



# *Criminological* Highlights

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*Criminological Highlights* is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is currently being published. Each issue contains “Headlines and Conclusions” for each of 8 articles, followed by one-page summaries of each article.

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This issue of *Criminological Highlights* addresses the following questions:

1. Why was Canada’s youth justice legislation effective in reducing imprisonment of youths?
2. Are young people punished because they have ‘bad’ families?
3. Can judges reduce violence against women that is committed by their intimate partners?
4. When the police crack down on disorder in a neighbourhood, do people feel safer?
5. How are people’s emotions and their views about the nature of crime related to their support for punitive criminal justice policies?
6. What effect might the current world economic situation have on support for punitive criminal justice policies?
7. Why don’t sex offence registries have any impact on sex offence recidivism?
8. What can be done to reduce the opportunities that a youth might have to offend?

**Canada’s Youth Criminal Justice Act was successful in reducing the use of incarceration of young people in large part because the police, the trial courts, and the Supreme Court of Canada have interpreted the Act within the spirit in which it was approved by Parliament.**

“In general, the police, prosecutors, and judges in Canada have responded to the admonition in the Preamble [to the YCJA] that the Act is intended to ‘reduce the over-reliance on the incarceration... of young persons’.” In cases involving more serious offences or youths with lengthy records who have not responded to community-based options, youth courts have continued to impose custodial sentences.” Nevertheless, “despite the success of the YCJA in achieving its principal objective, youth justice issues remain controversial in Canada.”

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**Coming from a ‘troubled’ family or having a father who had been incarcerated increases a youth’s chances of being placed in custody for relatively minor offending.**

The juvenile court was founded, in part, on the belief that in some cases “the parents could not make appropriate decisions for the youth and the court should step in and serve as *parens patriae*” (p. 197). To a large extent the decision to place a youth out of the home appears to relate to court officials’ judgments about whether the youth came from a good or bad family and “their assessments of whether the family can provide care, supervision, and control over the youth within the community” (p. 198). To the extent that placement out of the home is seen by the youth and others as a punishment, it would appear that the sins of the parents are, in effect, visited upon their children.

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**Coordinated, well-resourced, court-based judicial oversight programs designed to address violence against women by intimate partners cannot be counted on to reduce violence.**

The results suggest that those positive effects that did exist (a small but inconsistent reduction in re-victimization on some measures) may have been the simple result of offenders having been incarcerated because of breaches of probation. The more basic problem may be that criminal justice solutions are, inherently, inadequate in dealing effectively with intimate partner violence. As one commentator on this study noted, it is unfortunate that the resources typically available for non-criminal interventions (e.g., shelters, job training, welfare and housing services) are dwarfed by funding for criminal justice interventions. If the goal of interventions is to make women’s lives safer, then perhaps more effective means of intervening (i.e., something other than simple coordinated judicial oversight of court based programs) need to be found.

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**Intensive policing of minor disorder in neighbourhoods increases fear.**

Given that extra police presence increased, rather than decreased, fear, it seems unlikely that ‘broken windows policing’ could reduce crime by making the streets feel more inviting for those who are likely to exercise informal social control. “Seeing a sudden increase in police presence on their block may lead residents to infer that crime has increased and that their block is more dangerous and crime prone than in the past” (p. 509). “Broken windows policing approaches that are detached from the community and pay little attention to community sentiment may in some sense be doomed to failure” (p. 510).

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**One of the important reasons people support punitive approaches to crime is that they are angry about crime.**

Support for punitive policies appears to be linked to more fundamental beliefs about society and about the origin of crime. To the extent that support for punitive policies is linked, as well, to simple anger about crime (above and beyond fear), it is clear that debates about policies based on evidence, costs, and effectiveness are, to some extent, irrelevant. For those people who are interested in engaging the public in a discussion about criminal justice policies, “Appealing to both the cognitive and affective nature of attitudes may prove a more successful strategy” (p. 62) than using simple evidence-based arguments.

