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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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Build it and they will come: Prison construction *causes* increased prison use.

This paper exposes what may be a “Catch-22” for policy makers concerned with overcrowded prisons: the impact of providing more prison capacity is that more people will be sentenced to prison. The “new” prisoners who fill new prison spaces tend to be those at the margins (in this instance, minor offenders). When prisons are full, there is a “natural” disincentive to jailing those who commit minor offences or violate their terms of release in minor ways. Take away that disincentive, and imprisonment rates rise. The paper should also encourage those who might be considering inviting the private sector to enter the prison business in Canada to take a sober second look at such a policy. The private sector may have the capacity -- that government may lack -- to make quick decisions to build prisons. Hence private involvement in providing prison space may, in fact, lead to more people being sent to prison. **(See Item 1.)**

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Communities where residents can count on their neighbours to intervene when there is minor trouble, and where residents trust one another, are likely to have low levels of violence *above and beyond the characteristics of the individuals who live in that neighbourhood.*

Above and beyond the other factors, those who live in neighbourhoods which are high in “collective efficacy” (neighbourhood informal social control and cohesion) are:

- less likely to believe that they live in neighbourhoods high in violence,
- less likely to have been the victim of violence, and are
- less likely to have had a homicide in their neighbourhood.

“Collective efficacy” is, in part, shaped by social and economic factors. However, given its apparent independent impact on all three measures of violence, it appears that one way to address problems of crime is to consider how neighbourhoods themselves can be strengthened. **(See Item 2.)**

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Completing a victim impact statement does *not* make victims more satisfied with the criminal justice system. Those victims who expected the victim impact statement to have an effect, but did not believe it had, were particularly dissatisfied with the sentence. Dissatisfaction with the sentence was the main determinant of dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system as a whole.

Some might believe that regardless of whether victim impact statements are helpful to the court, they may help demonstrate to the victim that the system is responsive to their concerns. This does not seem to be the case. The authors suggest that “if the victim impact statement practice is continued, efforts to prevent raised expectations, which result in a decrease in satisfaction with justice need to be taken.” The authors also noted that “although the victims wanted more and longer prison sentences than were actually imposed..., they also desired more orders of restitution, community service and license revocations than the court provided.... It suggests that other, more constructive outcomes such as restitution or compensation... or community service... are of considerable importance to the victims.” **(See Item 3.)**

So-called “law and order” politicians may want prisons to be “a strict tough environment without creature comforts” but American prison wardens disagree. For the most part -- but with some notable exceptions -- they do not want normal prison programs and services reduced.

The move to restrict programs and amenities within prisons (in the U.S.) does not come from the wardens, but does tend to be supported most by the wardens who favour “paying back offenders for the harm they have caused” over “reforming offenders so that they return to society and live constructive lives” as the primary goal of corrections. One wonders whether those in Canada who espouse differing views on this subject are similarly divided about what “corrections” should be all about. (See **Item 4.**)

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The three strikes law in California was passed even though it was known by legislative committees to be seriously flawed, and even though it was known to imply heavy financial costs, and even though other “tougher” but more rational approaches were available. The political and criminological lessons from California’s experience should be learned by all.

The California three strikes legislation provides us with a case history of what can happen when electoral politics -- and to some extent rushed legislation -- takes precedence over rational evaluation of complex questions. Most sentencing systems punish repeat offenders more than first time offenders. The difficulty is that this history illustrates that there are strong forces -- in the case of the three strikes legislation they included the prison guard’s association -- that coalesce in favour of legislation that cannot meet its stated goals but appears, on the surface, to provide quick and effective security. (See **Item 5.**)

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Homelessness for Canadian male youth leads to involvement in crime. Economic situations and prospects are important, but it is also the way these conditions are interpreted and explained that determine the youth’s involvement in criminal behaviour.

