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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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Some facts about crime:
Lowering welfare rates increases homicide rates
There is no evidence in Canada for an increase in serious youth
violence

Metropolitan counties in the U.S. with higher welfare rates have lower homicide rates, even when other factors are controlled for.

“Eliminating welfare for those truly in need, or forcing people to work at jobs yielding lower net income than could previously be obtained through welfare assistance, could well result in an increase in homicide rates. Despite [the well documented] flaws [with the U.S. welfare system] welfare aid seems to reduce the frequency of lethal violence, a fact that speaks to the considerable importance of social support for enhancing social control.... The results emphasize the role of material deprivation and suggest that the state can do more than just punish homicidal violence, it can also prevent it.” (p. 42-3). Welfare, then, doesn’t cause crime as some politicians would suggest, but *reductions* in welfare rates contributes to high murder rates. **(See Item 1)**

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The rate of serious juvenile violent crime is *not* increasing in Canada. Those who argue that the “quality” of youth violence is getting more serious are doing so in the complete absence of data. The available data demonstrate that there is no evidence of an increase.

The increase in violent cases coming to court in Canada appears to be the result of decisions by citizens and criminal justice officials to bring more minor cases to court. The rate of bringing serious violence cases to court has not increased. Youths are no more violent today than they were in the early part of this decade. Those concerned with laws governing young offenders should develop policy knowing that rates of “youth violence” are probably not changing. **(See Item 2).**

Dealing with street or inner city youth

Criminal justice sanctions do not deter inner-city youths, but their criminal behaviour is affected by the behaviour of their friends, their own sense of right and wrong, and their parents.

The likelihood of being caught for criminal activities may be important for middle-class people (and middle class politicians who talk about deterrence) because, as sociologists point out, they have a “high stake in conformity.” This is not the case for inner-city deprived youth: for them the perceived responses of peers and family as well as internalized norms are much more important. Legal sanctions pale into insignificance in comparison to these other social factors. (See Item 3)

Violent offences by homeless male street kids will not be deterred by threats of criminal sanctions. Policies that increase these youths’ bonds to conventional society are more likely to be effective than are policies that focus on creating harsher penalties.

If society is interested in doing something constructive about serious crime by male street youths, it clearly must address the factors that both lead youths to be on the street and which lead these youths to “see little wrong with their criminal behaviour” (p. 50). “Not only do street youth lack the fear of formal sanctions but they suffer from an absence of informal controls that might restrict their criminal behaviour” (p. 50). “Harsher penalties probably will not deter those most at risk for criminal behaviour, because they are involved in a lifestyle that reduces the perceptions of risk and provides them with an environment where criminal behaviour is required and rewarded” (p. 52). Once again, when addressing a real crime problem, we find that the solutions are likely to be found outside of the criminal justice system. (See Item 4)

Two contrasting approaches to preventing crime:
The ineffectiveness of transfers of youths to adult court
The effectiveness of early and late intervention in the lives of
troubled youth

Turning children into adults for the (sole) purpose of processing them as adults in criminal courts appears to be an increasingly popular, but ineffective policy in the United States. A careful analysis of the practice revealed it to be part of two related trends: America becoming afraid of its children, and the long term, but continuous decline in the view that children can be changed.

The transfer of youths into adult courts may well make short term political sense. A careful examination of the data, however, suggests that increased use of transfers by any mechanism - judicial decisions, legislative mandates, or prosecutorial decisions -- makes bad policy. Crime is not reduced and, in fact, there are reasons, given the lack of rehabilitative programs in the adult system, to expect that wholesale transfers of youth will cause an increase, rather than a decrease, in crime. (See Item 5)

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No social agency appears to be responsible for the identification and treatment of serious and/or violent young offenders. Nevertheless, the results of a large “study group” of experts convened by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention concluded that the knowledge, but not necessarily the political will, exists “to reduce the likelihood of young ‘at risk’ juveniles becoming serious and/or violent juvenile offenders” (p. 28). It is never too early to intervene, nor is it ever too late to intervene. Serious delinquency can be reduced, but only if governments make intervention a serious priority.

