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Criminological Highlights

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Criminological Highlights is produced approximately six times a year by the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto and is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is being published.

Contents

- The first three pages contain "headline" that summarizes the important points of the article. This is followed by a single paragraph "conclusion" on what one might learn from the paper. **We suggest that the busy user of this service should begin by reading the headlines** and any of the "conclusions" that seem interesting.
- Next comes an 8-page section -- the core of this document -- where we have provided one-page summaries of each paper.
- Copies of actual papers can be obtained from your own library or from the Centre of Criminology (at cost).

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The boot camp model -- with military style discipline -- appeals to politicians who want to look "tough on crime". Boot camps offer not only punishment and retribution, but people also claim that they deter and rehabilitate offenders. However, research reveals that youth who are placed in boot camps are more likely to recidivate than youth who are placed on probation or who are placed in traditional custodial institutions.

Although boot camps have been sold to the public as a means by which to reduce crime and change offenders' attitudes, there is no such evidence that this is being accomplished. Offenders from boot camps appear to be slightly more likely to re-offend than other groups of offenders. If there is any attitudinal change among boot camp attendees, it is likely to be only temporary. (Item 1)

Two possible reasons why empirical evidence has failed to provide a clear consensus on the relationship between income inequality, poverty and homicide rates are (1) that the relationship may be time dependent, and (2) the nature of the relationship is contingent on the type of homicide being analyzed.

At this point in our history, economic inequality and poverty are positively linked to increases in certain types of homicide rates. Considering the present economic deterioration and the obstacles to socioeconomic revitalization, it is reasonable to suggest that any long-term improvements to the quality of life experienced by residents of poor and disadvantaged areas is going to depend on macrolevel social and economic transformations that provide increased opportunities for individuals of all classes and skill levels. Changes in economic structures do affect crime, but the effects are complex. (Item 2)

Treating serious young offenders as adults does not enhance public safety, nor does the practice of forcing young people who commit "adult" offences to do "adult time" in adult facilities. These hard line practices may appear to be "tough on crime," but, in fact, they are more likely to be "tough on safety."

The policy conclusions, presuming that one is interested in reducing crime, are clear: "Minimize the number of juvenile cases transferred to [adult] court..." (p. 12). "The research reviewed here indicates that something inherent in criminal [adult] court processing may produce increased recidivism" (p. 13). Clearly, few benefits, in terms of either short-term or long-term safety flow from sending youths into adult court. (Item 3)

Socioeconomic status has important links with crime. But it can work both ways. Low socioeconomic status promotes crime by increasing alienation, financial strain, aggression, etc., and thus increasing crime. But children from high socioeconomic status homes are likely to become involved in crime in a different way: they are more likely to take risks and less likely to accept conventional values.

Given that socio-economic status is *both* positively and negatively related to crime, it would appear that "prevention programs working with young people in a given segment of society [should] focus upon those crime-related characteristics found most commonly in that segment [of society]. For example, in the lower social classes, prevention programs might find the most success in attempting to reduce levels of aggression and alienation while increasing educational and occupational aspirations. Conversely, in the high social classes, programs might do well to emphasize conventional values and the risk of crime" (p. 191). (Item 4)

Though "getting tough" is a common sense approach to reducing crime, there is a need to find a replacement for it since it is an ineffective response to a serious problem. Promoting "social support" is a sensible alternative approach in part because it "appeals to people's common sense and thus has intuitive legitimacy" and it works.

There is evidence that "cultural values that de-legitimate crass utilitarian individualism and that reinforce support or altruism are likely to reduce conditions conducive to criminal behaviour" (p.202). "The challenge for progressives is to develop public ideas – stories about crime – that appeal to the nobler side of the citizenry, that seem rooted in common sense, and that can effect meaningful savings in crime..." Social support "is a construct that makes sense to most people and that is consistent with their vision of what a good society entails" (p.204). It is also a good way of reducing crime. (Item 5)

"Zero tolerance policing" is no more effective in reducing crime than is its ideological opposite: problem oriented community policing. But "zero tolerance policing" has the added disadvantage of creating tension between the police and the community and in criminalizing large numbers of people without any apparent benefit."

