeted programs and simply aren't powerful enough to show strong effects, especially since the attendance rate of parents was rather low in one program. Alternatively, it could be that – notwithstanding favourable impacts reported by those who developed the programs – the programs simply aren't effective when implemented by those who are committed to following a curriculum and have no financial or intellectual interest in the outcome. It could be that these programs are not effective in school settings where other educational and behavioural programs are already part of the curriculum as they were in Zurich. Finally, it could be that "it simply is not realistic to expect a long-term effect of these programs on later delinquency and problem behaviour" (p. 42). There was one important benefit, however: by allowing a high quality independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs, the Zurich school system determined that two program that had 'promise' did not work in that setting.

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## **Prison sentences punish more than just the person who is imprisoned: Children who experience the imprisonment of a parent are likely to suffer in a number of social and personal domains when they become young adults.**

It is estimated that more than half of American prison inmates have children and that about 1 in 43 American children have an incarcerated parent. There is a growing body of literature demonstrating the negative impact of imprisonment on the children of those imprisoned (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* 14(2)#1). A substantial amount of this research focuses on the immediate effects on children. This paper examines whether these negative effects are evident when the children who experienced the imprisonment of a parent reach adulthood.

The study analyzed data collected as part of the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health between 1994 and 2008. It used a statistical technique known as propensity score matching, where youths are given a score – in this case based on 20 variables – on their likelihood of having a parent incarcerated. The variables used to create the measure of the likelihood of having an incarcerated parent included the youth's race, economic situation, family structure, parental alcoholism or drug use, and neighbourhood disorder and safety. Youths who, as adolescents, had a parent who had been incarcerated at least once were matched with youths whose parents were not incarcerated but had the same likelihood of ending up in prison. The circumstances of these children at age 18-24 and 26-34 were then examined on eight different measures.

“Across different domains in early young adulthood [age 18-24], parental incarceration... is associated with greater levels of grown children's offending, mental health problems (i.e., depression), and illegal drug use... In addition, children of incarcerated parents obtain less formal education and are more likely to cohabit [but not marry]” (p. 21). The size of some of these effects is not small: offending rates

are about 26% higher for those who had experienced the incarceration of a parent. These effects carry over to the later time period (when the youths were young adults, age 26-34). In some cases (e.g., criminal offending) the effects of having experienced the incarceration of a parent were larger at this later stage of the young person's life. But in addition, when they were age 26-34, those who had experienced the incarceration of a parent were more likely to report problems with alcohol and lower annual earnings. On average, those who had experienced the incarceration of a parent earned about three thousand dollars less per year.

Other published work demonstrates that “parental incarceration... can adversely affect young children and does so along multiple life domains, including offending, health, and education... [These results suggest that] parental incarceration may constitute a turning point that exerts harmful effects during and after the transition into adulthood” (p. 24-5). Obviously, the effect of parental incarceration may vary “depending on how frequently parents have been incarcerated, the duration of a parent's incarceration... and whether children reside with their parents during the transition into adulthood” (p. 27).

*Conclusion:* It is clear that there are immediate and long-term harmful effects on the children of those who are incarcerated. Incarceration “may harm children through distinct causal mechanisms [such as] less supervision of children, which in turn may result in lower school attendance, reduced emotional attachment and weakened social skills [along with] financial insecurity” (p. 26). Although sentencing laws and practice do not normally explicitly take into account the harmful effects of imprisonment on the offspring of those being sentenced, findings such as these raise serious questions about the overall usefulness of incarceration in circumstances where other punishments could be imposed as alternatives.

*Reference:* Mears, Daniel P., and Sonja E. Siennick (2016). Young Adult Outcomes and the Life-Course Penalties of Parental Incarceration. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(1), 3-35.

## **Though there are not many well-executed studies of the benefits and costs of crime prevention programs, what data there are suggest some types of programs can be considered to pay for themselves.**

When a crime prevention program is shown to be effective, it is reasonable to ask a second question: Is the program worth its costs? This paper examines only programs that have been evaluated using high quality experimental or quasi-experimental designs and have looked at both monetary benefits and costs. Remarkably, there were only 23 studies that met these criteria.