We can be either optimistic or extremely pessimistic about the findings of this expert panel. The reasons for optimism are clear: much is known about what will make a healthy (and peaceful) young person. We know that the lives of young people are shaped early. At the same time, we know that interventions in mid- to late- adolescence can have positive effects. The pessimism comes from the fact that knowing what should be done and actually doing something about it are different. None of the effective approaches advocated by this blue ribbon panel appear to be the kinds of interventions that can be announced, implemented, and shown to be having a measurable effect on crime within a single political mandate. Only a politician who is serious about making a long lasting difference, therefore, would be interested in following the advice of these experts.

(See Item 6)

Public opinion supports non-prison sanctions and prevention

Community based sanctions are acceptable to members of the public when the public is asked about “real” cases and is not asked, simply, whether “sentences are harsh enough.” The sanctions, however, must have real consequences for the offender in order to be acceptable to the public.

In this survey (as in surveys carried out by the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto recently in Ontario), ordinary people -- even those who say that they think that sentences are not harsh enough -- are quite supportive of the use of community sanctions. These sanctions must have meaningful consequences. And the public’s support for community sanctions is more evident when they are responding to actual cases.

(See Item 7)

The public supports the use of tax money to provide social programs aimed at providing help to children at risk of developing into offenders. Data show that, at an aggregate level, children at risk can be identified. Programs exist which can reduce the incidence of delinquency in a community. Those programs that are likely to reduce offending will provide a direct benefit to the children themselves that go far beyond delinquency. So why is it so hard, politically, to invest in the prevention of offending by young people?

Even in conservative parts of the U.S., there is enormous support for early intervention programs for youth rather than the building of more prisons. It is hard to imagine that a government in Canada or the U.S. could not achieve public support for progressive crime prevention rather than punitive approaches if it were willing to do so. **(See Item 8)**

Metropolitan counties in the U.S. with higher welfare rates have lower homicide rates, even when other factors are controlled for.

Context. A politician running for governor of Florida once stated that “The accumulated evidence of the last thirty years is conclusive. Welfare does not prevent crime. Welfare causes crime.” He did not, apparently, produce any evidence. There are others more closely connected to criminology (e.g., James Q. Wilson) who make similar evidence-free arguments by suggesting that the welfare system “encourages denial or responsibility among the poor and reduces attachment to traditional institutions” (p. 31). There are equally plausible arguments on the other side: more generous welfare payments may “reduce violent crime by alleviating the personal strains of poverty and poverty induced community disorganization” (p. 32). Interestingly, there are data related to this hypothesis: “higher state social welfare expenditures [are] associated with substantially lower suicide rates” (p. 35). This study investigates the impact of welfare rates on homicide -- a crime less likely to be affected by reporting problems than other violent crimes.

This study examined 437 large metropolitan U.S. counties where adequate data could be found on relevant variables. The generosity of the welfare system was “the average amount of public assistance per poor recipient...” *Poor* meant that the recipient’s income level fell below the federally established poverty line. Most of the public assistance was in the form of general welfare payments and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Other factors -- such as economic deprivation (percent persons in poverty, percent female headed families, family income inequality) and population structure (population density and size of community) were also controlled for. Hence any effect of welfare aid (welfare payment per poor person; percent of poor families on welfare) would be above and beyond these other factors.

The results were quite simple: The usual types of factors had an impact on homicide rates: “resource deprivation” (percent of persons living in poverty, family income inequality), population structure (density, size of the metropolitan area) and the proportion of the population between 16 and 29 years old. But more importantly, various indexes of the generosity of the welfare system had an impact over and above these other factors: more generous welfare systems were associated with *lower* homicide rates. These are non-trivial differences. Those counties with the highest welfare rates had an average homicide rate of 5.5 per 100,000 in the population (controlling for other factors). The rate for those with the lowest welfare rates was 9.0 per hundred thousand.

Conclusion. “Eliminating welfare for those truly in need, or forcing people to work at jobs yielding lower net income than could previously be obtained through welfare assistance, could well result in an increase in homicide rates. Despite [the well documented] flaws [with the U.S. welfare system] welfare aid seems to reduce the frequency of lethal violence, a fact that speaks to the considerable importance of social support for enhancing social control.... The results emphasize the role of material deprivation and suggest that the state can do more than just punish homicidal violence, it can also prevent it.” (p. 42-3). Welfare, then, doesn’t cause crime as some politicians would suggest, but *reductions* in welfare rates contributes to high murder rates.