When crime rates go down, the police are often quick to take credit for the drop, though they seem to be less eager to take responsibility for increases that occur from time to time. Policing may well affect crime rates, but New York's decline in crime, which mirrors reductions occurring elsewhere, cannot legitimately be used as evidence that "zero tolerance" works. There are serious costs in a "zero tolerance" approach to crime. Those who favour it would do well to consider these costs when evaluating zero tolerance approaches in comparison to other policing techniques that have been implemented elsewhere and which are associated with comparable reductions. (Item 6)

Interventions into the lives of anti-social kindergarten children can have a lasting impact on their lives. Small investments in small children pay big dividends immediately and when the children become bigger.

This intervention into the lives of "at risk" children appears to have been successful in reducing anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, it would appear to be a program that parents and teachers approve of and which can be implemented with rather minimal cost. Though it is hard to estimate the actual cost of the program, it would appear that the cost of "treating" a single child would be less than the dollar cost of charging a single child with a common assault and having that child go through the court system and receive an absolute discharge at the end. This cost estimate, of course, ignores the other beneficial effects of the program and the harmful impact of criminal justice contact. (Item 7)

US data suggest that there is no support for the assertion that there is a "youth violence epidemic." There was a large increase in certain violent offences (murder and aggravated assault) in the US which is largely attributable to an increase in gun crimes. Furthermore there is *no* reason to assume that the upcoming relatively small change in the proportion of youth in the population will create a new "crime wave."

Youth crime is serious enough without distorting either the trends that exist or the predictions for the future. Given the changes in rates of youth crime which have occurred in recent years, we should be hesitant in making predictions for the future. (Item 8)

The boot camp model -- with military style discipline -- appeals to politicians who want to look “tough on crime”. Boot camps offer not only punishment and retribution, but people also claim that they deter and rehabilitate offenders. However, research reveals that youth who are placed in boot camps are more likely to recidivate than youth who are placed on probation or who are placed in traditional custodial institutions.

The Context: Over the past decade crime issues and crime control agendas have become part of political campaigns. Politicians seem to want to look “tough on crime”. The boot camp model -- with military style discipline -- therefore appeals to politicians and to the public. “When the public and the politicians demand tougher sanctions, correctional systems are able to maintain their legitimacy by delivering “tough” boot camps” (p. 72). Boot camps are seen, miraculously, as being able to fulfill, simultaneously, the goals of retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. While the treatment within boot camps vary, a strict military regimen is present in all programs.

Boot camps have been one of the fastest growing so-called “fixes” to youth crime. For example, in 1984 only two states operated boot camps. However, by 1994 36 states were operating boot camps. Given that many states in the U.S., as well as some provinces in Canada, have now implemented such programs, the obvious question that arises is: does participation in such a program actually reduce recidivism?

This study investigated recidivism rates among first time offenders (N=1,937) who were placed on probation (30%), in traditional custodial institutions (41%), or in boot camps (29%). The majority offenders were convicted of property offences.

The results revealed that offenders who were placed in boot camps were *more likely* to recidivate after release than the offenders placed on probation or in a normal prison. During a 2.5 year period, 17% of the offenders placed on probation, and 20% of the offenders in prison re-offended, while 35% of offenders from boot camps re-offended. The finding -- that offenders from boot camps are more likely to recidivate than offenders in prison or probation - is consistent with other evaluations of boot camps.

The results also revealed that no matter where offenders had to serve their sentence, as they got older, they were less likely to re-offend. This finding is consistent with other criminological research which demonstrates that offenders appear to “mature out” of crime.

This study also investigated participants’ perceptions of boot camp. The perceived level of severity of the boot camp did not affect the participants’ perception of their own rehabilitation. Those who believed that rehabilitation was the main goal of the boot camp program were more likely to believe that they had been rehabilitated.