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**For white male Americans with low levels of education or low income, expecting to be financially less well off next year than this year is associated with support for punitive criminal justice policies.**

As various theorists (e.g., David Garland) have suggested, “the perception that life is precarious and fraught with risk and that somehow the State is seen as failing in its efforts to deliver physical and economic security to key groups” (p. 41) may explain some of the support for harsh policies toward those who are seen as being responsible for at least some of this insecurity. At times when economic insecurity about the future is salient for increased portions of the population, one might expect support for punitive policies to increase.

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**New York’s Sex Offender Registration and Notification Law had no impact on reducing sexual re-offending by rapists, child molesters, or other sex offenders.**

One of the main reasons that sex offence registries and community notification schemes do not have any impact is that the recidivism rate for sex offenders is not remarkably high. Most sex offences, it appears, are committed by those who have not previously been convicted of a sex offence. “Because registration and community notification laws were based on false assumptions regarding sex offenders and sexual offences, attention and resources are diverted from those most common types of sex offences – those committed by first-time sex offenders and those who have a pre-established relationship with the victim – to ones perpetrated by the stereotypical sex offender” (p. 298).

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**Youths who spend a lot of time “just hanging out with friends” are especially likely to be involved with various forms of crime, as are youths with higher incomes and better access to automobiles.**

Clearly some forms of advantaged positions in life – operationalized here as having access to money and a car – *increase* the likelihood of involvement in delinquency perhaps because both money and access to a car provide youths with opportunities for delinquencies that they would not otherwise have. In addition, opportunities to be delinquent come in other ways: unsupervised time with other youths was associated with property and violent crime as well as heavy drinking and marijuana use. These findings suggest that “Although individual traits clearly matter, it is also important to consider the extent to which the routine activities of youth affect their exposure to opportunities for delinquency” (p. 25).

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## **Canada's Youth Criminal Justice Act was successful in reducing the use of incarceration of young people in large part because the police, the trial courts, and the Supreme Court of Canada have interpreted the Act within the spirit in which it was approved by Parliament.**

Canada's Young Offenders Act, which came into effect in 1984, was seen as being 'soft on crime' even though many professional observers believed that Canada made too much use of youth court and custodial sentences for youths. In 2003, its replacement – the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) – came into effect with the explicit goal of reducing the use of formal sanctions especially for minor offences.

Previous research (*Criminological Highlights 10(1)#1*) has shown that the YCJA was unambiguously responsible for a reduction in the proportion of youths apprehended by the police who were subsequently referred to youth court. The principles governing the operation of the YCJA explicitly state that youths should be dealt with outside of the court if such an approach is adequate. The data reported in this paper are quite clear: there was a dramatic drop in all regions of Canada in the proportion of cases taken to court when the YCJA was implemented. This paper examines the implementation of the YCJA by the police and courts and in particular it reports on trends in the use of custody from 1997/8 until 2007/8.

The principles of the YCJA made it clear that custodial sentences were to be used sparingly. The Supreme Court of Canada has held that deterrence is not a relevant sentencing principle for youth. Furthermore, the Act set down four very specific 'gateways' or hurdles to custody. These gateways have also been narrowly construed by the Supreme Court.

The proportion of those youths apprehended by the police who were sent to court dropped dramatically when the YCJA came into effect. One might have expected, therefore, that the proportion of those found guilty who were subsequently incarcerated would, if anything, increase. Presumably, cases in court would on average be more serious under the YCJA than they had been in the past. However, the proportion of those found guilty who were incarcerated dropped from 27% of those found guilty in the last year of the previous law to 22% in the first year of the YCJA. This trend continued such that by 2006/7 only 17% of those found guilty were incarcerated. Looking at the overall rate of placing youths in custody, changes in police discretion and sentencing meant that in 2006/7 there were 219 youths placed in custody per hundred thousand youths compared to 526 four years earlier. The average daily count of the youth custodial population shows a decrease from about 108 per hundred thousand youths in 2002/3 to about 60 in 2003/4 and 38 in 2007/8. While there are provisions of the YCJA that were intended to reduce use of

pre-trial detention, there has not been a decline in the use of remand custody under the Act. There were about 36 youths in custody per hundred thousand youths in the population in 2007/8 – which was about the same as it had been 7 years earlier.