Reference. De Fronzo, James and Lance Hannon. Welfare assistance levels and homicide rates. *Homicide Studies*, 1998, 2 (1), 31-45.

The rate of serious juvenile violent crime is *not* increasing in Canada. Those who argue that the “quality” of youth violence is getting more serious are doing so in the complete absence of data. The available data demonstrate that there is no evidence of an increase.

Context. Most responsible observers of crime in Canada have concluded that crime rates in Canada have been more or less stable during the 1990s. Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey showed no real change in individual victimizations (violent or not) between 1988 and 1993. There is no evidence of any increase in homicide rates in Canada since the mid-1970s. In fact, the overall rate of homicide in Canada is lower than it was in the mid-1970s. The number (or rate) of youths charged with homicide varies a lot from year to year, but there is no evidence of an overall upward trend.

Nevertheless, there are those who are undaunted by such data and suggest that although the numbers do not show an increase, somehow the individual acts of violence themselves have gotten worse. For them, it seems, every silver lining has its cloud. And apparent evidence of the cloud can be found in the annual youth court statistics: Although the number of cases brought to youth court has gone down slightly (4.6%) between 1991 and 1996, the number of cases involving violence has gone up considerably (16.4%) during this same period (p. 188).

This study analyzes this increase in detail by testing the hypothesis that the increase in violent cases coming to court is the result of policies that require or encourage the bringing to court of minor acts of violence. This hypothesis would suggest that judges and others who believe that they are “seeing more violence” and who believe that “more youth crime involves violence than it used to” are correct, if it is made clear that they are referring to youth violence *brought to court* rather than youth violence as it occurs on the street.

The findings of this study are simple. The increase in youth violence arriving at the court door is almost exclusively due to increases at the lower end of violence -- the lowest of the three levels of assault. The rate of common assault has, in fact, gone up dramatically (31.3% more cases in 1995-6 than in 1991-2; p. 189). However, the rate of *all* other violent crime has not changed in this same period (Tables on p. 188 & 189). Looking, for example, at the three levels of non-sexual assault, the less serious the violence, the larger the increase. This finding is completely consistent with the hypothesis that the increase in violent cases coming to court has to do with changes in adult behaviour (citizens’ and police officers’ decisions to deal with minor violence in the court). If we are looking for someone to blame for the increase in youth violence arriving at the court door, then, we should blame adults, not kids.

The first cousins to those who say, incorrectly, that youth violence is getting “more serious” are those who say that violence by girls is getting worse. The data for girls are almost exactly the same as the overall results: the increase in “girl violence” is largely due to an enormous increase in the number of common assaults coming to court. More serious assaults do not show an increase (p. 191). Girls account for only about 20% of the cases of violence arriving at the youth court. When girls are brought to court for a violent offence, the level of violence is lower than the violence attributed to boys. Girls are brought to court less than boys for violence, and when they are brought to court for a violent act, the charge is usually less serious.

Conclusion: The increase in violent cases coming to court in Canada appears to be the result of decisions by citizens and criminal justice officials to bring more minor cases to court. The rate of bringing serious violence cases to court has not increased. Youths are no more violent today than they were in the early part of this decade. Those concerned with laws governing young offenders should develop policy knowing that rates of “youth violence” are probably not changing.

Reference: Doob, A. N. and Jane B. Spratt. Is the “quality” of youth violence becoming more serious? *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 1998, 185-194.

Criminal justice sanctions do not deter inner-city youths, but their criminal behaviour is affected by the behaviour of their friends, their own sense of right and wrong, and their parents.

