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Criminological Highlights

Volume 5, Number 5: May 2003

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 currently being published. Copies of the original articles can be obtained (at cost) from the Centre of Criminology Information Service and Library. Please contact Tom Finlay or Andrea Shier.

This issue of *Criminological Highlights* will address the following questions:

1. Does crime policy in the U.S. ensure Republican election victories?
2. Does the personal experience of apprehension make offenders believe that they will be caught in the future?
3. Can future offending be reduced by sentencing youths as adults?
4. Are health, education, and finance policies related to homicide rates?
5. Do Miranda warnings render the successful prosecution of offenders more difficult?
6. Is home detention a promising alternative to imprisonment?
7. Are 'adult onset' offenders unusual and do they differ from adult criminals who also committed crimes as youths?
8. Can the way in which the media portrays criminal activity within ethnic groups affect crime?

Contents: Three pages containing "headlines and conclusions" for each of the eight articles.
One-page summaries of each of the eight articles.

Criminological Highlights is prepared by Anthony Doob, Tom Finlay, Dena Demos, Cheryl Webster, Rosemary Gartner, John Beattie, Carla Cesaroni, Myrna Dawson, Elizabeth Griffiths, Voula Marinos, Andrea Shier, Jane Sprott, Kimberly Varma, and Carolyn Yule. The production of *Criminological Highlights* is assisted by contributions from the Department of Justice, Canada, and the Correctional Service of Canada. Comments or suggestions should be addressed to Anthony N. Doob or Tom Finlay at the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto.

Crime is more of an election issue in the U.S. than one may initially think. Indeed, the policy of disenfranchisement of anyone in prison or on probation/parole as well as those who were ever convicted of a felony has ensured Republican control of the Senate and was one of the ways in which George W. Bush managed to win the presidency in 2000.

Crime policy is, naturally, the result of a political process. Conservative governments that wish to remain in power are clearly aided by policies that disenfranchise individuals serving sentences and those who have been convicted of a felony at least once during their life. A previous study (see *Criminological Highlights*, Volume 1, Number 4, Item 1) demonstrated that imprisonment policy has a distorting impact on unemployment figures. This paper demonstrates that crime policies impact on the political process itself.

Reference: Uggen, Christopher and Jeff Manza (2002). Democratic Contraction? Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 777-803. **[Item 1]**

Compared with offenders who are not caught, those who are, in fact, apprehended are less likely to believe that they will be caught again in the future.

These findings “raise questions about whether punishment is as efficacious a specific deterrent as deterrence theory suggests” (p.114). It may be that vicarious punishment – the perception that *others* are likely to be apprehended – makes individuals less likely to offend. However, the personal experience of being apprehended appears to make low risk people believe that - next time - they can get away with it.

Reference: Pogarsky, Greg and Alex R. Piquero (2003). Can Punishment Encourage Offending? Investigating the “Resetting” Effect. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40, 95-120. **[Item 2]**

Sentencing youths as youths makes crime control sense: A study of transfers to adult court demonstrates that adult court and adult sentences are criminogenic.

These findings are similar to those from other studies. “It seems, then, that legislative waiver laws... can realistically be expected to have little or no deterrent utility. In fact, the evidence suggests a criminogenic effect – or that these laws may serve to increase the frequency and seriousness of future offending by those youths who are excluded from juvenile court” (p.94).

Reference: Myers, David L. (2003). The Recidivism of Violent Youths in Juvenile and Adult Court: A Consideration of Selection Bias. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 1, 79-101. **[Item 3]**

Nations that spend a high proportion of their gross domestic product on health care and public education and have relatively low income inequality tend also to have lower homicide rates.

As with other studies, income inequality and measures of expenditures on basic health and education programs were found to be important in understanding homicide rates. Sometimes described as indicators of social support for those individuals in society who are the most disadvantaged, these types of measures clearly appear to affect the level of lethal violence in a country.

References: Pratt, Travis C. and Timothy W. Godsey (2002). Social Support and Homicide: A Cross-National Test of an Emerging Criminological Theory. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30, 589-601. Messner, Steven F., Raffolovich, L.E., and Peter Shrock (2002). Reassessing the Cross-National Relationship between Income Inequality and Homicide Rates: Implications of Data Quality Control in the Measurement of Income Distribution. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 18, 377-395. [Item 4]

Warnings given by police to suspects concerning their rights have had a “negligible effect on the ability of the police to elicit confessions and on the ability of prosecutors to win convictions” (p. 203).