The results suggest that the problem of unemployment with these youth is not so much that it will cause crime directly. It is more that being unemployed will, for some youth, create long term changes in the way in which they explain their disadvantaged state that are themselves criminogenic. The authors note that “homelessness is extremely criminogenic, but it is the youth’s reactions to the conditions that leads to criminal behaviour.” (See **Item 6.**)

The community corrections conundrum: those who appear to be most likely to “need” intensive supervision (in contrast to “normal” parole or probation supervision) are the very same people who are most likely to fail when released. Intensive supervision of those in the community may turn out to be a complex way of setting people up to fail.

The authors of the paper conclude that “The typical candidate for intensive supervision is often precisely the type of offender who is most likely to fail in the community. Moreover, the present culture of community supervision only exacerbates this problem by encouraging officers to [return those who violate conditions to jail].... When we consider that intensive supervision programs largely select rule breakers who are supervised by rule enforcers, we might easily conclude that the system is programmed to fail.” (See Item 7.)

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Leading American criminologists and American police chiefs agree: The death penalty does not significantly reduce the number of homicides. Debates about the death penalty distract politicians from focusing on real solutions to crime problems, and politicians support the death penalty to show that they are “tough on crime”.

If expert views of capital punishment are important, then it is useful to know that there is consensus about the ineffectiveness of the death penalty among elite criminologists. And it is interesting that the majority of U.S. police chiefs agree with the academics. One suspects that many other criminologists, not just the presidents of organizations *and police chiefs* would support the view that there are more important crime and criminal justice issues to spend one’s time on than capital punishment. (See Item 8.)

Build it and they will come: Prison construction *causes* increased prison use.

Background. It is obviously a truism: the more prison cells a jurisdiction has, the more prisoners it will have. The common assumption, however, is that prison construction follows demand: as prison populations increase, governments build more prisons. The reasons why so many jurisdictions find that their prisons are always full is that they can't keep up with the demand for space. That is the assumption. The opposing theory is that prison capacity -- whatever it might be in a jurisdiction -- puts a limit on the use of imprisonment. Hence a jurisdiction that creates extra capacity will use it.

This paper. Orange County, Florida provided a near perfect opportunity to investigate the impact of capacity on use. In January 1992 they opened a new facility that increased their capacity to receive prisoners by 34%. Furthermore, they had reliable daily data on their jail population as well as data on an obviously relevant factor -- the number of daily arrests made by police. By having precise data (on a daily basis) the investigators could see whether the change in capacity had an impact on the jail population above and beyond any pre-existing trends.

Findings. Almost immediately after the new facilities were open, the jail population increased. Within three to four weeks, the population had increased dramatically. Statistical tests made it clear that the increase was not caused by increased police arrests. And the increase that took place was independent of previous trends. Equally important is the finding that "when jail beds were made available, they tended to be filled with minor law violators" (Page 285). A substantial source of supply for the new jail beds were misdemeanor probation violators.

The authors of the paper conclude that "Because adding capacity may have a positive and substantive effect on jail incarceration, apart from the influence of police activity and beyond the effect of preexisting incarceration trends, policy makers should remain cautious about adding capacity to reduce inmate overcrowding. Additionally, because available capacity does appear to increase incarceration levels, especially for minor defendants, inmate overcrowding may be addressed more appropriately by greater reliance on nonincarcerative remedies" (Page 287).

Conclusion. This paper exposes what may be a "Catch-22" for policy makers concerned with over-crowded prisons: the impact of providing more prison capacity is that more people will be sentenced to prison. The particular type of prisoners ending up in prison gives a strong hint about the mechanism: the presence of already full or overcrowded prisons acts as a disincentive to the sentencing or parole authority to make decisions which result in people at the margins (in this instance, minor offenders) going to prison. Take away that disincentive, and imprisonment rates rise.

The paper should also encourage those who might be considering inviting the private sector to enter the prison business in Canada to take a sober second look at such a policy. The private sector may have the capacity -- that government may lack -- to make quick decisions to build prisons. Hence private involvement in providing prison space may, in fact, lead to more people being sent to prison.

Reference: D'Alessio, Stewart J. and Lisa Stolzenberg (1997). The effect of available capacity on jail incarceration: An empirical test of Parkinson's Law. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 25 (4), 279-288.