Context: The “theory” behind general deterrence is inherently perceptual: if people perceive that they will be apprehended and punished, they will refrain from committing offences. It is their *perceptions*, rather than the “reality” that has the impact. Criminal justice officials’ reliance on deterrence is clearly based on the notion that potential offenders will assess the likelihood of receiving a punishment and will, therefore, not commit the crime. There has been a fair amount of work on deterrence (and perceptual components to it). In this body of research, there is essentially no support for the view that higher (real or perceived) levels of penalties will affect the likelihood of offending. There is, however, occasional support for the proposition that higher likelihoods of (real or actual) *apprehension* will affect involvement in crime.

This study examines deterrence among a group of potential offenders -- inner-city teenagers who, relative to their involvement in crime, have tended to be understudied. They were 298 13-20 year-old (mostly 15 to 17 year old) students in a northeastern U.S. city drawn from schools in “high-risk” neighbourhoods. Most (94%) were non-white or Hispanic. The behaviours examined (in the “perceptual” measures) were marijuana use, under-age alcohol use, theft and assault. Respondents were asked how likely it was that they would be caught, whether their friends engaged in these behaviours, the likely reactions of friends, the perceived likelihood that parents would find out (and the probable response of parents), whether adults they knew did these acts and, how wrong the respondent felt each crime was. Finally respondents were asked about their own involvement in crime.

Findings. Perceived risk of arrest was *not* related to the respondent’s own delinquency. Three factors were independent predictors of delinquency: whether the respondent’s friends were seen as involved in these same criminal activities, the perceived severity of the response of parents, and how wrong the respondent saw the behaviours to be. The author suggests that the influence of peers and of parental responses were mediated by their own internalized norms of what was right or wrong. “The threat of legal sanctions did not deter these inner-city youths, but they were influenced by the behaviour of their friends, their own sense of right and wrong, and their parents (and perhaps other adults in their lives)... These results support the growing consensus that crime prevention concentrating on informal influences has more potential than formal law enforcement” (p. 437).

Conclusion. The likelihood of being caught for criminal activities may be important for middle-class people (and middle class politicians who talk about deterrence) because, as sociologists point out, they have a “high stake in conformity.” This is not the case for inner-city deprived youth: for them the perceived responses of peers and family as well as internalized norms are much more important. Legal sanctions pale into insignificance in comparison to these other social factors.

Reference: Foglia, Wanda D. Perceptual deterrence and the mediating effect of internalized norms among inner-city teenagers. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 1997, 34, 414-442.

Violent offences by homeless male street kids will not be deterred by threats of criminal sanctions. Policies that increase these youths' bonds to conventional society are more likely to be effective than are policies that focus on creating harsher penalties.

Context. Many government policies have been proposed to deal with street crime. In recent years, the concern about street crime has focused on crime by homeless male street youths. These "street people" (particularly young males) are, apparently seen as being personally threatening by many members of middle class society. For this reason, it would be useful to understand crime committed by this group of people.

This study reports the results of interviews carried out with 125 male street youth, under age 24, who spent a considerable amount of time each week "on the street" in Edmonton, Alberta. Respondents were asked how many times in the past year they had committed two relatively serious property crimes ("broken into a car; broken into a house") and how often they had committed a relatively serious assault ("attacked someone with a weapon or fists/feet injuring so badly they probably needed a doctor").

The results showed that those youth who thought that there was a reasonable likelihood that they would be caught by the police *for property crime*, and those who said that being caught *for property crime* would be a problem in their lives, were less likely to commit these crimes. However, the most reliable predictor of property crime appeared to be whether a youth believed that his friends were involved in such a crime.

For *violent crime*, the pattern was somewhat different. The youths' perceptions of how likely it was that they would be apprehended did not have an impact the likelihood that they had engaged in serious violent behaviour. Similarly, the youths' estimates of the impact of police apprehension was unrelated to their own level of violence. As the authors of the paper point out, the serious violent activities that do take place on the street "are guided more by impulse and the sway of emotion than by reflection, judgement, or premeditation" (p. 48).

Conclusion. If society is interested in doing something constructive about serious crime by male street youths, it clearly must address the factors that both lead youths to be on the street and which lead these youths to "see little wrong with their criminal behaviour" (p. 50). "Not only do street youth lack the fear of formal sanctions but they suffer from an absence of informal controls that might restrict their criminal behaviour" (p. 50). "Harsher penalties probably will not deter those most at risk for criminal behaviour, because they are involved in a lifestyle that reduces the perceptions of risk and provides them with an environment where criminal behaviour is required and rewarded" (p. 52). Once again, when addressing a real crime problem, we find that the solutions are likely to be found outside of the criminal justice system.