*Conclusion:* "In general, the police, prosecutors, and judges in Canada have responded to the admonition in the Preamble [to the YCJA] that the Act is intended to 'reduce the over-reliance on the incarceration... of young persons'." In cases involving more serious offences or youths with lengthy records who have not responded to community-based options, youth courts have continued to impose custodial sentences." Nevertheless, "despite the success of the YCJA in achieving its principal objective, youth justice issues remain controversial in Canada."

*Reference:* Bala, Nicholas, Peter J. Carrington, and Julian V. Roberts. (2009) Evaluating the Youth Criminal Justice Act After Five Years – A Qualified Success. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 51 (2).

## Coming from a 'troubled' family or having a father who had been incarcerated increases a youth's chances of being placed in custody for relatively minor offending.

Youth justice systems vary somewhat on the principles that are supposed to guide court dispositions. Beginning with the first juvenile courts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American and Canadian juvenile courts were expected to make decisions about youths based to a large extent on the theory that they could craft dispositions that would reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Though Canadian legislation has moved toward a more offence-based orientation in its youth sentencing provisions, judges in any jurisdiction who are inclined to follow 'child welfare' principles in sentencing youths might be expected to focus much of their attention on the characteristics of youths' families – in contrast with characteristics of youths themselves. Such an orientation might well have a profound impact on the treatment that youths receive from the court. This study – carried out in a jurisdiction in which rehabilitating the youth was meant to be a dominant factor in deciding youth court dispositions – examines the manner in which youths' families can affect whether an out-of-home placement is imposed on them.

The study examined 325 case files of youths being sentenced in juvenile court in Arizona. The most serious cases in this jurisdiction involving older youths would have been dealt with by the adult criminal courts. The case files were examined in order to see if the court had been informed of any history of incarceration of the youth's father or mother and whether there was an explicit mention of "family dysfunction." For example, a probation officer's report in one case noted that "The parenting at home is poor and there seems to be drugs and alcohol involved... The family system is very dysfunctional... The only way that [the youth] can actually address [the serious issues he needs to address] is if he is away from the home and placed in a secure setting..." (p. 193). The goal of the study was to see if the incarceration of parents and/or the assessment that the family was dysfunctional affected the likelihood of out-of-home placement. Various other factors were controlled statistically (race, age, whether the youth was in court for an offence against persons,

living arrangements such as whether it was a single parent household, and the number of times that the youth had previously been referred to court).

Fourteen percent of the 325 cases resulted in an out-of-home placement. Not surprisingly, those with more prior referrals to court were more likely to be placed out of the home. Black youths and youths already in foster care were more likely to receive out-of-home dispositions as were younger youths. This last finding may be the result of the fact that in Arizona those 15 and older who commit serious violent offences automatically are transferred to criminal court and dealt with as adults. Above and beyond the characteristics of the youths themselves, those who were described as coming from dysfunctional families were considerably more likely than other youths to receive an out-of-home placement. In addition, those youths whose files indicated that their fathers had, at some time, been incarcerated were also more likely to receive an out-of-home placement.

*Conclusion:* The juvenile court was founded, in part, on the belief that in some cases "the parents could not make appropriate decisions for the youth and the court should step in and serve as *parens patriae*" (p. 197). To a large extent the decision to place a youth out of the home appears to relate to court officials' judgments about whether the youth came from a good or bad family and "their assessments of whether the family can provide care, supervision, and control over the youth within the community" (p. 198). To the extent that placement out of the home is seen by the youth and others as a punishment, it would appear that the sins of the parents are, in effect, visited upon their children.

*Reference:* Rodriguez, Nancy, Hilary Smith, and Marjorie S. Zatz (2009). "Youth is Enmeshed in a Highly Dysfunctional Family System": Exploring the Relationship Among Dysfunctional Families, Parental Incarceration, and Juvenile Court Decision Making. *Criminology*, 47(1), 177-208.