Conclusion: Although boot camps have been sold to the public as a means by which to reduce crime and change offenders’ attitudes, there is no such evidence that this is being accomplished. Offenders from boot camps appear to be slightly more likely to re-offend than other groups of offenders. If there is any attitudinal change among boot camp attendees, it is likely to be only temporary.

Wright, D. and Mays, L. (1998). Correctional boot camps, attitudes, and recidivism: The Oklahoma experience. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 28, 71-87.

Two possible reasons why empirical evidence has failed to provide a clear consensus on the relationship between income inequality, poverty and homicide rates are (1) that the relationship may be time dependent, and (2) the nature of the relationship is contingent on the type of homicide being analyzed.

Background. There is a long history of criminological debate over the effect of income inequality and poverty on crime. Under conditions of *absolute* deprivation, some theorists have argued that crime is a way 'to make money for poor people' who are faced with situations of chronic unemployment and underemployment (p. 571). Crime, subsequently, results in more violence than most types of legitimate employment. In terms of *relative* deprivation, individuals compare what they have to others in their community or through media exposure. When they are unable to achieve 'culturally defined goals,' strain and/or frustration develop that manifests itself into violent behavior. Finally, theories explaining both absolute and relative deprivation suggest that social values develop which support violence as a way of life and a means to achieve desired goals. These values are transmitted through successive generations. Despite the proliferation of theories to explain this association, however, empirical evidence remains contradictory.

This study takes a more thorough approach to the analysis of the relationship between income inequality, poverty and homicide rates using various measures of income inequality not incorporated into other analyses including (1) the ratio of the percentage of total U.S. income received by the top 20% of families to that of the bottom 20%; and (2) the share of income received by the top 20% of families. Poverty is measured by the percentage of the population below the poverty line. Cities in the U.S. are used as the unit of analysis examining the period 1989-1991, what the authors refer to as the Post-Reagan era.

Results. While the data indicate that income inequality and poverty are positively associated with rates of homicide, this relationship varies depending on the type of homicide analyzed (i.e. family, acquaintance, or stranger homicide). As unemployment rates, divorce rates and population size increase, so do city homicide rates. Among all factors examined, the number of black residents was the strongest predictor (the greater the black population, the greater the homicide rate). When homicide rates are disaggregated according to victim-offender relationship, the findings remain primarily consistent with the initial results. Poverty or inequality are significant for all three types of homicide. However, family homicide is more closely associated with socioeconomic factors (inequality and poverty and, perhaps, unemployment) while acquaintance homicides are influenced more by subcultural factors (i.e., proportion of blacks in the city). Stranger homicide is predicted by either, depending on the circumstances (robbery versus other felony). The authors suggest that their finding of a positive relationship is based in part on the time period which they are analyzing. Prior to the period of study (1989-1991) and during much of the century, the manufacturing industry provided stable employment to those with few skills and little education. The 1980s, however, was a decade of change which, by the end of the decade, resulted in decreased legitimate employment for low-skilled workers in disadvantaged areas, thus increasing the likelihood that illegitimate opportunities would be sought out.

Conclusion. At this point in our history, economic inequality and poverty are positively linked to increases in certain types of homicide rates. Considering the present economic deterioration and the obstacles to socioeconomic revitalization, it is reasonable to suggest that any long-term improvements to the quality of life experienced by residents of poor and disadvantaged areas is going to depend on macrolevel social and economic transformations that provide increased opportunities for individuals of all classes and skill levels. Changes in economic structures do affect crime, but the effects are complex.

Reference: Kovandzic, Tomislav V., Lynne M Vieraitis, and Mark R. Yeisley. The Structural Covariates of Urban Homicide: Reassessing the Impact of Income Inequality and Poverty in the Post-Reagan Era. (1998) *Criminology* 36 (3), 569-599.