Reference: Baron, Stephen W. and Leslie W. Kennedy. Deterrence and homeless male street youths. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 1998, 40 (1), 27-60.

Turning children into adults for the (sole) purpose of processing them as adults in criminal courts appears to be an increasingly popular, but ineffective policy in the United States. A careful analysis of the practice revealed it to be part of two related trends: America becoming afraid of its children, and the long term, but continuous decline in the view that children can be changed.

Context. When a young offender, Willie Bosket, killed two New York City subway passengers shortly after being released from a maximum security youth facility in 1978, the public focus was not on why the state had failed to deal effectively with a young person who had spent only 18 months out of state agency placements between age 9 and age 15. Instead, the focus was on the fact that the law, as it was at that time, “only” allowed him to be incarcerated for five and a half years -- until his twenty-first birthday. Just as the story of another Willie (Willie Horton) was to influence a presidential election in 1988, Willie Bosket was the unambiguous cause of the introduction, two weeks after he was sentenced, of a change in New York’s law deeming children 13 years old or more to be dealt with *automatically* as adults if they were charged with murder. And those 14 years old or older charged with a range of offences including robbery and certain forms of burglary and assault are also *automatically* dealt with as adult offenders. Since that time, state legislatures in virtually every state have made it easier -- or automatic -- to try certain juveniles as adults. New York, it seems, led the pack.

Philosophically, of course, transfers -- particularly automatic ones -- are a rather peculiar phenomenon. In effect, the automatic transfer implies that a 14 year old who manages to get charged with an “automatic transfer” offence, becomes, as a result of that charge, mature enough to be considered to be an adult for criminal justice purposes. One wonders which criminal charges might be capable of indicating that a 14 year old is mature enough to vote in federal elections.

The response. The United States, with its 51 criminal justice jurisdictions, allows for “natural variation” in criminal justice policy even though it may not benefit from the “natural selection” or the survival of the fittest policies. Hence there is experience with different forms of transfer. “Judicial waiver”, the method we are most familiar with here in Canada, though the most common in legislation (it is present in 46 of the 50 states) is quickly becoming less important in terms of its overall impact. “Presumptive transfers” (similar to Canada’s law for 16 and 17 year olds charged with very serious offences) are becoming more popular and, at least in some locations in the U.S. result in dramatically more hearings and dramatically more transfers. Though most states have legislative guidelines on judicial transfers or waivers, the broad discretion given to judges to emphasize some factors to the exclusion of others raises concerns for many. Much more common in recent years has been the “statutory exclusion”: 36 of the 50 states automatically make children into adults for criminal justice processing if they are charged with certain serious offences. The most recent approach -- popular particularly with prosecutors -- is the “direct file” or “prosecutorial waiver” where the prosecutor has sole (and usually unreviewable) discretion to put the case either in the juvenile court or the adult court. Prosecutors like it for obvious reasons: it avoids the “red tape associated with these [transfer] hearings” as the Alabama Attorney General put it (p. 395).

Sweeping the juvenile justice problem under someone else’s carpet. Transfers do not appear to be accomplishing much good. In the first place, there appears to be “justice by geography” even *within* certain states -- where the county in which a person is charged determines how the case will be tried. Second, in “direct file” cases, where the prosecutor decides the court that will hear the case, race is critical: black youths are more likely to be transferred. Finally, the data are reasonably clear on the effects: transfers do not reduce recidivism nor does the existence of easy or automatic “transfers” deter youth crime. One way in which crime may be reduced because of transfers comes from another study: “the suicide rate for juveniles incarcerated in adult prisons and jails is eight times higher than for children in juvenile facilities” (p. 405).

Conclusion. The transfer of youths into adult courts may well make short term political sense. A careful examination of the data, however, suggests that increased use of transfers by any mechanism -- judicial decisions, legislative mandates, or prosecutorial decisions -- makes bad policy. Crime is not reduced and, in fact, there are reasons, given the lack of rehabilitative programs in the adult system, to expect that wholesale transfers of youth will cause an increase, rather than a decrease, in crime.