Communities where residents can count on their neighbours to intervene when there is minor trouble, and where residents trust one another, are likely to have low levels of violence *above and beyond the characteristics of the individuals who live in that neighbourhood.*

Background. In the previous issue of *Criminological Highlights*, we presented a paper demonstrating that communities which teach their members to have social and moral obligations to others have less crime. The idea that there are characteristics of *communities* above and beyond the characteristics of *individuals* that are important in understanding levels of crime is not new, but at the same time, it is not an idea that has received much systematic research attention. This study, coming from the "Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighbourhoods" demonstrates that there are characteristics of communities -- above and beyond the characteristics of individuals -- that are important "protectors" from crime.

This study. This study looked at victim reported crime in 343 "neighbourhood clusters" in Chicago. These clusters were relatively small -- about 8000 people each -- and were designed to approximate local neighbourhoods in Chicago. A measure which the authors call "collective efficacy" was assessed by interviewing 8782 people (at least 20 per neighbourhood cluster). Respondents were asked how likely it was that their neighbours could be counted on to intervene in various ways if children were misbehaving, or committing minor offences, or if their local fire station was threatened with budget cuts. In addition, they were asked various questions relating to social cohesion: whether neighbours are willing to help one another, whether people in the neighbourhood can be trusted, etc. The answers to ten such questions were combined, for each neighbourhood, into a scale value of "collective efficacy." Various measures of the characteristics of those living in the neighbourhood were also obtained. There were three measures: (1) How often residents reported various forms of violence to have occurred in their neighbourhood in the previous six months, (2) whether they, or a member of their household, had experienced any violence while in the neighbourhood, and (3) whether a homicide had been recorded by the police as having occurred in the neighbourhood during that year (1995).

"Collective efficacy" obviously does not stand alone. It turns out to be negatively related to some other factors. Such factors included the concentration, within the community, of "disadvantaged" people (the unemployed, those below the poverty line, single-parent families, etc.). In addition, "collective efficacy" was lower in neighbourhoods that had higher proportions of those born outside the country and higher levels of "residential instability" (e.g., where people have moved a lot). These relationships make sense for obvious reasons: communities where there may be a language barrier, or where people have not lived in the neighbourhood for long may "impede the capacity of residents to realize common values and achieve informal social controls."

Findings. Above and beyond the other factors, "collective efficacy" (neighbourhood informal social control and cohesion) was a predictor of perceived neighbourhood violence, whether or not respondents had been the victim of violence, and whether a homicide had occurred in the neighbourhood.

Conclusion. "Collective efficacy" (or neighbourhood informal social control and cohesion) is, in part, shaped by social and economic factors. However, given its apparent independent impact on all three measures of violence, it appears that one way to address problems of crime is to consider how neighbourhoods themselves can be strengthened.

Reference: Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls (1997). Neighbourhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 15 August 1997, 918-924.

Completing a victim impact statement does *not* make victims more satisfied with the criminal justice system. Those victims who expected the victim impact statement to have an effect, but did not believe it had, were particularly dissatisfied with the sentence. Dissatisfaction with the sentence was the main determinant of dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system as a whole.

Background. It is often presumed that allowing victim impact statements will ensure that victims are more satisfied with the criminal justice system because they are no longer legally excluded. On the other hand, some have argued that giving victims an opportunity to express their views may create the expectation that their advice will be followed. If their advice is then not followed, it may lead to increased disillusionment with the system.

This paper. Cases with an identifiable individual victim were chosen from the South Australian higher courts. Some had filed a victim impact statement, some had not. A survey questionnaire was sent to them by the Director of the Office of Crime Statistics in the Attorney General's office.

Findings. Not surprisingly, most victims (96%) said that they wanted their victim impact statements used in sentencing, and most (71%) indicated that they expected it to have an impact on the sentence. Fewer than half (46%), however, thought it had affected the sentence. The net result was that for 34% of the victims, their expectation that they would have an impact was, in their view, unfulfilled. Most importantly, there was no significant difference between those who had filled out a victim impact statement and those who had not, in the mean satisfaction rating of the way in which the criminal justice system had handled their case.

