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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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**Restoring order to one of the worst and most unpleasant facilities in New York City -- the Port Authority Bus Terminal -- was accomplished largely through changes in design and management rather than with criminal justice muscle. Zero tolerance, in this case, meant not tolerating bad design and poor management and addressing problems as they arose.**

The Port Authority Bus Terminal had been a dangerous, unpleasant, place to visit. It was clear that its problems -- high rates of crime and general disorder -- could not be addressed using traditional "hard" police tactics. Instead, a combination of approaches were used most of which had to do largely with design and management of the facility. The result was what was desired: a bus station that people could use, without fear, as a bus station. "Combining physical design and clever management, the Port Authority has brought its transient problem under substantial control and reduced its crime problem." Some of the design changes were rather mundane: they made 14 design changes in the washrooms which, in total, helped reclaim the washrooms for use by bus station users. Perhaps what is most interesting is that crime, disorder, and unpleasantness were reduced dramatically without resorting to hard line police tactics. Crime was designed and managed away. (See **Item 1**)

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**Transferring youths into adult court does not lead to an overall reduction in their future offending.**

The results are clear: transferring those charged as juveniles to adult court is likely to have no beneficial effect on future offending. There was some variability across groups in the effect of a transfer on whether or not the youth recidivated. But any apparent "benefit" of being transferred has to be weighed against the fact that *transferred* youth recidivated earlier and more often. Though we do not know why recidivism among transferred youth is higher, it is clear that policies aimed at reducing crime by increasing transfers are likely to backfire. (See **Item 2**)

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**Wealthy and powerful people are less likely to commit homicide because they have greater access to legal ways of handling conflict. Those without access to legal remedies (the poor, the disadvantaged, etc.) must handle conflicts themselves, increasing the likelihood of lethal violence.**

This is an important theory which gives a reasonable account of why violence (or what is labeled as "crime" more generally) is not evenly distributed across classes in society. It also has clear policy implications: if "legal" approaches to dealing with disputes are not available to all people (and are not seen as effective, fair, etc.), other means of resolving disputes will be used. (See **Item 3**)

**California's "3-Strikes" law strikes out again. Strike One: Its effect on crime through incapacitation will be minimal. Strike Two: If fully implemented, the increase in prison costs in the state will be roughly equivalent to the state's current post-secondary education budget. This study throws Strike Three: it will not deter crime.**

California's three strikes law does not deter. In nine of the ten largest California cities there was no measurable impact on the law beyond what was happening anyway before the law came into being. More important is the implication of these findings for *any* attempt to deter through harsher legislative minimum sentences. The California three strikes law received enormous publicity and was well known to most people since it was voted on in a state-wide initiative. Since it had no discernible deterrent effect, one cannot plausibly expect other legislative minimum sentences in any country to have an impact on crime. (See Item 4)

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**The desire for tougher laws in the U.S. relates more to factors such as the public's belief in the decline of morality and increases in the diversity of the population than it does to perceptions of fear and risk.**

We tend to explain views about crime by looking to crime-related beliefs and attitudes. This paper argues that such an approach is not sufficient. Social values, and views of the community and the family are, according to this study, *more* important in explaining punitive attitudes. When we hear members of the Reform Party, for example, arguing for certain punitive policies, we must look beyond the Reformer's views of crime for an explanation. Their punitive views may be related, much more strongly, to their broadly based views that their communities and their country have deteriorated morally. (See Item 5)

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**The analysis of the relationship between IQ and crime presented by Herrnstein and Murray in their book *The Bell Curve* is seriously flawed: A careful analysis of the data demonstrates that the size of the relationship between IQ and crime is trivial and is much less important than many factors that society can change.**

