Criminological
Highlights

Volume 10, Number 2   February 2009

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.

Criminological Highlights is prepared by Anthony Doob, Tom Finlay, Rosemary Gartner, John Beattie, Andrea Shier, Carla Cesaroni, Maria Jung, Myles Leslie, Natasha Madon, Nicole Myers, Jane Sprott, Sara Thompson, Kimberly Varma, and Carolyn Yule.

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

1. Are youths fully responsible for the amount of disorder in schools?

2. How are communities harmed by high imprisonment policies?

3. Should there be limits on the number of hours 16 year olds can work during the school year?

4. How can high imprisonment policies be reversed?

5. Can we predict and control imprisonment rates?

6. Does 'circle sentencing' reduce reoffending?

7. What kinds of school programs are successful in reducing illicit drug use?

8. When people say they want youths to spend 'adult time for adult crime,' do they really mean it?

The manner in which a school is run has an impact on the amount of school-based delinquency above and beyond the characteristics of the students in the school.

Clearly the social organization of a school has an impact on an individual student's involvement in delinquency. These findings suggest "the great potential for school-based delinquency prevention. Interventions that can strengthen the communal organization of the school, and, in turn, increase student bonding could reduce the amount of delinquency in the school" (p. 451).

The harmful effects of imprisoning large numbers of people from a community extend beyond those incarcerated and their immediate families: the communities themselves can show the impact of high imprisonment policies.

Although few would question the necessity of imprisoning some offenders, this paper suggests that, in addition to direct financial costs to society and personal costs to the offender, there are a range of almost inevitable negative impacts of incarceration on communities. It would be sensible, then, for governments to consider these costs when debating changes in laws that might affect imprisonment rates.

Allowing youths, age 16 and older, to work long hours while still in school may reduce delinquent behaviour, but may, simultaneously, encourage them to drop out of school.

This study directly examines the impact of child labour laws on changes in behaviour of youths as they move from more restrictive federal laws (at age 15) to state laws of varying restrictiveness (at age 16). First-time formal work at age 16 appears to have some benefits in terms of protecting youths from delinquencies, but also has some costs, in that these same youths are more likely to drop out of school.

The New Zealand government orchestrated an attempt to end high rates of adult imprisonment.

The change in policy in New Zealand is interesting because, like that in Finland, the policy explicitly targeted prison population size and because international comparisons were used as arguments in favour of a change in direction. There are signs that those who determine imprisonment policy in other countries – Britain and parts of the United States, in particular – may also be concerned about the size of the prison population, in part because of resource concerns. In the end, however, "just like any other system of power, one that is heavily influenced by penal populism will be dependent on the legitimacy of its promise and what it actually achieves" (p. 379).

The future impact of laws that 'toughen' sentences can be modelled. In California, legislative efforts to toughen sentencing laws have had – and will continue to have - dramatic effects on the size of the prison population. This increase consists largely of drug – not violent - offenders.

These cumulative impacts of California's sentencing laws demonstrate that whatever its stated purposes might be, California's complex sentencing structure (including the three-strikes laws) is "clearly not defensible on the basis that it makes the public safer by incapacitating dangerous offenders" (p. 261). Though a modified system of 3-strikes that focuses only on those with a violent criminal history might result in a prison population with slightly higher levels of dangerousness, "it still does not perform terribly well in the context of the existing system" (p. 261). Thus far it is clear that "two decades of sentencing policy reforms conceived and implemented with the goal of making California's citizens safer have, in fact, resulted in a prison population that is more than four times the size and substantially less dangerous than it was in 1980" (p. 262). "The most prominent promise of criminal sentencing policy reform in California… has been to protect the public from dangerous offenders…. California has faltered miserably on this promise" (p. 262).

Circle sentencing – as an alternative sentencing process for adult offenders – has no impact on re-offending of Aboriginal people in New South Wales, Australia.

"Taken as a whole, the evidence presented here suggests that circle sentencing has no effect on the frequency, timing or seriousness of offending" (p. 7). However, "it should not be concluded that circle sentencing has no value simply because it does not appear to have any short-term impact on reoffending. Reducing recidivism is just one of several objectives of the process. There is nothing in this analysis to suggest that circle sentencing is not meeting the other objectives" (p. 7).

Some school programs aimed at reducing the use of illicit drugs do reduce drug use. However, many of the more common types of programs are ineffective.

There is no guarantee of the effectiveness of any program designed to reduce illicit drug use. However, intensive interactive universal programs delivered during the middle school years that adopt social influence or competency enhancement components appear to have the highest likelihood of being effective. Given the fact that no program can, *a priori*, be assumed to be effective, it is important that any new program be carefully and competently evaluated.

Even though political leaders sometimes suggest otherwise, members of the public do not generally want youths to be treated as adults in criminal justice matters.