In thinking about the benefits of programs, one needs to consider that for certain types of programs – programs that attempt to ensure that youths have healthy early lives, for example – the benefits are almost certainly underestimated if one looks only at the crime-related outcomes. Situational crime prevention programs, on the other hand, are likely to have benefits only in the area of reduced crime. Some costs are relatively easy to estimate (imprisonment costs, for example) whereas others (e.g. the psychological costs to victims) are less straightforward. A second problem in estimating benefits is that for some programs – programs aimed at parental child-rearing practices or other issues early in development – the crime-prevention benefits are not expected to be demonstrated until many years later. Costly interventions in the lives of very young children, therefore, might not appear to be cost-effective *in terms of crime prevention* until many years later even though there may be more immediate benefits to the child. A comprehensive study of an early developmental intervention program would ideally, therefore, evaluate not only a wide variety of crime reduction benefits, but also reductions in substance abuse and health costs, success in education and employment, and benefits to other family members. And it would follow the children for many years.

Eleven studies of developmental prevention were examined. Interventions varied in length from 10 weeks to 6 years and typically involved a focus on ‘at risk’ children shortly after birth or in some cases when a woman found out she was pregnant. Seven studies had long follow-up periods (7-36 years). All had high quality research designs. For most of them, the benefits substantially exceeded costs. Eight showed unambiguously favourable benefit-to-cost ratios. “Developmental prevention appears to be a highly promising strategy in reducing the monetary costs associated with delinquency and later criminal offending and improving the life-course development of at-risk children and their families” (p. 473).

Eight situational crime prevention programs were examined on such matters as improved lighting in high crime areas. In six of them, there were favourable benefit-cost ratios, but the follow-up periods tended to be rather short. In addition, they tend to be more likely to show positive effects on crime when implemented in high crime areas.

Four high quality studies of community crime prevention were found. These interventions are “intended to change the social conditions that are believed to sustain crime in residential communities” (p. 484) and often attempt to intervene

in ways that address specific issues within a given community. These, too, tended to show favourable benefit-to-cost ratios.

*Conclusion:* One advantage of developmental prevention is that its monetary benefits often go far beyond reduced crime. “On the basis of benefit-cost ratios, the most cost-beneficial developmental crime prevention programs include preschool intellectual enrichment and cognitive-behavioural treatment” (p. 490) both of which are likely to lead to long-term benefits far beyond simple crime reduction. However, situational and community-based programs also have shown monetary benefits. The most important lesson, perhaps, is that crime prevention programs need to be implemented in a fashion that allows for rigorous long-term evaluation. The evaluation itself may be difficult and involve non-trivial investment of resources. Without it, however, ineffective – or even harmful – programs are likely to continue to be implemented.

*Reference:* Welsh, Brandon, David P. Farrington, and B. Raffan Gowar (2015). Benefit-Cost Analysis of Crime Prevention Programs. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, (Michael Tonry, ed.), 44, 447-516. University of Chicago Press.

## It is not clear that wearing body cameras will reduce the use of force by police.

Although police are authorized to use force against civilians in certain circumstances, incidents involving inappropriate or excessive police use of force that happened to be recorded have led to the suggestion that the police should be equipped with body worn cameras (BWC) as a way to reduce violent acts by and against the police. The assumption appears to be that if police and citizens know that their actions will be recorded, their use of violence will decrease. The results of studies of BWCs are not, at this point, conclusive, though there is some evidence suggesting that they are effective in reducing police use of force on civilians (see, e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, 15(6)#8)

These two papers report findings from 10 separate experiments in 6 jurisdictions, mostly, apparently, in the U.K. Individual officers, on a given day, were randomly assigned to wear and use the BWC. Other officers, on each shift, were assigned to the comparison (No BWC) group. The unfortunate aspect of this design is that officers were constantly aware of whether or not they were wearing the BWC on each shift and, equally importantly, were aware of the fact that they were participating in an experiment. It undoubtedly would have been more 'true life' if BWCs had been made 'permanently' mandatory in some geographic areas and not others. If that had been done, officers would become accustomed to their new equipment. That design was, unfortunately, not used.

Three different measures were used in assessing the value of BWC:

- (1) Reports by officers of any use of force beyond verbal commands during an arrest.
- (2) Reports by officers of assaults by citizens on them, and
- (3) Complaints against the police filed by citizens.