A careful empirical analysis -- using the very same data that Herrnstein and Murray used -- demonstrates the empirical inadequacy of Herrnstein and Murray's contention that IQ is an important factor in explaining crime. Quite simply, Herrnstein and Murray presented an inadequate analysis of the data. The authors of this paper demonstrate that "the effects of IQ on criminal involvement are, at best, modest... [The data show] that IQ is a weak to modest risk factor in offending and its criminogenic effects are dwarfed by a range of factors, many of which are amenable to change.... Herrnstein and Murray's policies to control crime, especially among the cognitively disadvantaged, have virtually no empirical support and, on their face, are certainly preposterous." (See Item 6)

**Persistent young offenders typically commit the same kinds of offences as other young offenders -- only more of them. Who qualifies as “persistent” is arbitrary and those identified by one definition at one point in time would not be the same people identified as “persistent” if the definition or time period were slightly changed.**

We cannot reliably identify who is likely to be a persistent offender. Definitions can be created and applied, but equally reasonably sounding definitions would identify a different group of offenders. Persistent young offenders -- by any definition -- may have committed more offences, but the offences that they commit, on average, are no more serious than the offences committed by others. A special regime for such offenders may look good as long as one does not look carefully at the effects. **(See Item 7)**

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**The reason that the sons born of adolescent mothers are more likely to commit criminal acts than are the sons born of older mothers is a combination of two factors: the lack of resources of these families and the fact that the mothers seem to lack parenting skills or provide poor role models to their offspring.**

This study suggests that “problem behaviours [such as crime] associated with children of adolescent mothers” seem to be rooted in the more enduring circumstances and behaviours related to the mother’s lack of skills as a parent and lack of resources available to her and to her children. At the same time it suggests that there is a need to intervene in support of mothers who have children early. Obviously, resources (financial and otherwise) can be helpful. Support, advice, help, and training in child rearing matters would appear to be important for the eventual well-being of these children who are “at risk.” **(See Item 8)**

**Restoring order to one of the worst and most unpleasant facilities in New York City -- the Port Authority Bus Terminal -- was accomplished largely through changes in design and management rather than with criminal justice muscle. Zero tolerance, in this case, meant not tolerating bad design and poor management and addressing problems as they arose.**

*Context.* The Port Authority bus terminal is the biggest bus station in the world, handling about 175 thousand passengers a day. A block away from the prostitutes, porn and drugs in Times Square, it was also the home of "several hundred" homeless people. The homeless had taken over most public areas in the building such that facilities designed for bus travelers were no longer available for them. The goal was to reduce crime (largely robbery, assaults, and thefts), and to deal effectively with the problems of the homeless, drugs, prostitution, etc.

*Approach.* The Port Authority (PA) police were incapable of taking control by "normal" police approaches. Although the PA police force is large (it is the 28th largest police force in the U.S.) with 125 officers assigned permanently to the bus terminal, they, alone, could do little. Other approaches had to be used. Instead of seeing the problem as being dealt with by way of "law enforcement" and, for example, arresting or harassing transients in the bus terminal, the PA contracted with a social service agency to provide services to "their" transient population. The police, then, induced transients to cooperate with the agency by providing the alternatives of accepting help, leaving, or going to jail. The transient problem was made manageable.

Physical modifications were also important. Entrances and exits were made more accessible. Niches and dark corners were eliminated. Areas where people could hide or sleep without being observed were made into public spaces by turning brick walls into glass walls. Benches where people had slept were removed and replaced with single seats that were made purposefully uncomfortable to sleep on. Information kiosks were set up to make it easy for visitors to get legitimate information rather than being victimized by various types of hustlers. Stores -- particularly chain stores that people felt comfortable patronizing -- were brought in. Video games that attracted young toughs were replaced with games that problematic folk were uninterested in. Physical changes facilitated the "flow" of people quickly and easily through the station, thereby reducing the opportunity for them to be victimized.

*Results.* Complaints went down. Ratings of various aspects of the terminal went up. There were 80% fewer homeless in the facility. Public order complaints were reduced dramatically as were the numbers of most offences. People felt more safe and saw the police as doing a better job. Only about a third as many people said that they felt insecure or very insecure in the PA terminal after the changes had been implemented as compared to before. Declines in crime had been occurring in New York (as well as other parts of the United States, and in Canada) at the time that the PA bus station was being cleaned up (beginning in 1991), but decreases were larger in the PA bus station than in the surrounding areas. Equally important is the fact that "there was no evidence of displacement of robbery to nearby precincts."