## Coordinated, well-resourced, court-based judicial oversight programs designed to address violence against women by intimate partners cannot be counted on to reduce violence.

Various criminal justice responses to violence against women by intimate partners have been tried over the past few decades. These include mandatory arrest and/or charge practices, “no-drop” prosecution policies, and various legal controls (e.g., peace bonds or civil protection orders). There are, at best, mixed results on the impact of these policies on the safety of women (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* 1(6)#8, 5(6)#4, 5(2)#7, 7(6)#5). The suggestion has been made, therefore, that what is needed is a more coordinated response to intimate partner violence that is overseen by judges. This study examines the impact of well-organized judicial oversight programs on offender recidivism and victims’ feelings of safety and well-being.

The core elements of the judicial oversight projects involved uniform and consistent responses by law enforcement personnel to domestic violence offences, coordinated victim advocacy and services including contact with victim services, and the development of safety plans for victims. In addition, offenders were supervised by the court and referred to treatment programs. Criminal justice personnel were given expanded and specialized training for the program and dedicated prosecution units were established. Comparison sites in two relatively similar counties in which ordinary responses to intimate partner violence took place were identified for two of the programs. In the judicially coordinated programs, cases typically involving physical assaults, and often quite severe assaults, were identified and tracked for about a year. Victims were interviewed twice. The programs that victims and offenders participated in were identified. Similar tracking took place in the comparison counties, but no special programs were implemented.

The findings suggest that women who lived in the counties in which judicial oversight took place did, in fact, receive more contact with

prosecutors, probation, and treatment and other services. However, there was no evidence that women whose cases were subject to coordinated judicial oversight perceived themselves to be safer. In addition, there were inconsistent findings on victimization. There was no reduction in violence attributable to the program in one state, but there was some evidence of less subsequent violence for victims in another. Although the programs appeared to be well-implemented in both locations, it would appear that the reductions in repeat violence occurred in the jurisdiction that revoked probationers for non-compliance. “The implication is that the reduction [in violence] resulted from incapacitating abusers who failed to comply with probation conditions rather than deterring offenders” (p. 519). Nevertheless, the overall rate of re-victimization was fairly high across both locations: 28% of the victims in the program were physically assaulted within 11 months of the initial incident compared to 35% in the non-program control county. Slightly more than half of the women in both groups reported that they had experienced threats and intimidation since the initial violent incident.

*Conclusion:* The results suggest that those positive effects that did exist (a small but inconsistent reduction in re-victimization on some measures) may have been the simple result of offenders having been incarcerated because of breaches of probation. The more basic problem may be that criminal justice solutions are, inherently, inadequate in dealing effectively with intimate partner violence. As one commentator on this study noted, it is unfortunate that the resources typically available for non-criminal interventions (e.g., shelters, job training, welfare and housing services) are dwarfed by funding for criminal justice interventions. If the goal of interventions is to make women’s lives safer, then perhaps more effective means of intervening (i.e., something other than simple coordinated judicial oversight of court based programs) need to be found.

*Reference:* Visher, Christy A., Adele Harrell, Lisa Newmark, and Jennifer Yahner (2008). Reducing Intimate Partner Violence: An Evaluation of a Comprehensive Justice System-Community Collaboration. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 7(4), 495-423.

## Intensive policing of minor disorder in neighbourhoods increases fear.

“Broken windows policing” has come to mean a form of policing involving crackdowns on signs of disorder (e.g., street prostitution, littered vacant lots, drug trafficking) the purpose of which is to reduce all types of criminal activity. The theory has been that if “disorder goes untreated, citizens become fearful and withdraw from the community, informal social control decreases and/or is perceived to be low by criminals, [and, as a result of this process] disorder and crime increase as criminals increase their activity in the area” (p. 504, Figure 1).

The effect of this approach on overall crime is not well established (see *Criminological Highlights* 8(4)#1, 8(5)#8, 5(1)#6). However, the hypothesized mechanism (reduced fear in the community) is itself important. This paper examines the impact of an intensive crackdown on street drug activity, prostitution, and other forms of street-level disorder, involving motor vehicle stops, sting operations, and generally a large increase in police presence in very small target areas.