Satisfaction with the sentence was the main determinant of their overall satisfaction with the criminal justice system. Satisfaction with the sentence was *not* significantly affected by whether or not the victim had filled out a victim impact statement. However, those victims who expected the victim impact statement to have an impact on the sentence but believed it had not had such an impact (i.e., those with unfulfilled expectations) were particularly dissatisfied with the sentence. And, of course, dissatisfaction with the sentence was the main determinant of dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system as a whole.

Conclusion. Some might believe that regardless of whether victim impact statements are helpful to the court, they may help demonstrate to the victim that the system is responsive to their concerns. This does not seem to be the case. The paper's authors suggest that "if the victim impact statement practice is continued, efforts to prevent raised expectations, which result in a decrease in satisfaction with justice need to be taken" (p. 56). The authors also noted that "although the victims wanted more and longer prison sentences than were actually imposed..., they also desired more orders of restitution, community service and license revocations than the court provided.... It suggests that other, more constructive outcomes such as restitution and compensation... or community service... are of considerable importance to the victims" (p. 56-7).

Reference: Erez, Edna, Leigh Roeger, and Frank Morgan (1997). Victim harm, impact statements and victim satisfaction with justice: An Australian experience. *International Review of Victimology*, 5, 37-60.

So-called “law and order” politicians may want prisons to be “a strict tough environment without creature comforts” but American prison wardens disagree. For the most part -- but with some notable exceptions -- they do not want normal prison programs and services reduced.

Background. Part of the “tough on crime” movement is to be “tough on prisoners.” Some may talk about prisons as if they are country clubs, and suggest that prisons should provide only the basic necessities of life. Some state legislatures have passed laws restricting prisoner’s access to various programs.

This study and its findings. State prison wardens in the U.S. were surveyed. The main part of the survey included a list of 36 prison programs and services. The wardens were asked whether each should be reduced or eliminated. Most wardens described their political philosophy as either “middle of the road” (53%) or conservative (39%); few (8%) were happy with the label “liberal”. In ranking the various goals of prison, incapacitation and deterrence were placed above rehabilitation (defined as “to reform offenders so that they will return to society in a constructive rather than destructive way”). However, retribution (defined as “to pay offenders back for the harm they have caused society”) was ranked lowest. Wardens who were most *opposed* to the reduction of prison programs were also most likely to rank rehabilitation as one of the most important goals of their institution. In contrast, those most in favour of eliminating prison programs were most likely to favour retribution.

Those amenities that fewer than a quarter of state prison wardens wished to eliminate included:

- all education programs (except college education)
- sports, crafts, etc., (except boxing, martial arts, or weight lifting)
- TV, radio, tape and CD players, musical instruments.

The programs the majority wanted to eliminate (in addition to the exceptions noted above) were of two types: ones that were unusual for these prisons (e.g., cosmetic surgery or dentistry, air conditioning, conjugal visits) or which appear to cause problems for them (e.g., state funded legal services, tobacco smoking, non-regulation clothing).

Only 1% of the wardens indicated that the restrictions that have taken place in their prisons were initiated by the wardens themselves. Part of the reason for this may be that most of the programs that are under fire for making prisons “too easy” are important time fillers for prisoners. As these authors point out, “the problem in prison is one of excess time and few constructive activities in which to engage....” (Page 38).

Conclusion. The move to restrict programs and amenities within prisons (in the U.S.) does not come from the wardens, but does tend to be supported most by the wardens who favour “paying back offenders for the harm they have caused” over “reforming offenders so that they return to society and live constructive lives” as the primary goal of corrections. One wonders whether those in Canada who espouse differing views on this subject are similarly divided about what “corrections” should be all about.

Reference: Johnson, W. Wesley, Katherine Bennett, and Timothy Flanagan (1997). Getting tough with prisoners: Results from the National Corrections Executive Survey, 1995. *Crime and Delinquency*, 43 (1), 2-41.