*Conclusion.* "Combining physical design and clever management, the Port Authority has brought its transient problem under substantial control and reduced its crime problem." Some of the design changes were rather mundane: they made 14 design changes in the washrooms which, in total, helped reclaim the washrooms for use by bus station users. Perhaps what is most interesting is that crime, disorder, and unpleasantness were reduced dramatically without resorting to hard line police tactics. Crime was designed and managed away.

*Reference.* Felson, Marcus and 11 others. (1996). Redesigning Hell: Preventing crime and disorder at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. In *Preventing Mass Transit Crime* Ronald V. Clarke, editor). Crime Prevention Studies, Volume 6. Monsey, New York: Criminal Justice Press.

**Transferring youths into adult court does not lead to an overall reduction in their future offending.**

*Context.* There are a number of reasons for transferring youths from juvenile (or youth) court to adult court. One of them is that offenders who are transferred might be less likely to re-offend. This study examines whether there is an impact on recidivism of being transferred.

*This study* examined all juveniles cases resulting in a transfer in the State of Florida in 1987. In all, Florida transferred 3142 juveniles to adult court that year. (Florida's population is about half of that of Canada; Canada transfers 75 - 130 juveniles to adult court in a year.) Juveniles who were not transferred but who shared a set of similar characteristics were used as a comparison group. [A problem with such approaches is that the matching may not be completely adequate. Nevertheless, in this study the matching criteria look reasonable.]

*Findings.* Overall, 42% of the young people who were transferred in 1987 were rearrested before November 15, 1994, compared to 43% of those dealt with in juvenile court -- essentially no difference. When the data were broken down by eight classes of offences, however, there was some variability in the impact of a transfer across groups. One group (those being prosecuted for felony property offences) were more likely to recidivate if they were *not* transferred. Most of the other offence groupings were more likely to recidivate if they were transferred (some groups were significantly more likely). A more sophisticated analysis showed that "the net effect of transfer was to increase recidivism in the long term, a finding that was consistent with the short-term analysis" (p. 553). Moreover, as a group "the transferred subjects tended to be rearrested more quickly than the nontransferred subjects throughout the long follow-up period" (p. 555), and the "average number of rearrests was higher for transfers than for nontransfers." All in all, then, even for the property felons, "when [those who were transferred] did reoffend, they reoffended more often and more quickly."

*Conclusions.* The results are clear: transferring those charged as juveniles to adult court is likely to have no beneficial effect on future offending. There was some variability across groups in the effect of a transfer on whether or not the youth recidivated. But any apparent "benefit" of being transferred has to be weighed against the fact that *transferred* youth recidivated earlier and more often. Though we do not know why recidivism among transferred youth is higher, it is clear that policies aimed at reducing crime by increasing transfers are likely to backfire.

*Reference.* Winner, Lawrence, Lonn Lanza-Kaduce, Donna M. Bishop, and Charles E. Frazier. The transfer of juveniles to criminal court: Reexamining recidivism over the long term. (October 1997) *Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 548-563.

**Wealthy and powerful people are less likely to commit homicide because they have greater access to legal ways of handling conflict. Those without access to legal remedies (the poor, the disadvantaged, etc.) must handle conflicts themselves, increasing the likelihood of lethal violence.**

*Context.* There is much evidence to suggest that homicides are concentrated among the poorest in a society. For example, aboriginal people in Canada -- both on and off reserves -- are much more likely than other Canadians to be victims or offenders in homicide incidents. However, it appears that in “premodern” societies, “homicide was found at all levels of the social hierarchy, including its higher echelons” (p. 381). Understanding what changed may help us understand something about the use of violence more generally.