The *Miranda* warning may “tap into a basic vein of fairness that transcends the [Supreme Court’s original] assumptions about the diminished free will of suspects facing police interrogation” (p.265). However, there is no consistent evidence that it has affected the ability of an accused person to resist giving a confession. Part of the reason for this reality appears to be because “the police adjusted to [the necessity of giving] *Miranda* [warnings] and learned how to comply in a way that minimizes the chance that the suspect will resist interrogation” (p.207). In other words, it would seem that police clearly include the right to confess as part of the *Miranda* warning.

Reference: Thomas, George C. III, and Richard A. Leo. (2002). The Effects of *Miranda v. Arizona*: “Embedded” in Our National Culture? in M. Tonry (ed). *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. Volume 29. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 203-271. [Item 5]

“Home detention” may be seen as an appealing alternative to prison. However, it has serious problems that may easily be overlooked by those searching for a “quick fix” custodial substitute.

If the main purpose of implementing a home detention policy is to save money and/or reduce imprisonment, there are other, potentially less problematic, ways in which this objective could be accomplished. For instance, proportionate sanctions could be imposed and the overall level of punishment reduced. Further, other sanctions (*e.g.*, community service, fines, *etc.*) may be more appropriate, particularly for low risk non-violent offenders. Indeed, it would seem more sensible to explore the adaptability of existing sanctions before jumping on the bandwagon of new – not yet fully tested - sentencing options.

Reference: Bagaric, Mirko (2000). Home Truths about Home Detention. *The Journal of Criminal Law*, 66(5), 425-443. [Item 6]

About half of the criminals in adult courts were never, officially, young offenders. Nevertheless, the characteristics of adult-onset offenders and those who committed crimes both as children and as adults are quite similar.

Although adult onset offending is relatively rare compared to youth onset offending, the individuals who do not get around to committing offences until they are adults are still important as they constitute approximately half of the offenders brought to adult court at least once. However, it is equally true that social policies aimed at decreasing the likelihood of one type of offending would appear to have the same positive effect on the other type of offending. In other words, it may be possible to prevent two jail birds with one policy stone.

Reference: Eggleston, Elaine P. and John H. Laub (2002). The Onset of Adult Offending: A Neglected Dimension of the Criminal Career. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 30, 603-622. **[Item 7]**

Press coverage of crime waves may not only describe the phenomenon. Rather, the way in which the media ‘constructs’ or defines crime may also have a direct impact on the frequency in which it occurs.

Because “many crime waves likely involve the dynamic interplay of changes in crime levels and changes in the social definition of crime,” it is important that “both the content and the meaning of criminal events be made problematic” (p.56). The analysis of the ‘black hand’ crime wave suggests that “the role that social problems constructions makes available to offenders (and to victims) can, under certain circumstances, facilitate these predator interactions” (p.74). Recognition of this feedback model may serve as an important warning within a contemporary context. Media claims surrounding the reluctance on the part of some groups to name offenders (e.g., blacks in Toronto) may have the effect of broadening the opportunities for the commission of subsequent offences. Further, it may distort reality by ignoring other more reasonable – albeit less sensationalistic – explanations for the non-reporting of certain kinds of crimes.

Reference: Sacco, Vincent F. (2002). Black Hand Outrage: A Constructionist Analysis of an Urban Crime Wave. *Deviant Behaviour*, 24, 53-77. **[Item 8]**

Crime is more of an election issue in the U.S. than one may initially think. Indeed, the policy of disenfranchisement of anyone in prison or on probation/parole as well as those who were ever convicted of a felony has ensured Republican control of the Senate and was one of the ways in which George W. Bush managed to win the presidency in 2000.