Averaging across the 10 experiments, there was no overall impact on police use of force, as reported by police officers, in the shifts in which police had BWCs compared to those in which the BWCs

were not used. However, there was substantial variation across the sites, with 3 studies showing higher reporting of use of force during the control shifts and 7 showing more reports of police use of force when BWCs were worn. Interestingly, police themselves in 8 jurisdictions reported *higher* rates of assaults on them by citizens when they were wearing a BWC than when they were not. Finally, simply carrying out the study reduced dramatically the number of complaints filed against the police in all jurisdictions - though the complaints that were received were equally likely to relate to actions taken when officers were wearing BWCs as when they were not. It would seem that the publicity surrounding the experiment changed either police behaviour, or citizens' willingness or comfort in filing complaints, or both. The fact that the 'complaint rate' against officers wearing or not wearing BWCs was the same suggests that it is not the wearing of the BWC *per se* that is responsible for the apparent change in the rate at which complaints were lodged. .

*Conclusion:* Although the experiment carried out and reported here used 'randomized' procedures, it cannot be said that the results are conclusive. The method whereby in a given week, a specific officer would sometimes

wear a body-worn camera (BWC) and sometimes not means that the experiment was likely always to be a salient part of their thinking. But in addition, the study relies, necessarily, on reports by the police as well as (in the second study) complaints by citizens, rather than any form of objective or disinterested assessment of police behaviour. Thus, we have no way of knowing whether a reduction in complaints about the police - which, in this study, was *not* related to the wearing of BWCs - was because of improved police behaviour or because those who came in contact with the police and would, otherwise, have filed a complaint did not do so for fear that some aspect of their own behaviour (e.g., bad language directed at a police officer) would come under increased scrutiny. On the basis of these two studies and others it seems premature to conclude that this equipment helps reduce the use of force by police.

*Reference:* Ariel, Barak & 7 others (2016). Wearing Body Cameras Increases Assaults Against Officers and Does Not Reduce Police Use of Force. *European Journal of Criminology*. Contagious Accountability: A Global Multisite Randomized Control Trial on the Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Citizens' Complaints Against the Police. *Criminal Justice & Behaviour*, 20(10), 1-24.

**Children and youths who are victimized are more likely, subsequently, to commit violent offences because the victimization experience increases the likelihood that they will anticipate positive feelings about their own violent offending and will decrease their anticipated feelings of shame.**

There is a substantial literature demonstrating that victims of violence are, themselves, more likely than non-victims to commit violent acts. However, there is less evidence explaining why this relationship exists. This paper explores the hypothesis that “victims [of violence] become more attuned toward the benefits of violence perpetration than toward its costs” (p. 287).

The study uses longitudinal data from youths in Zurich, Switzerland, for four years starting from when the children were on average 11.3 years old. Various control measures (e.g., risky leisure activities, attitudes toward violence, self-control) were assessed when the child was 11.

When the child was approximately 13 years old, violent victimization in the previous 12 months (e.g., robbery, sexual assault, assault) was assessed. In addition, they were given 3 short vignettes about violent interactions with a same sex child to assess how they thought they would feel if they, themselves, acted violently. One was as follows: “Imagine that another adolescent from your school comes up to you and says “Get lost, you idiot!” so loudly that others can hear it. Refusing to take it, you punch the other adolescent right in the face. She/he falls on the floor, her/his pants rip, and she/he begins to bleed heavily from her/his nose. You yourself are unharmed. Other people are not involved.” Youths were then asked whether they would feel good doing this, whether they would be ashamed of their behaviour, whether their friends would admire them, and whether they thought the other person would retaliate.

Self-reports of “victimization [when the child was age 13 were] positively related to positive perceptions of violent action, including feeling good about violent behaviour and being admired by friends. In addition, victimization was negatively related to negative perceptions of violent action, including the perceived seriousness of violent behaviour, feeling ashamed with parents and friends, the perceived seriousness [of the violent acts] by friends, and the perceived risk of retaliation” (p. 293).

Two years later, when the youth was 15, they were asked about violence perpetration in the previous 12 months. As was expected, prior victimization (measured at age 13) was positively related to offending at age 15. The youths’ assessments (at age 13) of how they and others would feel if they committed violent acts were also related to reports of offending at age 15. For example, those who anticipated that their friends would admire them if they committed acts of violence reported committing more violence at age 15. More important, however, was the fact that the strength of the initial relationship between victimization prior to age 13, and reported violent offending at age 15 decreased by about 38% when the mediating factors of how the youths thought they would feel about

their own violence were included. Most notably, anticipating positive feelings about being violent appeared to account for a substantial amount of the victimization-offending relationship. When these feelings about the consequences of offending were controlled for, the relationship between prior victimization and offending was no longer statistically significant.