*This paper* relies largely on an analysis of the role of law in an earlier paper (by Donald Black) that suggests that much of crime is best thought of as “a form of aggressive conflict management, or as it is sometimes known in the anthropological literature, ‘self help.’ Although violence is an accepted method for pursuing grievances in many societies, states define it as a crime.... [Black suggested] that within state societies some groups occupy stateless locations in social space.... Low status people... are largely outside the state’s legal system and hence are more likely to use aggressive tactics to resolve their conflict... Thus one factor that appears to predict homicide is virtual statelessness, or the effective unavailability of law” (p. 393).

On the other hand, in many western countries, most calls to the police come from the poor and disadvantaged, and many of these calls involve interpersonal disputes. These findings are not in conflict with this perspective since the poor, disadvantaged, or marginalized, may simply invoke the law “less readily than other people, and when they do, they less often receive from it the help they want” (p. 393). “In sum, law is differentially distributed across status groups. Because law is relatively unavailable to low-status groups, they cannot rely on it to settle their disputes and so homicide comes to fill some of the void left by its absence” (p. 395).

“[In] societies in which the state has evolved to being itself of high status, the protection of the law allows high status people to abjure lethal conflict. Those at the lower echelons of society do not enjoy the same luxury, however. For them, law is... a distant and repressive system. Because law is effectively unavailable, low-status people must handle conflicts themselves, thereby increasing the likelihood of lethal violence” (p. 397).

*Implications.* This is an important theory which gives a reasonable account of why violence (or what is labeled as “crime” more generally) is not evenly distributed across classes in society. It also has clear policy implications: if “legal” approaches to dealing with disputes are not available to all people (and are not seen as effective, fair, etc.), other means of resolving disputes will be used.

*References.* Cooney, Mark. The decline of elite homicide (1997). *Criminology*, 35, 381-407.  
Black, Donald. Crime as social control (1983). *American Sociological Review*, 48, 34-45.

**California's "3-Strikes" law strikes out again. Strike One: Its effect on crime through incapacitation will be minimal. Strike Two: If fully implemented, the increase in prison costs in the state will be roughly equivalent to the state's current post-secondary education budget. This study throws Strike Three: it will not deter crime.**

*Context.* California's three strikes law created mandatory 25 years to life sentences for those convicted, for the third time, of *any* felony (after two prior convictions for serious crimes). It also increased dramatically the sentence for the second strike. One might expect such well publicized mandatory sentences to deter crime. A previous study by the RAND Corporation looked at incapacitation effects and costs (Strikes One and Two against this law). This study, looks at the other presumed benefit from harsh sentences: general deterrence.

*This study.* Using month-by-month data from California's ten largest cities, the authors looked at the impact of the new law on felonies (which, presumably, should be given an extra dose of deterrence by the 3-strikes law) before and after the change in the law. And, as a form of comparison, the authors looked at reported misdemeanor larcenies which, presumably would be unaffected by the three strikes law.

*Results.* The results are easy to describe: "The results generally indicate that the three-strikes law did not decrease the California Crime Index [a crime rate based on the rate of reported "index" crimes] below that expected on the basis of preexisting trends" (p. 464). It is important to look at preexisting trends since crime in California, as elsewhere in North America, was going down *before* the three strikes law came into being. This is important to remember, given that one often hears about simple "before vs. after" comparisons when examining issues such as this one. If crime was already going down before the three strikes law came in, one cannot logically attribute the drop in crime to the law. [In one city -- Anaheim -- there was a significant decrease in the crime index not attributable to preexisting trends. There is no explanation related to the three strikes laws that might explain this one effect in isolation from the other nine cities. The best guess is that something quite different was responsible for the apparent drop in this one city.]

One explanation for the lack of deterrent impact of the law is the obvious one: sentences were already pretty harsh in California. Second, those generally in the position of committing a third strike were getting a little too old to be committing crimes anyway. A law that attempted to deter or incapacitate people when they were at the point of naturally retiring from a life of crime cannot have much impact.