Background. In contrast with Canada in which the Supreme Court has recently returned the right to vote to those serving sentences, all but three of the 51 U.S. electoral jurisdictions (*i.e.* Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont) disenfranchise at least some of those who have had contact with the criminal justice system (*i.e.* prisoners, parolees, felony probationers, jail inmates and/or those who have served their complete sentence for a felony). For example, it is estimated that 7% of adult American citizens in Florida cannot vote because of felony disenfranchisement. In addition, the U.S. is unique in restricting rights of *non-incarcerated* felons including those who have served their full sentence. This group makes up $\frac{3}{4}$ of disenfranchised Americans. Further, because black Americans are particularly likely to be imprisoned or placed under criminal justice control, their right to vote is disproportionately affected. Clearly, it is important to examine the impact that voting rights policies can have on the democratic process. Historically, the establishment of the formal right to vote “has varied from country to country [and] has always been a slow, contested and uneven process” (p.777). While other groups in the U.S. (*e.g.*, women, African-Americans) have won the right to vote over the past 200 years, felons (current or past) have slowly lost this same right. Particularly in recent years, felony disenfranchisement has become a serious issue because of the U.S. enthusiasm for prosecution (*e.g.*, drug offences) and imprisonment. Indeed, the result is that 2.3% of American adults could not vote in 2000 compared to only approximately 1% in 1975.

This paper carefully estimates – using voting data, election surveys and demographic information about voters and felons – the likelihood that felons would have voted (if permitted) and for whom they would have been likely to vote. From surveys, it is clear that those who constitute the “felon” population are considerably less likely to vote than other Americans. For those who do, in fact, vote, they are considerably more likely to vote Democratic than most U.S. citizens. The validity of the voting assumptions made in this paper was tested in a longitudinal survey in Minnesota. The demographic variables used in the larger study to estimate voter turnout and party preference accounted completely for the differences between “felons” and others. In other words, the estimates used in this study appear to be valid.

The results of this study suggest that the U.S. Senate - in the 2000 election - would almost certainly be under Democratic control if felons had been able to vote. Aside from other problems with the election in Florida, Gore would also have easily won if this population had had the right to vote. In fact, Gore would still have beat Bush if only *ex-felons* had been allowed to participate in the election or only half of the estimated voter turnout rate for this group had been permitted to vote. While this paper focuses exclusively on presidential and senate elections, one would expect that the effects of felony disenfranchisement would be even larger at the local level.

Conclusion: Crime policy is, naturally, the result of a political process. Conservative governments that wish to remain in power are clearly aided by policies that disenfranchise individuals serving sentences and those who have been convicted of a felony at least once during their life. A previous study (see *Criminological Highlights*, Volume 1, Number 4, Item 1) demonstrated that imprisonment policy has a distorting impact on unemployment figures. This paper demonstrates that crime policies impact on the political process itself.

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Compared with offenders who are not caught, those who are, in fact, apprehended are less likely to believe that they will be caught again in the future.

Background. If specific deterrence “works”, punished offenders should be less likely to believe that they can get away with crime than those not apprehended. However, recent studies show the opposite. More specifically, it has been found that “punished individuals believe the certainty of being sanctioned in the future is lower than do their less punished colleagues” (p.96). Clearly, they seem to think that “the punishment experience helps insulate them from future apprehension” (p.96). There are two possible explanations for this assumption. On the one hand, those who are apprehended may be individuals who generally consider the likelihood of being caught as low. On the other hand, offenders may believe in the “gambler’s fallacy” – that is, the belief that relatively rare events are unlikely to reoccur, especially soon afterward. Accordingly, the apprehended individual may believe that because he/she was caught “this time” (in contrast with the multiple times in which he/she had offended and was not caught), he/she will not be apprehended again.

This study asked university students to consider a hypothetical situation in which they had been drinking, were probably intoxicated, and had to decide whether to drive home. These subjects estimated the likelihood that they would, in fact, drive. They were also asked to report the number of times that they were “stopped by the police when they believe their blood alcohol content was above the legal limit” (p.103). In order to control for other relevant factors, the subject’s “risk status” was estimated by determining whether each respondent fit a “drunk driving risk profile” (p.103). This profile included such variables as the amount of alcohol that he/she typically consumed, prior offending and drinking-driving by peers, as well as various individual characteristics such as gender and impulsivity.

A measure of belief in the gambler’s fallacy was obtained by having respondents imagine that a coin was flipped and it came up heads four times in a row. They were subsequently asked “whether on the fifth flip, the coin was more likely to land heads, tails, or whether both outcomes were equally likely” (p.105). Twenty percent of the subjects answered “tails” – the response consistent with the gambler’s fallacy.