It would appear that "People want juveniles who are accused of serious offences to be held responsible for their actions, and they see transfer as a mechanism for achieving this goal. Thus, the extent of transfers in the future may hinge, at least in part, on the capacity of the juvenile justice system to show that is an instrument of accountability" (p. 72-73).

The manner in which a school is run has an impact on the amount of school-based delinquency above and beyond the characteristics of the students in the school.

It is understandable that many people focus on the characteristics of the student body when trying to understand how much delinquency takes place in a school. In addressing crime problems in schools, others may focus on various 'crime prevention' approaches to delinquency (e.g., searching students for weapons, police in schools, monitoring of students). This paper examines the hypothesis that communally run schools in which students feel that they are part of the school community will have less school-based delinquency than schools run in an autocratic non-communal fashion.

There is some evidence that well-run schools have fewer crime problems (see *Criminological Highlights 4*(2)#4). Just as communities that have high levels of informal social control and cohesion appear to have lower levels of crime (see *Criminological Highlights 1*(2)#2), schools that have "supportive relationships between and among teachers, administrators and students; a common set of goals and norms; and a sense of collaboration and involvement" (p. 430) may have a climate that discourages delinquent acts. This study examines the impact of communally organized schools and the attachment of students to the schools on the amount of delinquency that takes place in the school.

Data were collected from students and teachers in 253 public secondary schools in the United States. Students were asked about their attachment to their schools and teachers (e.g., whether they cared about teachers' views of them and whether they were happy in school). Teachers were asked about the school organization (e.g., whether they viewed the school administration as being supportive and collaborative) and whether they

perceived that the goals of the schools were clear to everyone. Students were also asked whether they had engaged, in the previous year, in various forms of offending (e.g., damaging school property, assaulting or threatening teachers or other adults in the school).

Above and beyond various characteristics of the school and the students (e.g., the racial makeup of the student body, the poverty of the area, whether the school was in an urban area), youths who were enrolled in schools characterized by supportive and collaborative relations and well-established norms and goals were less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour. Students in schools with these characteristics were also more likely to report high levels of 'bonding' to the school. Not surprisingly, "students who are more attached to school and to education and who give more legitimacy to school rules are less likely to be delinquent" (p. 443) than are students who do not see school in this way. Finally it appears that "when the school community is strong, there is less of a need for individual-level controls [e.g., school bonding] to

protect against delinquency. However, when the school community is weak, there is a greater need for individual-level controls, and the protective effect that student bonding has on delinquency is stronger" (p. 448).

Conclusion: Clearly the social organization of a school has an impact on an individual student's involvement in delinquency. These findings suggest "the great potential for school-based delinquency prevention. Interventions that can strengthen the communal organization of the school, and, in turn, increase student bonding could reduce the amount of delinquency in the school" (p. 451).

Reference: Payne, Allison Ann (2008). A Multilevel Analysis of the Relationships among Communal School Organization, Student Bonding, and Delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 45*(4), 429-455.

The harmful effects of imprisoning large numbers of people from a community extend beyond those incarcerated and their immediate families: the communities themselves can show the impact of high imprisonment policies.

It is well known that imprisonment can hurt the life chances of those who are incarcerated. Imprisonment of drug offenders, for example, may act to increase recidivism (e.g., see *Criminological Highlights* 5(2)#3). Imprisonment also reduces the ability of men to get a job (*Criminological Highlights* 6(3)#2) and even if they do find employment, being imprisoned appears to have a permanent impact on a person's wages (*Criminological Highlights* 5(3)#7). This paper suggests that concentrated incarceration may go beyond these individual impacts and may harm the communities themselves.

Whether a country has a high or a low rate of imprisonment, imprisonment is concentrated in some communities more than others. Men are much more likely to be imprisoned than women. In the United States, men are almost 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than women. (In Canada, the rate of imprisonment (average counts) of men is about 17 times that of women.) In addition, imprisonment is concentrated in certain racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Blacks, Aboriginal persons), the young, and people who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. One study found that the result of this concentration is that in some poor neighbourhoods in some U.S. cities, almost one in five males age 18-44 is in prison on any given day. Another study estimated that about a third of young males in certain neighbourhoods are incarcerated for at least some period each year.

The impact of this level of concentrated imprisonment is widespread.

- There can be enormous impacts on a family if the remaining family members were financially dependent on the incarcerated family member. In addition, "incarceration affects social networks by removing one of the members of the poor family's network" (p. 105). The indirect effect of incarceration, then, may be to create social isolation for some families. In addition, removal of the father weakens his commitment to his children upon his return to the community.

- Incarceration appears to be related to the lasting deterioration of poor families, contributing to the high rate of single (female) parent families. These effects hold across racial and ethnic groups, but are strongest for black males whose likelihood of marriage drops by half after incarceration.