*Conclusion.* California's three strikes law does not deter. In nine of the ten largest California cities there was no measurable impact on the law beyond what was happening anyway before the law came into being. There seems to be no reasonable explanation related to the three strikes law for the data from the tenth city (Anaheim). There are simple explanations for why the law had no deterrent impact. More important is the implication of these findings for *any* attempt to deter through harsher legislative minimum sentences. The California three strikes law received enormous publicity and was well known to most people since it was voted on in a state-wide initiative. Since it had no discernible deterrent effect, one cannot plausibly expect other legislative minimum sentences in any country to have an impact on crime.

Reference: Stolzenberg, Lisa and Stewart J. D'Alessio. "Three Strikes and You're Out": The Impact of California's New Mandatory Sentencing Law on Serious Crime Rates. (October 1997). *Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 457-469.



**The desire for tougher laws in the U.S. relates more to factors such as the public's belief in the decline of morality and increases in the diversity of the population than it does to perceptions of fear and risk.**

*Background.* There are two broad, but not mutually exclusive, ways in which punitiveness within the general population might be explained.

- It is possible that people are punitive because they believe that punitive approaches to wrongdoing will create a safer and more secure society. Punitiveness, if this view is correct, should be linked to views about crime and to fear.
- In addition, people may be punitive because they feel the need to reassert social values and to re-establish the obligation to obey the law. Punitiveness, then, would be linked to social values -- such as judgements about the cohesiveness of society and views of the family.

*This paper.* This was a relatively small scale (166 respondents) survey in Northern California. Although the survey size was small, and the location was quite specific, the respondents appear to be a reasonably representative sample of adults in this area. Furthermore, and most importantly, the respondents were diverse in terms of education, race, etc.

The authors used, as their measure of punitiveness, support for California's Three Strikes law, some measures of "overall punitiveness" and respondents' "willingness to abandon procedural protections" in the criminal law.

They also obtained measures of people's views about crime, the courts, whether their neighbourhood and state are cohesive and caring, as well as measures of whether they feel traditional family values have disappeared and the acceptance of diversity in their state. Finally, measures of authoritarianism and dogmatism were obtained.

*Findings.* The findings are somewhat complex, but the following results were quite clear:

- Support for three strikes, support for general punitive policies, and willingness to abandon procedural protections were all reasonably related to one another.
- Authoritarianism and dogmatism were strong predictors of support for the three strikes initiative, support for general punitive policies, and the willingness to abandon procedural protections.
- Other concerns about social conditions -- especially the view that traditional family values have disappeared -- predict support for all three types of punitive responses (3-strikes, general punitiveness, no procedural safeguards).
- Above and beyond these concerns, crime-related concerns *at best* have a modest relationship with punitive responses.

*Conclusion.* We tend to explain views about crime by looking to crime-related beliefs and attitudes. This paper argues that such an approach is not sufficient. Social values, and views of the community and the family are, according to this study, *more* important in explaining punitive attitudes. When we hear members of the Reform Party, for example, arguing for certain punitive policies, we must look beyond the Reformer's views of crime for an explanation. Their punitive views may be related, much more strongly, to their broadly based views that their communities and their country have deteriorated morally.

*Reference.* Tyler, Tom R. and Robert J. Boeckmann. (1997) Three strikes and you are out, but why? The psychology of public support for punishing rule breakers. *Law and Society Review*, 31, 237-265.

**The analysis of the relationship between IQ and crime presented by Herrnstein and Murray in their book *The Bell Curve* is seriously flawed: A careful analysis of the data demonstrates that the size of the relationship between IQ and crime is trivial and is much less important than many factors that society can change.**

*Context.* The best-selling book by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray -- *The Bell Curve* (1994) suggests that "IQ has a powerful and largely immutable effect across a range of behaviours" including crime. Herrnstein and Murray use data from the American National Longitudinal Study of Youth. What they failed to do was to control adequately for other causes of crime *which could have been controlled for using the data that they used for their analysis.*

*This study* takes a more thorough approach to the analysis of the relationship between IQ and crime using the very same data used by Herrnstein and Murray. These authors demonstrate that the effect of IQ on crime becomes insignificant when a full set of *known* causes of crime is taken into account. The authors of this paper note that Herrnstein and Murray are not politically stupid: Herrnstein and Murray "controlled for" *one* variable (socio-economic status) as if that was the only relevant variable. That way it looked as if they had "controlled for" social factors when, in fact, they had barely begun to do so.