The results initially showed that those respondents who had previously been caught were more likely to indicate that they would drink-drive than their non-apprehended counterparts. However, a more detailed analysis reveals that this effect is attributable largely to low risk offenders. Compared with low risk individuals who had not been apprehended, those (low risk) people who had previously been caught were considerably *less* likely to think that they would be apprehended if they drove while impaired. Said differently, those with a relatively low risk of offending appear to believe in the gambler’s fallacy whereby their initial apprehension is seen by them as a shield from being caught in the future. In contrast, there was no impact of previous apprehensions and no evidence that the belief in the gambler’s fallacy was related to the perceived likelihood of future apprehension for those at high risk of offending.

Conclusion. These findings “raise questions about whether punishment is as efficacious a specific deterrent as deterrence theory suggests” (p.114). It may be that vicarious punishment – the perception that *others* are likely to be apprehended – makes individuals less likely to offend. However, the personal experience of being apprehended appears to make low risk people believe that - next time - they can get away with it.

Reference: Pogarsky, Greg and Alex R. Piquero (2003). Can Punishment Encourage Offending? Investigating the “Resetting” Effect. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40, 95-120.

Sentencing youths as youths makes crime control sense: A study of transfers to adult court demonstrates that adult court and adult sentences are criminogenic.

Background. For some, treating young offenders as adults is seen as an attractive “solution” to youth crime. In fact, many state legislatures in the U.S. have increased the ease with which young offenders may be considered - for criminal justice purposes - to be adults. However, the usefulness of such harsh treatment has been challenged by a growing body of research suggesting that the transfer of youths to adult court does not, in fact, reduce recidivism or deter other youths (see, for example, *Criminological Highlights*, Volume 1, Number 3, Item 2; Volume 1, Number 5, Item 5; Volume 2, Number 4, Item 3; Volume 3, Number 5, Item 5).

This study examines the notion that the transfer of young offenders to adult court reduces the re-offending rates of this population. To rule out a potential selection bias – that is, the possibility that high recidivism among transferred youths merely reflects the fact that only the worst youths are treated as adults – this paper controlled, to some extent, for offence by looking only at robbery and aggravated assault. Further, this study statistically holds constant other variables known to be associated with recidivism in order to assess the impact of transfer on re-offending. Recidivism was defined in this research as arrests that occurred after the final disposition of the case. Not surprisingly, a number of differences (*e.g.*, criminal record of the youth) existed between the transferred population and those retained in youth court.

The results are easy to describe: “Waived [transferred] youths were more likely to be rearrested following final disposition than were their counterparts in juvenile court” (p. 90). In fact, “[b]eing waived to adult court more than doubled the simple odds of a postdisposition arrest” (p. 90). Furthermore, “youths transferred to adult court were rearrested more quickly following final disposition than were their counterparts who remained in juvenile court” (p. 92). In addition, this same population was more likely to be rearrested for a violent offence than the young offenders who remained in youth court.

There are a number of possible explanations for this effect. One possibility is that appropriate treatment facilities may be more available in youth court than in adult court. It is also plausible that those youth transferred to adult court gain the opportunity to learn from more experienced adult offenders about how to commit crimes. Finally, it is possible that the impact of being publicly labelled as a criminal has negative repercussions.

Conclusion. These findings are similar to those from other studies. “It seems, then, that legislative waiver laws... can realistically be expected to have little or no deterrent utility. In fact, the evidence suggests a criminogenic effect – or that these laws may serve to increase the frequency and seriousness of future offending by those youths who are excluded from juvenile court” (p.94).

Reference: Myers, David L. (2003). The Recidivism of Violent Youths in Juvenile and Adult Court: A Consideration of Selection Bias. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 1, 79-101.

Nations that spend a high proportion of their gross domestic product on health care and public education and have relatively low income inequality tend also to have lower homicide rates.

Background. Studies of social support have shown that communities which are cohesive and whose members are willing to help others as well as support those in need tend to have relatively lower crime rates (See, for example, *Criminological Highlights*, Volume 1, Number 1, Item 1; Volume 1, Number 5, Item 1; Volume 1, Number 6, Item 4). Within the U.S. and Canada, states and provinces with low income inequality also have low homicide rates (See, *Criminological Highlights*, Volume 4, Number 2, Item 3).