*Conclusion:* It was found that “being victimized influences people’s experience and appraisal of subsequent interpersonal conflict situations, which in turn influences the likelihood that they will engage in violent offending in these future situations.... More specifically, the results showed that prior victimization increases the likelihood that individuals anticipate positive feelings about violent offending while reducing feelings of shame.... [Furthermore] feeling good about violence increased the likelihood of engaging in violent offending....” (p. 300). “The effect of victimization on later offending was partially mediated by an altered appraisal of violent situations” (p. 301).

*Reference:* Averdijk, Margit, Jean-Louis Van Gelder, Manuel Eisner, and Denis Ribeaud (2016). Violence Begets Violence... But How? A Decision-Making Perspective on the Victim-Offender Overlap. *Criminology*, 54, 282-306.

## Well-intentioned gang streetworker programs designed to help people move out of gangs are more likely to increase offending than to decrease it.

Many levels of government invest scarce funds into programs that claim they will reduce offending, typically on the basis of testimonials or very persuasive sounding ‘case histories.’ The assumption appears to be that, at worst, these programs won’t work, and at best, they will help solve the crime problem. The difficulty, as this study (as well as others – e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, 5(4)#1, 6(2)#4) demonstrates, is that well-intentioned programs can make things worse. Said differently, crime prevention programs *can* cause increases in crime.

Gang streetworker programs have a long history. A 1950s program in Boston in which seven professionally-trained streetworkers were directed “to contact, establish relations with, and attempt to change resident gangs” (p.7) showed no favourable impact when compared to gangs that had not been part of the program. A Chicago study in the 1960s did show some effects: “the greatest delinquency *increases* [recorded in the study] were experienced by youth who were served *most* intensively by their assigned streetworkers” (p. 7). More recent studies show, at best, mixed results of similar gang intervention approaches, with one study carried out in Pittsburgh showing a “statistically significant *increase* in aggravated assaults and gun assaults in its targeted neighbourhoods” (p. 10). One explanation for these results is that “the presence of streetworkers may have increased the cohesion of gangs, making some gangs more organized, in turn leading to increased violence” (p. 10).

In Boston, a streetworker program was started in 2009. It “deployed 15 streetworkers to develop relationships with and serve members of the 20 treatment gangs. Most streetworkers were assigned to a single gang...”

(p. 11). Many of the streetworkers were former gang members who knew how gangs worked and were hired because of their specialized knowledge. The second strategy used in this program involved delivery of social services (e.g., life skills programs, education, employment opportunities) to treatment gang members.

Since concern about gun violence was the main impetus for starting the program, serious gun violence trends involving treatment gangs were compared, in a quasi-experimental design, to serious gun violence for equivalent gangs that did not receive treatment. Three different approaches to matching treated and untreated gangs were used.

If all one did is to look at changes within the gangs that were assigned a streetworker, it would seem that the treatment (gang streetworkers and providing services) was effective: shootings went down by 23%. However, the *untreated* gangs showed a 31% decrease in shootings. Compared to what would have happened with no intervention, then, it would seem that providing services *increased* the number of shootings beyond what would have happened without the intervention.

*Conclusion:* This program was implemented and monitored carefully. Measurement of gun violence in the two groups was carried out in an equivalent manner. Hence the increase in violence associated with gang streetworkers needs to be taken seriously, especially given the rather mixed findings over the past 60 years of research on this approach to dealing with gang violence. Although it is not known for certain why this ‘crime prevention’ program *increased*, rather than decreased, serious crime, it is thought that the intervention “may have strengthened gang identify and cohesion by its extensive use of group-based programming” (p. 15). “Given the existing evidence base, jurisdictions suffering from gang violence problems should be advised to avoid implementing gang streetworker programs” (p. 17). More generally the lesson is clear: it cannot be assumed that well-intentioned anti-crime treatments can do no harm.

*Reference:* Braga, Anthony A. (2016) The continued importance of measuring potentially harmful impacts of crime prevention programs. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 12, 1-20.

## **Crafting and evaluating programs that contribute to the peaceful re-entry of prisoners into society need to be taken seriously. Effective programs appear to be those that address directly the factors leading to offending in those most likely to reoffend.**

Even though thousands of sentenced prisoners are released each year from prisons (over 600,000 from state and federal prisons in the US in 2013 and about 10,000 in Canada serving sentences of a year or more), relatively little is done to help these former prisoners re-enter society as peaceful citizens, even though, at least in the US, public opinion polls suggest that the public supports the idea that public funds be invested in re-entry programs.