Treating serious young offenders as adults does not enhance public safety, nor does the practice of forcing young people who commit “adult” offences to do “adult time” in adult facilities. These hard line practices may appear to be “tough on crime,” but, in fact, they are more likely to be “tough on safety.”

Getting “tough” on youth crime appears to translate into treating young offenders as adults. There are a number of empirically based reasons for doubting whether the transfers of youths into the adult system (or the sentencing of young people as adults) accomplishes what its advocates hope:

- Adult court processing typically takes more time than youth court processing (p. 6).
- Children processed as adult offenders appear to be more likely to recidivate than are children processed as children in youth court (p. 6). “Three recent large-scale studies indicate that juveniles tried in criminal court have greater recidivism rates after release than juveniles tried in juvenile court” (p. 7).
- It is not clear that young offenders, especially serious and violent offenders will serve more custodial time in the adult system than in the youth system (p. 7).
- “Two well designed studies found that automatic transfer laws have no deterrent effect on juvenile crime....” (p. 7)

In addition, those in the U.S. who value their children might be concerned to find that in the U.S. juveniles in adult prisons are, compared to juveniles in juvenile facilities “eight times more likely to commit suicide, 500 times more likely to be sexually assaulted and 200 times more likely to be beaten by staff...” (p. 9). In addition, adult facilities typically lack programs appropriate for youth, in part because the number of youth in a given facility tends to be small.

In the U.S., where some estimates suggest that about 180,000-200,000 youths are tried in the adult system each year (as contrasted with fewer than 100 a year in Canada), the US Department of Justice concluded that “[Transfer] does not appreciably increase the certainty or severity of sanctions” (quoted, p. 12).

Interestingly, one of the suggestions is that “juvenile courts [be empowered] to impose adult sentences, with authority to supervise rehabilitation... into adulthood...” (p. 12) similar to provisions in the (proposed) *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

The policy conclusions, presuming that one is interested in reducing crime, are clear: “Minimize the number of juvenile cases transferred to [adult] court...” (p. 12). “The research reviewed here indicates that something inherent in criminal [adult] court processing may produce increased recidivism” (p. 13). Clearly, few benefits, in terms of either short-term or long-term safety flow from sending youths into adult court.

Reference: Redding, Richard E. Juvenile offenders in criminal court and adult prison: Legal, psychological, and behavioural outcomes. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, Winter 1999, 1-20.

Socioeconomic status has important links with crime. But it can work both ways. Low socioeconomic status promotes crime by increasing alienation, financial strain, aggression, etc., and thus increasing crime. But children from high socioeconomic status homes are likely to become involved in crime in a different way: they are more likely to take risks and less likely to accept conventional values.

Background. Although socioeconomic status (SES) has been important in theorizing about the causes of crime, “empirical studies consistently have found weak or nonexistent correlations between individuals’ socioeconomic background and their self-reported delinquent behaviour” (p. 176).

This paper takes a different approach. It assumes that SES works through other “mediating variables.” Those from low SES families might be more likely to feel alienated from society, might be more likely to feel financial strain, would have lower aspirations and perhaps less self-control. On the other hand, those from high SES families might have a higher propensity to take risks, would “see themselves as above society’s precepts... and [might] assess themselves as being at relatively low risk of detection and punishment for their deviant acts” (p. 179). In other words, to varying extents in different individuals, SES could have different effects.

This study looked at self-reported delinquency from a sample of New Zealand 21- year olds who had participated in a longitudinal study since birth. Overall, there was no simple relationship of SES with crime. However, low SES was associated with financial strain, aggression, alienation, and low educational and vocational aspirations. High SES was associated with a “taste” for risk, feelings of social power, a low perceived risk of detection and low attachment to conventional values.

The results show that when “taste” for risk, feelings of social power, perceived risk of detection, and attachment to conventional values are held constant, low SES was, in fact, associated with higher levels of delinquency. On the other hand, holding financial strain, aggression, educational and vocational aspirations, attachment to the community and social control constant, *high* SES was associated with delinquency.