These papers look at homicide rates across nations as a function of three structural variables: the proportion of GDP spent on public education, the proportion of GDP spent on health care and, finally, the level of income inequality in the country. Public education and health care expenditures were highly related (*i.e.* countries that spent a substantial amount of money on one also tended to invest a great deal in the other). The first paper (on the impact of health and education expenditures) also controlled for such factors as economic inequality and the level of general socioeconomic development in the country.

The results show that the three structural variables under study are, in fact, associated with homicide rates. Looking across 46 nations over the period 1989-1995, countries that had relatively high expenditures on public education and health tended to have low homicide rates. This relationship continued to exist even after economic inequality and the proportion of the population living in urban areas were statistically held constant.

The second study examined income inequality. Part of the difficulty with any cross-national study has to do with the quality of the data. In this study, analyses were repeated using only data from nations in which it was believed that highly reliable figures could be obtained. Regardless of the analysis, “[n]ations with high levels of income inequality exhibit relatively high homicide rates, controlling for other socio-demographic characteristics of nations” (p.386). Interestingly, when one looks longitudinally (*i.e.* at changes across five-year periods) instead of cross-sectionally at the data, short term (and presumably fairly small) changes in income inequality did not make a difference.

Conclusions: As with other studies, income inequality and measures of expenditures on basic health and education programs were found to be important in understanding homicide rates. Sometimes described as indicators of social support for those individuals in society who are the most disadvantaged, these types of measures clearly appear to affect the level of lethal violence in a country.

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Warnings given by police to suspects concerning their rights have had a “negligible effect on the ability of the police to elicit confessions and on the ability of prosecutors to win convictions” (p. 203).

Background. When the *Miranda* warnings were imposed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1966, police and prosecutors suggested that it would no longer be possible to obtain confessions and that offenders would go unpunished. However, early studies on the actual use and effectiveness of this legal requirement did not find strong empirical support for the belief that prosecutions would be made more difficult. Rather, they suggested that warnings tended to be given most often in important cases “when failure to do so might jeopardize the admissibility of a highly valued confession” (p.233). At the same time, it was noted that most suspects did not appear to fully understand the impact and importance of the material in the warning. Furthermore, some research suggested that the required warnings neither affected the likelihood that an accused would confess nor the success of prosecutions (p.234). Although other work found a somewhat lower confession rate for certain offences, this phenomenon did not invariably translate into a lower *conviction* rate. In fact, it was concluded in one study that “police interrogators used the warnings to their advantage to create the appearance that a voluntary statement had been obtained” (p.234). Generally speaking, the early studies suggested that “the *Miranda* rules had only a marginal effect on the ability of the police to elicit confessions and on the ability of prosecutors to win convictions, despite the fact that some detectives continued to perceive a substantial *Miranda* impact” (p.238).

This paper contrasts these early conclusions regarding the use and effectiveness of *Miranda* warnings with those from more recent studies. While “quantitative claims [made by those arguing that the warnings have impeded prosecutions] have not been generally accepted in either the legal or social science community” (p.244), they underline the controversy which still surrounds this legal requirement. In an attempt to synthesize the current consensual view of the *Miranda* warning, this study notes the following points:

- While the police give warnings in almost all cases in which they are legally required, questioning does occur “outside” *Miranda*.
- The police have developed strategies which induce *Miranda* waivers in part by downplaying the significance of the warning or suggesting that benefits may be attributed to those individuals who talk to them.
- Waivers are given in most (78-96%) police interrogations although this percentage drops with suspects who have a criminal record. As one researcher noted, “[n]ext to the warning label on cigarette packs, *Miranda* is the most widely ignored piece of official advice in our society” (p.247).
- In some jurisdictions, police are trained to violate the warning.
- There appear to be fewer seriously abusive interrogations than there were 40 years ago. Nevertheless, “*Miranda* has not changed the psychological interrogation process that it condemned but has only motivated police to develop more subtle and sophisticated – and perhaps more compelling – interrogation strategies” (p.255).

Conclusion: The *Miranda* warning may “tap into a basic vein of fairness that transcends the [Supreme Court’s original] assumptions about the diminished free will of suspects facing police interrogation” (p.265). However, there is no consistent evidence that it has affected the ability of an accused person to resist giving a confession. Part of the reason for this reality appears to be because “the police adjusted to [the necessity of giving] *Miranda* [warnings] and learned how to comply in a way that minimizes the chance that the suspect will resist interrogation” (p.207). In other words, it would seem that police clearly include the right to confess as part of the *Miranda* warning.