The more complete model suggests that various factors known to be manipulable (e.g., various attitudes and values) are much more important than IQ in understanding crime.

Studies of the *relative* importance of IQ among a large number of other "risk factors" for crime suggests that it is almost invariably one of the least important factors. One analysis of the published literature suggests, for example, that of 34 factors related to crime, 30 different factors are more important than IQ. Various "attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours (e.g., having delinquent associates) that support an antisocial lifestyle" are much more important than IQ. And these kinds of factors are "dynamic in nature; that is, they can change and, thus, are amenable to correctional treatment. This reality contravenes the bell curve paradigm put forth by Herrnstein and Murray" (p. 399).

*Conclusion.* A careful empirical analysis -- using the very same data that Herrnstein and Murray used -- demonstrates the empirical inadequacy of Herrnstein and Murray's contention that IQ is an important factor in explaining crime. Quite simply, Herrnstein and Murray presented an inadequate analysis of the data. The authors of this paper demonstrate that "the effects of IQ on criminal involvement are, at best, modest... [The data show] that IQ is a weak to modest risk factor in offending and its criminogenic effects are dwarfed by a range of factors, many of which are amenable to change.... Herrnstein and Murray's policies to control crime, especially among the cognitively disadvantaged, have virtually no empirical support and, on their face, are certainly preposterous" (p. 388-389).

*Reference.* Cullen, Francis T., Paul Gendreau, G. Roger Jarjoura, and John Paul Wright. Crime and the Bell Curve: Lessons from Intelligent Criminology. (October 1997). *Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 387-411.

**Persistent young offenders typically commit the same kinds of offences as other young offenders -- only more of them. Who qualifies as “persistent” is arbitrary and those identified by one definition at one point in time would not be the same people identified as “persistent” if the definition or time period were slightly changed.**

*Context.* The idea that a “small number of offenders” is responsible for a disproportionate amount of (youth) crime has become a meaningless truism of criminal justice culture. For example, one can honestly say that in 1995-1996, 2.6% of youth in Canada are responsible for 90% of the cases brought to youth court. Similarly, one can honestly point out that in 1995-6, 46 youths in Canada were responsible for ninety percent of the homicides that took place apparently at the hands of youth. Both of these statements are, essentially, meaningless. There were 111,027 cases brought to court (involving 67,681 persons); these youths are 2.83% of all youths in Canada. There were 51 youths charged with homicide in Canada; 46 youths constitutes 90% of these 51. On the other hand, offending, like many human activities is not evenly distributed across the population. Hence we have the search for the magic sign which identifies “persistent offenders” who could then be incapacitated or treated.

*This book* reports a study of all of those youths who were arrested three or more times in two parts of England. Starting with this population of youths, three definitions of “persistence” were applied to the pool of 531 youths who had been arrested three times in a year (number of arrests, number of offences attributed to them, number of offences *known* to have been committed by them). An attempt was made to identify the 10% most persistent youthful offenders. The only problem was that 69 different youths were identified by one or more of these criteria, but only 30 of these 69 were identified by all three criteria.

As the authors point out, “These are the juveniles in whom the police, the courts, the press and the public are particularly interested” (p. 101). The offences they were doing were the same as other juveniles: just more of them: “It is not the case that these persistent offenders were committing the more violent or serious offences....” (p. 102)