Conclusion. Given that socio-economic status is *both* positively and negatively related to crime, it would appear that “prevention programs working with young people in a given segment of society [should] focus upon those crime-related characteristics found most commonly in that segment [of society]. For example, in the lower social classes, prevention programs might find the most success in attempting to reduce levels of aggression and alienation while increasing educational and occupational aspirations. Conversely, in the high social classes, programs might do well to emphasize conventional values and the risk of crime” (p. 191).

Reference: Wright, Bradley R. Entner, Avshalom Caspi, Terrie E. Moffitt, Richard A. Miech, and Phil A. Silva. Reconsidering the relationship between SES and delinquency: Causation but not correlation. *Criminology*, 1999, 37 (1), 175-194.

Though “getting tough” is a common sense approach to reducing crime, there is a need to find a replacement for it since it is an ineffective response to a serious problem. Promoting “social support” is a sensible alternative approach in part because it “appeals to people’s common sense and thus has intuitive legitimacy” and it works.

The problem for those who reject (for ideological or empirical reasons) a “get tough” or “more control” approach to crime prevention is that a substitute is needed. This substitute must provide an articulate and intuitively appealing substitute. “Social support is a worthy candidate as a public idea to organize thinking and action...” (p.190). It is not only “good criminology,” but also “the idea that social support protects against crime appeals to people’s common sense and thus has intuitive legitimacy” (p.190).

A social support approach to crime prevention “starts with the... assumption that supportive relations, beginning at birth, are integral to healthy human development” (p. 192). In addition to other supportive findings, “It is noteworthy that early intervention programs that give support to at-risk families and youngsters help both to prevent the onset of misconduct and to reduce criminal involvement once it occurs...” (p.193). Though there is evidence that social support is likely to have its strongest effects in childhood, there is evidence that “receiving social support is inversely related to delinquent involvement” for adolescents as well (p.193).

American researchers have attributed the high rate of U.S. violent crime relative to other countries in part to widening inequality, “mean spirited welfare policies,” and the fact that other countries have “state and social institutions [that are] arranged to give support to their citizens” (p.194). Other studies (contained in earlier “Highlights” issues) show that supportive communities are less likely to have high violence rates (p.194).

The problem for criminologists is that it is not sufficient to explain “why conservative narratives about crime are best considered to be fairy tales” (p.196). Conservative narratives are attractive because they “have drama (‘Superpredators are now roaming free...’), they stir our emotions [by referring to victims], they acquit us of blame (‘Society doesn’t commit crime, offenders do’), they pinpoint who the real culprit is (‘Liberal courts...’), and they give simple solutions that promise to have large results (‘Lock up the predators...’)” (p.196). An alternative narrative is needed. Social support may work because it is a matter of common sense and “many citizens want more than an a society of atomized individuals...” (p. 197). Early intervention programs and community support programs (e.g., Big Brothers/Sisters) have been shown to be effective. Rehabilitative programs can be described both in support terms but also in terms of being a means of making society safer.

Conclusion. There is evidence that “cultural values that de-legitimize crass utilitarian individualism and that reinforce support or altruism are likely to reduce conditions conducive to criminal behaviour” (p.202). “The challenge for progressives is to develop public ideas – stories about crime – that appeal to the nobler side of the citizenry, that seem rooted in common sense, and that can effect meaningful savings in crime....” Social support “is a construct that makes sense to most people and that is consistent with their vision of what a good society entails” (p.204). It is also a good way of reducing crime.

Reference: Cullen, Francis T., John Paul Wright, and Mitchell B. Chamlin. Social support and social reform: A progressive crime control agenda. *Crime and Delinquency*, 1999 (April) 45 (2) 188-207.

“Zero tolerance policing” is no more effective in reducing crime than is its ideological opposite: problem oriented community policing. But “zero tolerance policing” has the added disadvantage of creating tension between the police and the community and in criminalizing large numbers of people without any apparent benefit.”