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“Home detention” may be seen as an appealing alternative to prison. However, it has serious problems that may easily be overlooked by those searching for a “quick fix” custodial substitute.

Background. Home detention has seen a dramatic increase in popularity not only in Canada but in other jurisdictions as well (*e.g.*, the State of Victoria, Australia recognizes it as an explicit sentencing option). Its attractiveness would seem to reside in its ability to reduce state costs and avoid the harmful effects of prison while simultaneously still being associated with the general ‘tough on crime’ approach to sentencing which is currently in vogue. Unfortunately, this justification not only lacks empirical support but also ignores other problematic issues related to this sentencing option.

This paper discusses a number of problems which emerge from a more careful examination of “home detention”. These include the following:

- If the real purpose of home detention is to reduce either the severity of sentences or the use of imprisonment, this goal should potentially be addressed directly rather than through the “back door” of creating an “equivalent” to prison. In fact, intermediate sanctions – that is, those sentencing options designed to fill an apparent void between fines and imprisonment – have not, generally, been successful in reducing imprisonment levels.
- The effects of home detention on other members of the family also need to be taken into account. On the one hand, these “innocent” cohabitants may be arguably seen as being punished alongside the offender as they are being forced to reside with someone who is “detained” in their household. On the other hand, some jurisdictions (*e.g.*, the State of Victoria, Australia) have given these additional members of the household a veto on whether the offender can be ordered into home detention. This practice raises delicate issues of genuine “consent” – particularly if the alternative for the family is to have their main source of support imprisoned. Of equal concern is the question of the appropriateness of partially turning over the sentencing function to members of the household who, in effect, can veto the imposition of a particular sanction.
- With the introduction of home detention into a sentencing structure, obvious concerns arise regarding the possibility of net-widening – this is, that potential offenders will be drawn largely from those who would not otherwise have been incarcerated rather than from the prison population.
- Costs will not necessarily be reduced by the use of home detention. For example, a study in New Zealand suggested that the real costs of this sentencing option may not differ dramatically from those associated with imprisonment.
- The impact of home detention will also vary dramatically with the nature of the “home.” The single mother with three children living in a one-bedroom apartment will clearly experience home detention quite differently from the white collar offender who is restricted to a luxurious mansion.

Conclusion: If the main purpose of implementing a home detention policy is to save money and/or reduce imprisonment, there are other, potentially less problematic, ways in which this objective could be accomplished. For instance, proportionate sanctions could be imposed and the overall level of punishment reduced. Further, other sanctions (*e.g.*, community service, fines, *etc.*) may be more appropriate, particularly for low risk non-violent offenders. Indeed, it would seem more sensible to explore the adaptability of existing sanctions before jumping on the bandwagon of new – not yet fully tested - sentencing options.

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About half of the criminals in adult courts were never, officially, young offenders. Nevertheless, the characteristics of adult-onset offenders and those who committed crimes both as children and as adults are quite similar.

Background. It is often assumed that a person who is found to have committed an offence as an adult must have also had contact with the justice system as a youth. As a result, “adult onset” offending has lacked careful examination. However, most offending – judging from official records of arrest – can be attributable to adults rather than youths. Therefore, even if a high portion of these adults does not have young offender records, their actual (raw) numbers may be large. In fact, an assessment of 15 longitudinal studies using official records show that while approximately 52% of delinquent youths apparently went on to commit at least one offence as adults, the portion of adult offenders who had no record of offending as youths was still about 50%. Clearly, adult onset offending (at least as measured by official records) accounts for a substantial amount of crime.

This study examines the determinants of early (as youths) versus late (as adults) onset offending in an attempt to discover whether the factors predicting adult onset offending are similar to those of youth onset offending. It employs a set of data involving people born in the 1940s in Racine, Wisconsin. Police contacts for non-traffic and non-status offences were examined until the sample subjects were in their 30s.