The challenge for those dedicated to helping prisoners re-enter society “is to avoid the trap of developing programs that ultimately prove to be ineffective. In fact the ... creation of numerous programs is far outstripping knowledge about what works in re-entry... and most programs are not evaluated” (p. 538). A challenge, of course, is that it is sometimes assumed that because programs that address observable problems that former prisoners face (e.g., employment, housing) can be justified on humanitarian grounds, they will also reduce re-offending. The data suggest that this cannot be assumed.

The data that are available suggest that high risk former prisoners will benefit from more intensive and extensive services. Low risk prisoners are unlikely to benefit from special services that might be provided to them. More generally, however, lack of integrity in program implementation – where those delivering services modify an existing program to fit what they think works – almost certainly ensures that even a program proven to be successful in previous studies will not be successful. One program, (*Criminological Highlights* 9(2)#4) for example, was implemented in a manner that the intervention was

clearly too brief to have a chance to be effective and had treatment groups that were at least twice as large as those that had been shown, in previous studies, to be effective. Furthermore, it did not include a key component of the original designed program.

An analysis of apparently effective re-entry programs suggests the following conclusions:

- (1) No single program is going to work for all ex-prisoners.
- (2) The evidence even on effective programs is slim; hence evaluation of all programs needs to be integrated into any re-entry program. Multiple continuing evaluations need to be carried out, especially when a program is implemented in a new setting.
- (3) It is difficult to generalize about what might be effective to new settings or different kinds of prisoners.

“The history of corrections instructs us that most programs fail, not only because they are poorly implemented but also because they were poorly conceived in the first place” (p. 552). It is suggested that the focus of programs should be on “those deficits (‘criminogenic needs’) that increase the likelihood that [former prisoners] will recidivate... and [the

focus should be] only on those causes of recidivism that can be changed” (p. 554).

*Conclusion:* The problem faced by those concerned with prisoner re-entry is that “re-entry programs are marked by a lack of a clear theoretical model and by a failure to specify which risk factors are being targeted and whether [these identified risk factors] are empirically established predictors of recidivism. In many instances, program advocates seem to rely on liberal common sense that doing something for [former prisoners]... will improve their lives and enable them to escape a life in crime. This intuition may not be fully incorrect, but it ignores the reality that interventions will likely fail or have only modest results when targeting weak predictors of recidivism or targeting them in the wrong way” (p. 555). “Good intentions may have disappointing results” (p. 564). It turns out that in this area, as in many others, there is no good substitute for good data.

*Reference:* Jonson, Cheryl Lero and Francis T. Cullen (2015). Prisoner Reentry Programs. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* (Michael Tonry, ed.), 44, 517-576.

**For some people who are found guilty in criminal courts, it is plausible that they could either receive a prison sentence or they could be given a community based sanction. A U.K. study found that after one year in the community, those who had been sent to prison were more likely to commit an offence.**

Though it is tempting to see incarceration as a way of reducing offending, existing data would suggest that those who are imprisoned rather than being given community sanctions are, if anything, *more* likely to reoffend (see *The Effects of Imprisonment: Specific Deterrence and Collateral Effects* <http://criminology.utoronto.ca/criminological-highlights/>). This study, carried out in the UK, compares the offending patterns of 1,162 people who were imprisoned with an equal number of comparable people who were given sentences involving community supervision.

The challenge in carrying out studies of the effects of imprisonment on crime are many, but the largest problem is creating an equivalent non-imprisoned comparison group. Although there have been some random or equivalent control trials (see *Criminological Highlights* 3(4)#4, 11(4)#2), clearly there are some people for whom equivalent comparators cannot be found (e.g., those whose offence almost automatically leads to a prison term and those whose offence almost never requires a prison term).

This study, then, uses 'propensity score matching' to identify equivalent pairs of male offenders who could have received either a prison sentence or a non-prison sentence. Of the more than 5000 people for whom data were available, reasonably equivalent pairs (one of whom went to prison, the other getting a community sanction) were found for 2,324 of them. Hence the study examines those who could have, under current practice, received either prison or a community sanction. All 2,324 of them were supervised in the community – either as

a sentence involving a community order, or after release from a prison sentence of at least one year. They were all followed for one year while being supervised in the community.

Those who had been sentenced to prison were significantly more likely than those given a community supervision order to be convicted of an offence within one year of the start of their supervision in the community (51.1% vs. 44.5% were reconvicted). Those who had previously been incarcerated were, as well, much more likely to be incarcerated as a result of their offence. In addition, those who had been incarcerated who did reoffend committed their first offence sooner than did those who had been sentenced to a community supervision order.