Reference: Klein, Eric K. Dennis the Menace or Billy the Kid: An analysis of the role of transfer to criminal court in juvenile justice. *American Criminal Law Review*, 1998, 35, 371-410.

No social agency appears to be responsible for the identification and treatment of serious and/or violent young offenders. Nevertheless, the results of a large “study group” of experts convened by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention concluded that the knowledge, but not necessarily the political will, exists “to reduce the likelihood of young ‘at risk’ juveniles becoming serious and/or violent juvenile offenders” (p. 28). It is never too early to intervene, nor is it ever too late to intervene. Serious delinquency can be reduced, but only if governments make intervention a serious priority.

Context. Although there does seem to be an enormous amount of public support in Canada and in the U.S. for crime prevention (See the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto report for Canadian data and studies elsewhere in this “highlights” issue for the U.S.) there is often some ambiguity about how best to conceptualize what such delinquency programs should look like.

This U.S. government report coming from a blue-ribbon panel of experts from at least three countries (including Canadian Marc LeBlanc at the University of Montreal) draws on knowledge from the social sciences on how best to deal with serious and violent juvenile offenders.

How should early intervention be structured? There are a number of known risk factors that make a young person likely to engage in serious or violent offending, but these may not be evident at the young person’s first court appearance. Hence “public health approaches” which target youths in “at risk” (disadvantaged) neighbourhoods are likely to be the most effective. The challenge for communities (and for the various levels of government that have an interest in the reduction of crime) is to integrate services across agencies such as the youth justice system, schools, social service (and child protection) services as well as the health system. It is probably not too much of an oversimplification to suggest that programs that lead to healthy children are likely to be effective in addressing many of the precursors to delinquency.

When considering “late” intervention, the study group found that interventions aimed at those youth who already had become serious and/or violent offenders were also possible, though “interventions for serious and/or violent offenders often have to be multimodal in order to address problems, including law breaking, substance use and abuse, and academic problems. The administration of multimodal programs requires integration of services of the juvenile justice system, mental health, schools, and child welfare agencies. Aftercare programs are essential...” One challenge for a country like Canada will be to integrate services that are often fragmented across ministries and levels of government.

Conclusion. We can be either optimistic or extremely pessimistic about the findings of this expert panel. The reasons for optimism are clear: much is known about what will make a healthy (and peaceful) young person. We know that the lives of young people are shaped early. At the same time, we know that interventions in mid- to late- adolescence can have positive effects. The pessimism comes from the fact that knowing what should be done and actually doing something about it are different. None of the effective approaches advocated by this blue ribbon panel appear to be the kinds of interventions that can be announced, implemented, and shown to be having a measurable effect on crime within a single political mandate. Only a politician who is serious about making a long lasting difference, therefore, would be interested in following the advice of these experts.

Reference: Loeber, Rolf and David P. Farrington. Never too early, Never too late: Risk factors and successful intervention for serious and violent juvenile offenders. *Studies on crime prevention*, 1998, 7(1), 7-30.

Community based sanctions are acceptable to members of the public when the public is asked about “real” cases and is not asked, simply, whether “sentences are harsh enough.” The sanctions, however, must have real consequences for the offender in order to be acceptable to the public.

Context. Broad public opinion poll questions about whether people think the courts are harsh enough almost always find that people want harsh penalties. “Given these numbers, it is understandable why virtually every elected official has jumped aboard the ‘get tough’ bandwagon and is wary of supporting policies that appear to treat offenders leniently.” These opinion questions, however, may assess “a general anger at, or a desire for protection from, the stereotypic chronic violent offender often portrayed in the media” (p. 7). These broad questions seldom assess support for rehabilitative approaches, and seldom give any details about offenders.

This study. A survey in Cincinnati, Ohio, asked respondents to read a short vignette describing a crime and the offender. Respondents were asked not only about their preferred sentence, but also which sentences they would tolerate. The vignettes varied across respondents. There were four crimes (two types each of robbery -- a purse snatching -- and burglary of a store). In some vignettes, the offender was described as carrying a gun; in others he was not. In some of the robberies, the victim suffered a physical injury; in some she did not. The amount taken in the burglary varied. Finally, the age, presence of a drug problem, prior record, and employment status of the offender varied.