Background. New York City is often held out as an example of how “getting tough” in policing “works.” Dramatic reductions in reported crime that occurred between 1993 and 1997 are used by the former police chief, William Bratton, and New York officials to support their assertion that “zero tolerance” policing works. The only problem with their logic is that there are comparable reductions in crime in other locations that have taken dramatically different approaches to policing. The most dramatic aspect of policing in New York is that “at the neighbourhood level, [Bratton’s] crime-fighting strategies were grounded in traditional law enforcement methods and in relentless crackdown campaigns to arrest and jail low-level drug offenders and other petty perpetrators” (p.173).

The changes in reported crime in NY need to be examined in the context of falling crime rates elsewhere in the US, Canada, and Europe. In San Diego, California, for example, there was a “virtually equal reduction in rates of serious crime” as in NY in the first part of the 1990s but there was only a trivial increase in the number of sworn police officers (6.2%) compared to NY’s increase of 39.5%.

One set of problems with NY’s zero-tolerance policing is that it appears to be associated with a great deal of tolerance for police misconduct and abuse. The number of complaints against the police increased 60%. These included a “sudden and sharp increase” in the number of “complaints filed by citizens... that involved incidents where no arrest was made or summons issued” (p. 176). Investigation into one incident of police torture found the incident was part of a “pattern of police abuse, brutality, and misconduct” (p. 176). Hence, even if policing did play a part in the reduction of crime, there was a cost. The best guess, however, is that “No single factor, cause, policy, or strategy has produced the drop in crime rates” (p.178).

Conclusion. When crime rates go down, the police are often quick to take credit for the drop, though they seem to be less eager to take responsibility for increases that occur from time to time. Policing may well affect crime rates, but New York’s decline in crime, which mirrors reductions occurring elsewhere, cannot legitimately be used as evidence that “zero tolerance” works. There are serious costs in a “zero tolerance” approach to crime. Those who favour it would do well to consider these costs when evaluating zero tolerance approaches in comparison to other policing techniques that have been implemented elsewhere and which are associated with comparable reductions.

Reference: Greene, Judith A. Zero tolerance: A case study of police practices and practices in New York City. *Crime and Delinquency*, 1999 (April), 45 (2), 171-187.

Interventions into the lives of anti-social kindergarten children can have a lasting impact on their lives. Small investments in small children pay big dividends immediately and when the children become bigger.

Background. “If criminal justice interventions into the lives of children are not likely to reduce anti-social behaviour, what kinds of programs actually do work?” This type of question is often asked. Programs do exist, but many of them have not been properly evaluated. This study demonstrates that children can be changed with a program that starts off with children who are just starting school.

The program. The program, “First Step to Success,” focuses on “at risk” kindergarten children, but involves teachers, peers, parents or caregivers, as well as the child. It starts with a formal screening of kindergarten children to identify problem children. The school intervention has 30 “formal” days of programming, though since a child must “pass” each day, it may take more than 30 days to complete. Typically it takes about 40 days. The first five days involve a “consultant” who need not be a formal professional. On each of these days, there are two 20-30 minute sessions in school. Essentially, it is a program where the child earns negotiated school and home privileges for appropriate behaviour. The details of how the privileges are earned change over time. What is important, however, is that it is a fairly rigid “program” designed to effect change at home and at school.

The study involved comparing a group of children to a randomly assigned “waiting list control” group of children. Quite large (and statistically significant) changes were found in the treatment group that were not found in the wait-list control group. Although the experiment was carried out when the children were in kindergarten, one group was followed through Grade 2. The improvements in the children’s behaviour continued.

The results are “consistent with existing literature on the case for early intervention with at-risk children.... That is, comprehensive early interventions, especially those involving parents, appear to (a) teach relationships between choices and their resulting consequences, (b) develop the social-behavioural and academically related competencies that allow children to cope effectively with the demands of friendship-making... and (c) reduce the long-term probability that at-risk children will adopt a delinquent lifestyle in adolescence” (p. 74). Furthermore, “by the standards used in other fields, [the program] is a relatively brief and inexpensive intervention” (p.76). Responses to the program by teachers and parents have been “generally positive, perhaps because the demands on them during implementation are relatively low level compared to the gains achieved” (p. 76).