It was also noted that if one looked at persistence over time, and one used as a measure of persistence “frequency of known and alleged offending over a three month period”, those who would be defined as persistent varied across time: “It was rare for [offenders] who met the criteria in each quarter to be the same individuals” (p. 103 ). “Offending, particularly persistent offending by juveniles, is a relatively transitory activity” (p. 105). But the overwhelming finding bears repeating: “Persistent offenders... -- whichever of the three definitions was used -- did not seem to be strikingly different from the full sample, with the tautological exception of the frequency of their offending” (p. 119). “Very serious offences -- grievous bodily harm, aggravated burglary, rape and sexual offences -- did not represent in total as much as one percent of all offenses attributed to persistent young offenders -- a pattern that is typical of juvenile offending generally” (p. 120). “Any definition of persistence will inevitably be arbitrary” (p. 122). “In summary, then, not only is the process of attempting to define persistence deeply problematic, but because there is a degree of arbitrariness in the way some offenders rather than others become defined as persistent, creating a custodial sentence for that group raises issues both about equity and about efficient resource use” (p. 123).

*Conclusion.* We cannot reliably identify who is likely to be a persistent offender. Definitions can be created and applied, but equally reasonably sounding definitions would identify a different group of offenders. Persistent young offenders -- by any definition -- may have committed more offences, but the offences that they commit, on average, are no more serious than the offences committed by others. A special regime for such offenders may look good as long as one does not look carefully at the effects.

*Reference:* Hagell, Ann and Tim Newburn. *Persistent young offenders*. London: Policy Studies Institute, 1994.

**The reason that the sons born of adolescent mothers are more likely to commit criminal acts than are the sons born of older mothers is a combination of two factors: the lack of resources of these families and the fact that the mothers seem to lack parenting skills or provide poor role models to their offspring.**

*Background.* Although it is relatively well established that children of adolescent mothers are at risk on a number of different dimensions (including crime), it is less well understood *why* this might be the case. *This study* draws on data from a longitudinal study of 411 boys born in 1952-3 who have been followed since they were 8-9 years old. The age of their parents (and other siblings) was collected, and the boys have been followed up until age 32. Their total (official) criminal record is known -- 36% had at least one criminal conviction.

*Explanations for the link between being born of a young mother and criminality.* There are three non-exclusive explanations that might be given for this link:

1. Life course immaturity account. The mother is simply not yet mature enough to provide good parenting. Older mothers have better skills and are more able to raise children.
2. Persistent poor parenting-role modeling account. This is similar to the previous account, except that this theory suggests that mothers who have children when they are young are, simply, inadequate. Those who are "destined" to be poor mothers have their children earliest. Thus women who have children early never learn to be good mothers.
3. Diminished resources account. This could be the result of economic poverty but also scarcity of non-financial resources such as time to enable the child to interact with the outside world.

The researchers looked at the age of the mother at the birth of her first child as well as her age when the child who was being studied was born (who may or may not have been her first child).

*Results.* Women who give birth early are more likely to have delinquent kids. But at even higher risk of becoming delinquent are children whose mother was over 20 when they were born and whose mother had given birth to another child when she was an adolescent. Such mothers seem to be especially lacking in parenting skills and also are lacking in resources for caring for their children. Hence there was support for the second and third of the explanations listed above, but not the first. Data are presented demonstrating that various "persistent poor parenting characteristics" and measures of "diminished resources" are more likely to be associated with children of mothers who have their first child early than they are associated with children who are born of mothers whose first child was born after age 20. There are, obviously, limitations of this study that need to be considered. First, it was carried out (in England) on a group of disadvantaged kids who were born in the 1950s. Second, the range of environmental and social variables (e.g., material and non-material support) examined was limited.

At the same time, however, it does suggest that there is a need to intervene in support of mothers who have children early. Obviously, resources (financial and otherwise) can be helpful. Support, advice, help, and training in child rearing matters would appear to be important for the eventual well-being of these children who are "at risk."

*Conclusion.* This study suggests that "problem behaviours [such as crime] associated with children of adolescent mothers seem to be rooted in the more enduring circumstances and behaviours emphasized in the poor parenting-role model and diminished resources..." (p. 158).

*Reference.* Nagin, Daniel S., G. (1997) Pogarsky, and David P. Farrington. Adolescent mothers and the criminal behaviour of their children. *Law and Society Review*, 31, 137-162.