The three strikes law in California was passed even though it was known by legislative committees to be seriously flawed, and even though it was known to imply heavy financial costs, and even though other “tougher” but more rational approaches were available. The political and criminological lessons from California’s experience should be learned by all.

Background. The “three strikes” legislation in California is not unique. And few jurisdictions (in North America, at least) are likely to be immune to the pressures which led to its passage. This paper chronicles the political history of California’s legislation, the changes in penal theory that enabled it to become law, and the claims that were made. Rather than try to summarize the paper, a list of points with page references are provided.

- Those favouring three strikes legislation point to statistics of reduced reported crime to show it is working (similar to statistics in most parts of the U.S.). However, the “time served” for non-three strikes offenders is being reduced dramatically to make room for three strikes offenders: a one year sentence now translates into 71 days, on average, in custody. Belief in deterrence made this all right according to California’s Attorney General: “[I]f more [offenders] are being pushed out in the street and the crime rate is going down, it’s difficult not to say that some are being deterred from committing other crime” (p. 396, ft 7). On the other side, there are an increasing number of stories of wildly disproportionate sentences (e.g., stealing a drill from a garage led to a 25 year to life sentence for a man with two prior household burglaries, one of which was in the late 1970s).
- African Americans who make up 7% of the state’s population account for 38% of those sentenced under these provisions (p. 399 and ft 20). The law is particularly harsh on them because it includes drug offences. Though there is evidence (see p. 456, footnote 350) that whites and blacks use cocaine and marijuana at the same rate, arrest rates are much higher for African-Americans.
- Multiple offender statutes have been passed in over 20 states (p. 400), but there is enormous variation in what qualifies as the earlier strikes, how many strikes one gets, what the “trigger” offence can be, and the nature of the impact of the final strike (e.g., whether the trigger offence is relevant) (p. 400-401 and 463-481). California’s law is one of the most extreme on *all* dimensions (p. 402).
- The actual California law seems to have been drafted by an appeal court judge at the request of the father of a murder victim (p. 410 and ft 84) and gathered support after a highly publicized kidnap-killing (p. 411 and ft 89-90). This created public support to put the law on the ballot as a voter initiative. The legislature was told they could pass it, or leave it to the voters to do it for them. It was an election year (1994) (p. 412-413). The problem then was that the citizen sponsor of the initiative would not accept amendments even from law enforcement officials who identified drafting errors (p. 413). Other proposals which would have incarcerated offenders early in their careers were also rejected (p. 419-420).
- Three strikes legislation can be seen as the end point of a move from rehabilitation on the one hand to incapacitation on the other (p. 423). Three strikes legislation abandons a retributivist model (p. 425). Three strikes laws assume that multiple offenders are incorrigible (p. 427), and hence incapacitation is all that is left.
- The evidence in favour of incapacitation as a crime control method is questionable and often simply flawed (p. 432-437). Aside from anything else, it ignores the fact that many crimes are committed in groups and single group members will be replaced (p. 434).
- One of the many difficulties with three strikes legislation is that it creates an elderly prison population who, clearly, are expensive to care for (p. 437).

- In addition, three strikes laws make it more or less impossible to consider what might be called “selective rehabilitation” (p. 448-449) which might be more effective as a crime control method than incapacitation.
- Does the California public really want 3-strikes? It is notable that only four years earlier they rejected a bond issue for prison construction (p. 452). In fact, of course, for the most part the impact of three strikes is a few years away since most 3-strikes offenders would have received some prison time for their offences. Perhaps if the choice had not been “three strikes or ‘nothing’” but rather had been a set of costed alternatives, the voter’s choice would have been different.

Conclusion: The California three strikes legislation provides us with a case history of what can happen when electoral politics -- and to some extent rushed legislation -- takes precedence over rational evaluation of complex questions. Most sentencing systems punish repeat offenders more than first time offenders. The difficulty is that this history illustrates that there are strong forces -- in the case of the three strikes legislation they included the prison guard’s association -- that coalesce in favour of legislation that cannot meet its stated goals but appears, on the surface, to provide quick and effective security.