Conclusion. This intervention into the lives of “at risk” children appears to have been successful in reducing anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, it would appear to be a program that parents and teachers approve of and which can be implemented with rather minimal cost. Though it is hard to estimate the actual cost of the program, it would appear that the cost of “treating” a single child would be less than the dollar cost of charging a single child with a common assault and having that child go through the court system and receive an absolute discharge at the end. This cost estimate, of course, ignores the other beneficial effects of the program and the harmful impact of criminal justice contact.

Reference: Walker, Hill M., Kate Kavanagh, Bruce Stiller, Annemieke Golly, Herbert H. Severson, and Edward G. Reil. First step to success: An early intervention approach for preventing school antisocial behaviour. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*, 1998 (Summer), 6 (2) 66-80.

US data suggest that there is no support for the assertion that there is a “youth violence epidemic.” There was a large increase in certain violent offences (murder and aggravated assault) in the US which is largely attributable to an increase in gun crimes. Furthermore there is *no* reason to assume that the upcoming relatively small change in the proportion of youth in the population will create a new “crime wave.”

Background. Trends over time in crime rates are not only notoriously difficult to explain. They are also difficult to describe. The nature of the trends vary across crimes. Though in the U.S. there was an increase in the rates of aggravated assault and homicide involving offenders age 13-17 in the late 1980s, there were sharp reductions in the early 1990s. Similar trends were not found for robbery and rape. The increase in the youth (offender) homicide rate which occurred in the late 1980s appeared to be completely due to an increase in gun homicides. Interestingly, there was no comparable change in the homicide rates of those aged 25-34.

There appears to have been a change in police behaviour, with “a greater police willingness to report and upwardly classify assault crimes and a greater willingness to arrest those who commit assaults...”(p.42). Victimization surveys carried out in schools in the US show that “involvement in serious assaults are virtually identical in 1982 and 1992,” but police data show big increases.

Predictions about the future from police reported crime are not very useful “because rates of serious offenses tend to be cyclical in unpredictable ways” (p. 45). But equally important is the fact that the trends are different for different crimes. Hence one cannot talk about trends of violent crime since these vary across individual crimes.

Demographic changes are, of course, relevant to predictions about crime. As the age distribution of a population changes, there will, of course, be some changes in overall rates of crime. However, these effects need to be put in context. A five or ten percent increase in the “crime prone” part of the population will, to some extent, affect crime rates. But in the U.S., the factor that is important in understanding overall crime rates are the “age specific” crime rates. For example, in 1984, the homicide rate for males age 13-17 was about 10 per 100,000 inhabitants, Ten years later it was close to 35. “Age specific” crime rates are dramatically more important than minor changes in the age distribution of society.

Those, like James Q. Wilson and John DiIulio, who predict an army of “terrifying teenagers” or “super-predators” have, in fact, used inappropriate, and in some instances, bizarre arithmetic techniques to substantiate these predictions. The prediction of a “predatory menace” of youths is described as a “classic case of a compounded distortion” (p.60). The extreme example is that of DiIulio whose calculations would lead one to the conclusion that there are “already 1.9 million juvenile superpredators on U.S. streets.” The difficulty with this statement is that “That happens to be more young people than were accused of any form of delinquency last year in the U.S.” (p.62).

Conclusion. Youth crime is serious enough without distorting either the trends that exist or the predictions for the future. Given the changes in rates of youth crime which have occurred in recent years, we should be hesitant in making predictions for the future.

Reference: Zimring, Franklin E. *American Youth Violence* (New York: Oxford, 1998). Chapter 3: A youth violence epidemic: Myth or reality?. Chapter 4: The case of the terrifying toddlers. (pages 31-65).