The sample was broken down into five groups that, roughly speaking, could be described in terms of their likelihood of being incarcerated at the time of their original sentencing. Generally speaking, the differences between the imprisoned and the community sanction group were largest

for those who, at the time of sentencing, were *least* likely to go to prison (e.g., those with the least serious offences and/or least serious criminal records). Said differently, prison seemed to have the largest negative impacts on those who were the most likely candidates for a sentence involving community supervision.

*Conclusion:* “The results of this research add to the growing evidence base [suggesting] that the experience of prison can be criminogenic” (p. 1072). In this study, being sent to prison “was associated with a small but significant increase in the proportion of people reoffending... and a substantial increase in the proportion of individuals being incarcerated.... [These findings are] strikingly similar to others found in England, the US, the Netherlands, and Switzerland” (p. 1070).

*Reference:* Jolliffe, Darrick and Carol Hedderman (2015). Investigating the Impact of Custody on Reoffending Using Propensity Score Matching. *Crime and Delinquency*, 61(8), 1051-1077.

## **Two long-term childhood psychosocial interventions into the lives of 7 year olds showed almost no positive effects on delinquency, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviour when the children were 13-15 years old, even though the programs had previously been evaluated by their designers.**

There is an increasing amount of evidence that “preventative action aimed at reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors during infancy and childhood can reduce the likelihood of later crime.... Among the most promising approaches are programs that target parenting skills and/or promote social and emotional skills during childhood” (p. 22).

This study examined two programs: “Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies” (PATHS) and the parenting program “Triple P.” The PATHS program is designed to “enhance affective, cognitive, and social competencies, and reduce aggression and behaviour problems in primary school-age children” (p. 24). Triple-P, on the other hand, is “a multilevel parent training program based on cognitive-behavioural therapy” (p. 24).

The programs were implemented as universal, population-level programs, rather than for particular subgroups of ‘at risk’ children, on the theory that all families and children could benefit from the programs. The programs were evaluated in 56 schools in Zurich, Switzerland. 14 sets of four similar schools were identified and then each school in a set was assigned to one of four conditions: A control condition, where neither program was implemented, schools that received the PATHS program only, schools that received the Triple-P program only, and schools that received both programs. In all, 14 schools were assigned to each of the four treatment or control conditions. Various outcome measures were used when the children were 13 and 15 including, among other things, self-reported delinquency, teacher reported deviance, self-reported contacts with the police,

substance use, prosocial behaviour, and non-aggressive conduct disorder.

In all, looking across the two programs, there were 52 separate effects reported (26 at age 13 and 26 at age 15). “The present study found practically no evidence for long-term intervention effects” (p. 41). The effects that were found were inconsistent across time, and across apparently similar measures. Furthermore, some were in the opposite direction from what would be expected.

One reason for the lack of effect may be that this was a universal program rather than an intensive program targeting particular (e.g., at-risk) children; therefore it might have little impact on children and families not ‘at risk’. Furthermore, the Triple-P program involved only four sessions of 2-2.5 hours each, and only 27% of the parents attended even one session. Only 19% of all parents attended all of the 4 sessions, notwithstanding the fact that the program was apparently delivered as it was designed to be. The PATHS program was delivered in the normal classrooms, 2-3 times a week for a total of about 67 minutes per week.

*Conclusion:* Various explanations might be offered for the failure of the two programs to show favourable effects. One possibility is that they were

universal rather than targeted programs and simply aren’t powerful enough to show strong effects, especially since the attendance rate of parents was rather low in one program. Alternatively, it could be that – notwithstanding favourable impacts reported by those who developed the programs – the programs simply aren’t effective when implemented by those who are committed to following a curriculum and have no financial or intellectual interest in the outcome. It could be that these programs are not effective in school settings where other educational and behavioural programs are already part of the curriculum as they were in Zurich. Finally, it could be that “it simply is not realistic to expect a long-term effect of these programs on later delinquency and problem behaviour” (p. 42). There was one important benefit, however: by allowing a high quality independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs, the Zurich school system determined that two program that had ‘promise’ did not work in that setting.

*Reference:* Averdijk, Jan Zirk-Sadopwski, Denis Ribeaud, and Manuel Eisner (2016). Long-term effects of two childhood psychosocial interventions on adolescent delinquency, substance abuse, and antisocial behaviour: A cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 12, 21-47.