The findings were quite consistent: The factors associated with youth onset offending were the same as the factors which predicted adult onset offending. Said differently, certain demographic variables (*i.e.* race, gender, social class, family size) were correlated with whether or not a person offended as an adult - both for those who had committed crimes as a youth and those who were not young offenders. In a similar vein, various aspects of the person’s adolescent life (*i.e.* whether the person had dropped out of school or used marijuana during adolescence) had the same relationship to adult offending for those with and without criminal records as a youth. Characteristics of the respondent as an adult (*e.g.*, whether the respondent had friends who offended) also had the same relationship to adult offending for both individuals with youth records and those with no youth criminal history. In other words, the predictors of adult offending were the same for those who had also offended as youths and for those who had a clean youth record.

Conclusion: Although adult onset offending is relatively rare compared to youth onset offending, the individuals who do not get around to committing offences until they are adults are still important as they constitute approximately half of the offenders brought to adult court at least once. However, it is equally true that social policies aimed at decreasing the likelihood of one type of offending would appear to have the same positive effect on the other type of offending. In other words, it may be possible to prevent two jail birds with one policy stone.

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Press coverage of crime waves may not only describe the phenomenon. Rather, the way in which the media ‘constructs’ or defines crime may also have a direct impact on the frequency in which it occurs.

Background. The existing research on crime waves has tended to focus attention on either the objective (*i.e.* measurable shifts in frequency or seriousness) or the subjective (*i.e.* claims made by media, public perceptions, and other experiential components) characteristics of this phenomenon. The problem with this approach is that it ignores the interconnections between these two dimensions. As a consequence, social analyses tend to be partial, lacking “balance or comprehension” (p.56).

This paper is an attempt to overcome this difficulty. More specifically, it examines the newspaper coverage of the “black hand” crime wave of violence and extortion which came to be associated with Italian communities in American and Canadian cities during the first two decades of the 20th century. As press reports of blackmail and violent crime in the “Little Italys” of North America multiplied, the image conjured up was that of a mysterious criminal organization that was controlled in Sicily but extended to every sizable North American city with an Italian community. This notion of dangerous organized crime was fueled by media accounts claiming widespread reluctance on the part of victims of ‘black hand’ extortion to reveal the names of offenders. In fact, this ‘tendency’ not to cooperate with the police was portrayed by the press as further evidence of the “viciousness of ‘black hand’ criminals and ... the vulnerability and susceptibility of their victims” (p.68) rather than a reasonable response from this particular population. Especially in light of the low level of police protection afforded to residents of Italian communities, the small number of Italian officers in the police department, the realistic nature of so many of the extortion threats, and the inability of many potential victims to arm themselves, their reluctance to assist police may, in fact, simply constitute a rational and justifiable course of action.

The findings from this study’s examination of the ‘black hand’ press coverage suggest that the media “construction” of this crime wave served, in fact, as a “cultural resource” (p.68) for both predators and their prey. More precisely, offenders could use it “to facilitate extortion demands of various sorts” (p.68) while it provided victims with a means of understanding “a variety of forms of predation to which they might be subjected” (p.69). In this way, “the publicity associated with ‘black hand’ crime may have widened the opportunity structure for extortionate crimes by allowing offenders to present themselves as dangerous, and by encouraging them to think of their victims as easily manipulated” (p.71). Indeed, the significant coverage associated with this particular crime and the widespread use of the ‘black hand’ label may have had a direct impact on the frequency in which this crime occurred by “encouraging its utilization by offenders as a coercive technique” (p.70).

Conclusion. Because “many crime waves likely involve the dynamic interplay of changes in crime levels and changes in the social definition of crime,” it is important that “both the content and the meaning of criminal events be made problematic” (p.56). The analysis of the ‘black hand’ crime wave suggests that “the role that social problems constructions makes available to offenders (and to victims) can, under certain circumstances, facilitate these predator interactions” (p.74). Recognition of this feedback model may serve as an important warning within a contemporary context. Media claims surrounding the reluctance on the part of some groups to name offenders (*e.g.*, blacks in Toronto) may have the effect of broadening the opportunities for the commission of subsequent offences. Further, it may distort reality by ignoring other more reasonable – albeit less sensationalistic – explanations for the non-reporting of certain kinds of crimes.

Reference: Sacco, Vincent F. (2002). Black Hand Outrage: A Constructionist Analysis of an Urban Crime Wave. *Deviant Behaviour*, 24, 53-77.