In this study, some block-long street segments were subject to intensive policing and some were not. In addition, researchers systematically recorded signs of social disorder (e.g., people loitering, loud disputes, noticeably drunk people, homeless people) and physical disorder (abandoned buildings, graffiti, litter). Residents were interviewed and were asked about their own perceptions of disorder. The main dependent variable was the residents’ report of how safe they felt walking alone outside at night on their block. In addition, actual measures of reported crime were recorded as well as characteristics of the respondents. The analysis also controlled for residents’ pre-intervention levels of fear.

The results showed that “those living in areas that received the extra police presence were more fearful than those in other areas, controlling for levels of crime, disorder and [pre-intervention levels of fear] and various other factors [e.g., demographic characteristics of the respondents]” (p. 508). Clearly, these results suggest that ‘broken windows’ approaches to policing of troubled neighbourhoods cannot be justified by the suggestion that people in those neighbourhoods will feel more comfortable.

Dividing respondents into those who felt either ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ walking on their own block at night, it was clear that disorder itself had a large impact. Most (72%) of those living on the most disordered streets reported feeling unsafe, compared to only 15% of those who lived on the least disordered streets. But 57% of those who experienced extra police presence felt unsafe as compared to only 29% of those whose streets got no extra police presence during the experiment.

*Conclusion:* Given that extra police presence increased, rather than decreased, fear, it seems unlikely that ‘broken windows policing’ could reduce crime by making the streets

feel more inviting for those who are likely to exercise informal social control. “Seeing a sudden increase in police presence on their block may lead residents to infer that crime has increased and that their block is more dangerous and crime prone than in the past” (p. 509). “Broken windows policing approaches that are detached from the community and pay little attention to community sentiment may in some sense be doomed to failure” (p. 510).

*Reference:* Hinkle, Joshua C. and David Weisburd (2008). The Irony of Broken Windows Policing: A Micro-Place Study of the Relationship Between Disorder, Focused Police Crackdowns and Fear of Crime. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 36, 503-512.

## One of the important reasons people support punitive approaches to crime is that they are angry about crime.

Much of the research on support for punitive responses to crime has focused on information deficits (e.g., lack of information about the effectiveness or the cost of various sanctions or about actual offences or offenders) rather than on people's emotional responses to crime. This paper follows earlier suggestions that there is an emotional component to the public's views of crime policy (see *Criminological Highlights* 4(3)#1) and that these emotions need to be understood in order to understand the support for policies that otherwise seem ineffective.

The focus of this paper is on punitiveness, defined by people's support for four criminal justice policies: life imprisonment for those convicted of three felonies, tightening parole release, trying and sentencing as adults juveniles age 14-17 who are charged with violent offences, and support for harsher sentences for violent crimes. A representative sample of non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black Americans were asked about their views of these policies. In addition, their views on various other matters were assessed: the extent to which they blame individuals (as opposed to circumstances) for crime (e.g., agreement with questions like, "People turn to crime because they are lazy), political conservatism, racial resentment (e.g., agreement with statements like "Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried"). Fear of crime was measured by respondents' answers to questions about how often they fear having their house broken into or being robbed. Anger about crime was assessed by way of a question which asked "When

you think about crime in this country do you feel..." with five response categories going from 'not angry at all' to 'very angry'.

Although both fear and anger independently and significantly predicted support for punitive policies, the impact of anger was considerably larger. In addition, however, political conservatism, the belief that people engaged in crime as a result of individual failings, and racial resentment were all positively related to support for punitive policies. Those who believed that the criminal justice system did not treat blacks and whites equally were less punitive, as were those who had a close friend or relative in prison.

*Conclusion:* Support for punitive policies appears to be linked to more fundamental beliefs about society and about the origin of crime. To the extent that support for punitive policies is linked, as well, to simple anger about crime (above and beyond fear), it is clear that debates about policies based on evidence, costs, and effectiveness are, to some

extent, irrelevant. For those people who are interested in engaging the public in a discussion about criminal justice policies, "Appealing to both the cognitive and affective nature of attitudes may prove a more successful strategy" (p. 62) than using simple evidence-based arguments.