Findings. Every respondent indicated that there should be some form of punishment imposed. Across vignettes, prison was the preferred option for 34-56% of the cases. Generally speaking, however, the data support the conclusion that “the public is reluctant to tolerate community based sanctions that do not include close monitoring of offenders” (p. 17). The data suggest, then, that community based alternatives are supported (even in a population that typically says that sentences are too lenient) even for relatively serious cases. There were, however, big differences in the preference for, and acceptability of, different community sanctions. “Regular probation” -- where the only real consequence was that the offender had to meet with the probation officer once a month for two years -- was seldom seen as preferred or acceptable. The authors suggest that community based sanctions need to be “developed and applied meaningfully.”

Conclusion: In this survey (as in surveys carried out by the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto recently in Ontario), ordinary people -- even those who say that they think that sentences are not harsh enough -- are quite supportive of the use of community sanctions. These sanctions must have meaningful consequences. And the public’s support for community sanctions is more evident when they are responding to actual cases.

Reference: Turner, Michael G., Francis T. Cullen, Jody L. Sundt, and Brandon K. Applegate. Public tolerance for community-based sanctions. *The Prison Journal*, 1997, 77, 6-26.

The public supports the use of tax money to provide social programs aimed at providing help to children at risk of developing into offenders. Data show that, at an aggregate level, children at risk can be identified. Programs exist which can reduce the incidence of delinquency in a community. Those programs that are likely to reduce offending will provide a direct benefit to the children themselves that go far beyond delinquency. So why is it so hard, politically, to invest in the prevention of offending by young people?

Context. Criminologists can sometimes be accused of being overly pessimistic about two aspects of crime prevention. They have a tendency not to be supportive of programs that may show incremental, sometimes small, but beneficial effects on young people. Second, they often are exceptionally concerned about increased state intervention in the lives of children and others. Notwithstanding these views, three empirical conclusions can be supported that suggest that early intervention is to be encouraged:

- “The origins of serious delinquency and adult crime can often be traced to childhood....”(p. 189).
- Researchers can predict who will become delinquent, though obviously such predictions are not perfect.
- “Crime is highly concentrated within [certain] families” (p. 189).

Early intervention has other justifications: “Because of the link between offending and numerous other social problems, any measure that succeeds in reducing crime will have benefits that go far beyond this. Any measure that reduces crime will probably also reduce alcohol abuse, drunk driving, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, family violence, truancy, school failure, unemployment, marital disharmony and divorce...”(David Farrington, quoted here on p. 189). What is needed, however, is public support. Does it exist?

This study reports survey results of 390 Tennessee residents. They were generally a rather punitive lot: most identified themselves as moderate or conservative, and most favoured capital punishment.

About three quarters of respondents favoured “spending tax dollars on programs that try to prevent crime by identifying youths early in life and rehabilitating them...” rather than “spending tax dollars to build more prisons so that more criminals can be locked up for longer periods of time.” This finding is very similar to recent University of Toronto Centre of Criminology findings from an Ontario survey.

When faced with specific early intervention programs, more than three quarters of respondents favoured each of the following: expanding preschool programs, giving special services to troubled kids, education programs to help parents of troubled kids deal with them effectively, school programs to identify troublesome youth and provide services, after school recreational programs, drug education programs, programs to keep delinquent kids in school, and rehabilitation programs for youths and parents of those convicted of offences.

Conclusion: Even in conservative parts of the U.S., there is enormous support for early intervention programs for youth rather than the building of more prisons. It is hard to imagine that a government in Canada or the U.S. could not achieve public support for progressive crime prevention rather than punitive approaches if it were willing to do so.

Reference: Cullen, Francis T., J. P. Wright, S. Brown, M. M. Moon, Michael Blankenship, B. K. Applegate. Public support for early intervention programs: Implications for a progressive policy agenda. *Crime and Delinquency*, 1998, 44, 187-204.