Reference: Vitiello, Michael (1997). Three strikes: Can we return to rationality? *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 87 (2), 395-481.

Homelessness for Canadian male youth leads to involvement in crime. Economic situations and prospects are important, but it is also the way these conditions are interpreted and explained that determine the youth's involvement in criminal behaviour.

Background. Concern about homelessness and youth unemployment is probably widespread, and at times that concern includes the impact of these factors on crime. There is much research on the relationship between unemployment and crime. The findings are somewhat inconsistent in part because the focus has usually been on "objective" measures rather than on the interpretations that are placed on labour market experiences.

This paper. In an attempt to understand crime committed by homeless male youth, this paper analyzed the results of interviews with 200 male "street" youth in Edmonton, Alberta. All were under age 24 and were not attending school. They all spent a fair amount of time "hanging around" on the street. Three quarters of them had "no fixed address" for the previous year. Standard self-report crime measures were obtained. In addition, questions were asked about the youths' interpretation of their own joblessness -- in particular whether they attributed their situation to themselves or others (government, industry).

Findings. For property crime, those who rejected the view that success would be the result of hard work were more likely to report having committed property crime, and this was more strongly the case for those with less overall income. The length of time they had been unemployed was not itself an important factor, but the long term unemployed "who blamed the economy, government and private industry for their unemployment were more likely to engage in property crime" (p. 423). Low amounts of legal income also led to increased amounts of property crime.

For violent crime, those who had been unemployed the longest and who rejected the view that success would come from hard work were most likely to report being violent, as was minimal legal income.

As the authors conclude, "In addition to objective labour market and material factors, street youths' perceptions of, and emotional reactions to, their labour market conditions help explain a range of offences. Youths who reject the dominant meritocratic ideology are more likely to access illegitimate means to obtain monetary and material goods." They also point out that "long-term unemployment and sparse employment histories tend to undermine perceptions of equal opportunity and lead the youths to blame the government, private industry, and the economy for their condition. The combination of these attributions with extensive joblessness, and a poor employment record increases youths participation in crime." Thus it is "labour market conditions and the way in which they are reacted to that work individually and together to increase criminal behavior" (p. 425).

Conclusion. The results suggest that the problem of unemployment with these youth is not so much that it will cause crime directly. It is more that the experience of unemployment will, for some youth, create long term explanations for unemployment that are themselves criminogenic. The authors note that "homelessness is extremely criminogenic, but it is the youth's reactions to the conditions that leads to criminal behaviour" (Page 425).

Reference. Baron, Stephen W. and Timothy F. Hartnagel (1997). Attributions, affect, and crime: Street youths' reactions to unemployment. *Criminology*, 35 (3), 409-434.

The community corrections conundrum: those who appear to be most likely to “need” intensive supervision (in contrast to “normal” parole or probation supervision) are the very same people who are most likely to fail when released. Intensive supervision of those in the community may turn out to be a complex way of setting people up to fail.

Background. It has been established in previous studies that intensive supervision of offenders who are in some kind of community program leads to more technical violations than “normal” release. This is a non-trivial problem from the perspective of those advocating the use of “intensive supervision” instead of imprisonment because the impact may be an increase in technical charges (e.g., for violation of a court order) and, as a result *increased* imprisonment.

This study. This study examined those who were given temporary release from prison in Vermont in preparation of release. The groups who were examined were, in fact, a rather heterogeneous group including some violent offenders with serious treatment needs and some who had committed minor crimes and had little or no need for treatment. The study came about as a result of an administrative accident. A new community program of intensely supervised house arrest had been set up by the state Department of Corrections but for various reasons, very few people were assigned to it. In order to use the additional staff sensibly, staff were allowed to supervise offenders on release prior to the end of their prison sentence. The result was that a group of offenders -- more or less unselected -- were subject to intensive surveillance. Because of this, more offenders were released early (administrators felt more secure than they had without this intensive supervision).