*Reference:* Johnson, Devon (2009). Anger about Crime and Support for Punitive Criminal Justice Policies. *Punishment and Society*, 11(1), 51-66.



## **For white male Americans with low levels of education or low income, expecting to be financially less well off next year than this year is associated with support for punitive criminal justice policies.**

Various writers have suggested that, quite independent of actual levels of crime, crime in our society has become more salient than it was in the past. Not only are most people exposed to numerous reports of crime (and entertainment television involving crime) but politicians in many countries have used crime and crime policy as a way of getting attention and votes. Almost all connections made by politicians between crime and crime policy are in a single direction: punitive crime policies are seen as a solution to the crime problem. But crime is not equally salient for all people in a community, and not everyone responds by supporting punitive policies. This paper examines the support for punitive policies by looking at people's insecurity about crime and their economic insecurity, the hypothesis being that at least for some parts of the population, punishment policies may "provide a ready opportunity for the channelling of anxious insecurities into rage" (p. 28).

Using data from a 1997 representative sample of Florida residents, respondents were asked about support for seven punitive policies (e.g., capital punishment, making prisoners work on chain gangs, harsher sentences, taking away TV and recreational privileges from prisoners). These formed a single factor of punitiveness. Fear was measured by asking people how much they feared being the victim of each of six crimes. Separate from this, people were asked about their concern about crime. Finally, people were asked "Looking ahead, do you expect that this time next year you will be financially better off than now, or worse off" (p. 32).

Overall, Blacks and those more educated were less punitive. Those who identified themselves as politically conservative (opposing efforts to achieve equality for minorities and

women, opposing spending tax money on health care for the poor) and those with high concerns about crime and high fear of being victimized were more likely to support punitive crime policies. Among whites and males, however, those who thought that next year they would be economically less well off were also more likely to support punitive crime policies. When the white male sample was examined in detail, it was shown that expecting to be economically worse off next year was associated with punitive attitudes only if the respondent had relatively low income or low education.

*Conclusion:* As various theorists (e.g., David Garland) have suggested, "the perception that life is precarious and fraught with risk and that somehow the State is seen as failing in its efforts to deliver physical and economic security to key groups"

(p. 41) may explain some of the support for harsh policies toward those who are seen as being responsible for at least some of this insecurity. At times when economic insecurity about the future is salient for increased portions of the population, one might expect support for punitive policies to increase.

*Reference:* Costelloe, Michael T., Ted Chiricos, and Marc Gertz (2009). *Punishment and Society*, 11(1), 25-49.

## New York's Sex Offender Registration and Notification Law had no impact on reducing sexual re-offending by rapists, child molesters, or other sex offenders.

Special laws requiring the registration of those in the community who have a history of sex offending and/or notification of citizens of their presence in the neighbourhood are based on the false assumption that recidivism rates of sex offenders are especially high (e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, 6(6)#8, 5(1)#4, 8(3)#8, 6(3)3, 9(2)#5). Previous studies (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* 4(1)#2) have suggested that these laws are unlikely to have any impact on crime, just as restrictions on where sex offenders can live are likely to be ineffective or counterproductive (e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, 7(4)#4, 5(6)#1, 8(6)#5). This study examines the impact, on those who had been convicted of sex offences, of New York's Sex Offender Registration Act which requires registration and community notification of convicted sex offenders who live in the community.

New York's law requires sex offenders to register, and, for those deemed to pose more serious risks, it requires some form of community notification. This study analyzed monthly arrest data for a 21 year period – 10 years before the law came into effect in January 1996 and 11 years after. The simple hypothesis would be that if the law kept people from being victimized, there should be a reduction in the criminal involvement of those who were subject to registration after the law came into effect. For a number of different offences (for this 21 year period) the number of arrests of those previously convicted of a (registration-required) sex offence and the number of arrests of those without a previous sex offence conviction were examined.