Findings. Not surprisingly, more offenders under intensive supervision were revoked than had occurred in the past (under normal procedures) -- almost always because of rule violations (not new offences). In fact, 34% had their release revoked -- 95% of them by corrections officers. The reasons sounded predictable: substance use (almost always alcohol) (33%), escape or “out of place” (25%), new crime (6%) or because they were subject of a criminal investigation (11%), as well as some other reasons (25%).

Those revoked tended to be slightly younger, more likely to be seen as needing drug treatment, *less* likely to be needing treatment regarding sexual behaviour, and more likely to have unstable employment. Those with a current or past property felony or a misdemeanour assault were more likely to be revoked. And those with longer records were more likely to be revoked. Institutional misbehaviour (measured both as frequency and as seriousness) correlated with revocation.

Conclusion. “The typical candidate for intensive supervision is often precisely the type of offender who is most likely to fail in the community. Moreover, the present culture of community supervision only exacerbates this problem by encouraging officers to [return those who violate conditions to jail].... When we consider that intensive supervision programs largely select rule breakers who are supervised by rule enforcers, we might easily conclude that the system is programmed to fail” (Page 116).

Reference: Ryan, James E. (1997) Who gets revoked: A comparison of intensive supervision successes and failures in Vermont. *Crime and Delinquency*, 43 (1), 104-118.

Leading American criminologists and American police chiefs agree: The death penalty does not significantly reduce the number of homicides. Debates about the death penalty distract politicians from focusing on real solutions to crime problems, and politicians support the death penalty to show that they are “tough on crime”.

Background. Public opinion polls in the United States and in Canada typically show a fair amount of support for the death penalty. In the U.S., according to a Gallup Poll in 1994, 80% supported the death penalty. Questions about support of the death penalty require an alternative choice in order to be meaningful. In 1991 it was found that support for capital punishment dropped from 76% to 53% when people were given a choice between capital punishment and life in prison without parole (p. 3). Obviously support for capital punishment exists for a number of reasons. The two reasons most often expressed are that it is appropriate for murder, given the nature of the crime, and that it will deter other potential murderers. Belief in deterrence turns out to be important for many people: a 1991 U.S. Gallup poll found that support for capital punishment dropped from 76% to 52% when people were asked “if they would support the death penalty if new evidence proved that the death penalty does not act as a deterrent to murder” (p. 4).

This study. Since there is some disagreement about how experts view the death penalty, the authors of this paper decided to compare two groups: eminent American criminologists and police chiefs and country sheriffs from all parts of the U.S. The police and sheriff study comes from 386 randomly selected chiefs and sheriffs conducted in 1995 by other researchers as part of another study. The criminologists consists of all of the living presidents and past-presidents of three professional and academic criminological organizations (the American Society of Criminology, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, and the Law and Society Association). Ninety-six percent returned the completed questionnaire.

Findings. The police chiefs and criminology presidents were presented with three statements and asked whether each was accurate:

- “Politicians support the death penalty as a symbolic way to how they are tough on crime.” Accurate statement: Criminology presidents: 100%. Police chiefs: 85%.
- “Debates about the death penalty distract Congress and the state legislatures from focusing on real solutions to crime problems.” Accurate statement: Criminology presidents: 87%. Police chiefs: 57%.
- “The death penalty significantly reduces the number of homicides.” Accurate statement: Criminology presidents: 0%. Police chiefs: 26%.

Obviously police chiefs are not quite as certain as criminology presidents that the death penalty is ineffective as a deterrent and supported largely for political purposes. Nevertheless, the vast majority do take this position.

Conclusion. If expert views of capital punishment are important, then it is useful to know that there is consensus about the ineffectiveness of the death penalty among elite criminologists. And it is interesting that the majority of U.S. police chiefs agree with the academics. One suspects that many other criminologists, not just the presidents of organizations would support the view that there are more important crime and criminal justice issues to spend one’s time on than capital punishment.

Reference. Radelet, Michael L. and Ronald L Akers. (1996) Deterrence and the death penalty: the views of experts. *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 87 (1), 1-16.