The results for total registerable sex offences (all offences that required registration under the 1996 law) are typical of all findings. There was no significant impact on total arrests of the registration law. Furthermore,

there was no impact on the number of arrests for those who had previously committed sex offences or on the number of first time arrests for sex offending. The data demonstrate, however, an important limitation on *any* attempt to reduce sex offending which focuses its attention on those who have a record of sex offences. Approximately 96% of those arrested for registerable sex offences throughout the 21 year period did *not* have a record that included any registerable sex offence. When smaller groupings of sex offences were examined results were very similar: There was no apparent impact of the law on rape or child molestations. The number of repeat rape or child molestation arrests did not change when the law came into effect and in about 95% of all cases, the person arrested had no record of a previous registerable sex offences.

*Conclusion:* One of the main reasons that sex offence registries and community notification schemes

do not have any impact is that the recidivism rate for sex offenders is not remarkably high. Most sex offences, it appears, are committed by those who have not previously been convicted of a sex offence. "Because registration and community notification laws were based on false assumptions regarding sex offenders and sexual offences, attention and resources are diverted from those most common types of sex offences – those committed by first-time sex offenders and those who have a pre-established relationship with the victim – to ones perpetrated by the stereotypical sex offender" (p. 298).

*Reference:* Sandler, Jeffrey C., Naomi J. Freeman, and Kelly M. Socia. (2008). Does a Watched Pot Boil: A Time-Series Analysis of New York State's Sex Offender Registration and Notification Law. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 14(4), 284-302.

## **Youths who spend a lot of time “just hanging out with friends” are especially likely to be involved with various forms of crime, as are youths with higher incomes and better access to automobiles.**

Previous research has found that unstructured socializing (or in normal language ‘just hanging out’) with friends is associated, for youths, with increased levels of delinquency. If being with friends (in the absence of adults) provides youths with opportunities to get in trouble, it could also be argued that other factors that affect opportunities to offend might have similar effects. This paper looks at the effect of income and access to private transportation (automobiles) on delinquency. The theory is that each of these factors “can be expected to increase delinquency by facilitating the ease of such behaviour and movement away from authority figures” (p. 8).

Data were collected from 17,890 youths (from 132 schools in the U.S.) who can be considered to be a representative group of school age (Grades 7-12) youths in the U.S. The study focused on four measures of delinquency – violent offending, property offending, heavy alcohol consumption (frequency of consuming 5 or more alcoholic beverages in a row), and marijuana use. The main independent variables were the frequency that youths reported just hanging out with friends, whether the youth had access to relatively large amounts of money (from work or allowances), and whether the youth had access to an automobile. Various control variables (age, gender, race, poverty, single parent family) were also included.

Across all four measures of delinquency (property and violent crime, high alcohol use and marijuana use), and controlling for various background factors (e.g., age, gender, race, poverty) youths who spent more time hanging out with other youths were

more likely to be involved in each of these forms of delinquency. But in addition, those youths who had access to relatively large amounts of money (from allowances, jobs during the school year, and summer jobs) were more likely to be involved in violent acts, heavy drinking and marijuana use but not property crime. Those youths who had an automobile they could drive were more likely to be involved in all forms of delinquency. In addition, those youths who typically had a parent who was at home before and/or after school were less likely to be involved in any of the four types of delinquency.

*Conclusion:* Clearly some forms of advantaged positions in life – operationalized here as having access to money and a car – increase the likelihood of involvement in delinquency perhaps because both money and access to a car provide youths with opportunities for delinquencies that they would not otherwise have. In addition, opportunities to be delinquent come

in other ways: unsupervised time with other youths was associated with property and violent crime as well as heavy drinking and marijuana use. These findings suggest that “Although individual traits clearly matter, it is also important to consider the extent to which the routine activities of youth affect their exposure to opportunities for delinquency” (p. 25).

*Reference:* Anderson, Amy L. and Lorine A. Hughes (2009). Exposure to Situations Conducive to Delinquency Behaviour: The Effects of Time Use, Income, and Transportation. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 46(1), 5-34.