- Incarceration rates in a given year appear to be related to later increases in sexually transmitted diseases in a neighbourhood and higher rates of teenage pregnancies.

- The economic viability of neighbourhoods is reduced as those with income are taken out of it.

- The legitimacy of the criminal justice system and perhaps other government institutions appears to be corroded by high rates of imprisonment. Not surprisingly, those former prisoners who are legally able to vote are considerably less likely to do so than are similarly situated people who have not experienced imprisonment.

- To the extent that those returning from prison are *more* likely to commit offences than they would be had they not been incarcerated, communities to which they return become less safe and are perceived to be less safe.

Conclusion: Although few would question the necessity of imprisoning some offenders, this paper suggests that, in addition to direct financial costs to society and personal costs to the offender, there are a range of almost inevitable negative impacts of incarceration on communities. It would be sensible, then, for governments to consider these costs when debating changes in laws that might affect imprisonment rates.

Reference: Clear, Todd (2008). The Effects of High Imprisonment Rates on Communities. In Tonry, Michael (ed.). *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Volume 37. University of Chicago Press.

Allowing youths, age 16 and older, to work long hours while still in school may reduce delinquent behaviour, but may, simultaneously, encourage them to drop out of school.

Since the mid-1980s, concern has been expressed about the impact of 'intensive work' (i.e., more than 20 hours per week) on youths. "Virtually without exception, empirical research has indicated that youths who work during the school year, particularly those who work intensively, are at higher risk of delinquent behaviour" (p. 341). However, this relationship could come about as a result of selection: those youths with backgrounds and experiences that make them more likely to offend may also be more likely to work during high school (see *Criminological Highlights* 8(6)#4). This means that it is important not simply to compare the offending rates of working youths to non-working youths, but to compare working youths to *comparably situated* non-working youths. In the United States, federal law restricts the number of hours that youths under age 16 can work during the school year. There is considerable variability across states in laws regulating working hours for youths 16 and older. This study takes advantage of this state-to-state variation in order to assess the impact of work on youths' offending, drug use, and performance in school.

The study examines the work experience and self-reported offending of 2,224 youths who were not employed in a formal job at age 15 when they were interviewed as part of a larger study. They were interviewed again, when 16 years old. At that time, they were asked about employment, involvement in offending and whether they had been arrested in the previous year. In addition, they were asked about school suspensions, grades, and whether they had dropped out of school. Various standard control variables (e.g., residential mobility, household size) were also included in the age 16 survey questionnaire.

In terms of *simple* effects, working longer hours had uniformly negative consequences for behaviour. Those who worked longer hours when 16 were more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour, more likely to use drugs, and more likely to be arrested. At school, they were more likely to be suspended, to have low grades, and to drop out of school.

However, when the child labour laws of the various states are taken into account – policies that are more or less independent of any pre-existing behavioural tendencies on the part of the youth – the results are very different. Here we see that the transition to intensive work (permitted in some states and not others and more or less independent of pre-existing tendencies of the youths) "corresponds with a significant and substantial *decrease* in delinquency and [school] suspensions" (p. 354). However, "the adverse effect of work intensity on school dropout remains robust, and in fact increases…" (p. 354).

Conclusion: This study directly examines the impact of child labour laws on changes in behaviour of youths as they move from more restrictive federal laws (at age 15) to state laws of varying restrictiveness (at age 16). First-time formal work at age 16 appears to have some benefits in terms of protecting youths from delinquencies, but also has some costs, in that these same youths are more likely to drop out of school.

Reference: Apel, Robert, Shawn D. Bushway, Raymond Paternoster, Robert Brame, and Gary Sweeten (2008). Using State Child Labor Laws to Identify the Causal Effect of Youth Employment on Deviant Behaviour and Academic Achievement. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 24, 337-362.

The New Zealand government orchestrated an attempt to end high rates of adult imprisonment.

Between 1996 and 2006, the rate of imprisonment in New Zealand climbed from a relatively high 130 to 188 prisoners per hundred thousand residents. In comparison, Canada's 2006 imprisonment rate was about 106 and England & Wales' was about 145. The rate in the U.S. was about 751. But in August 2006, New Zealand's Prime Minister announced that her government's goal was "to get the imprisonment rate back to something more consistent with the countries we consider our peers… The criminal justice system cannot go on as it is [with] an unacceptably high rate of imprisonment" (p. 364). She pointed out that prison levels had become "economically and socially unsustainable" (p. 365). This paper examines how high imprisonment lost its legitimacy in New Zealand.

In the first few decades after World War II, criminal justice policy was seen to be the domain of experts in New Zealand. However, from the 1970s onwards, there appeared to be a loss of confidence in criminal justice experts, culminating in a nonbinding referendum in 1999, supported by 92% of voters, arguing for tougher treatment of offenders. In this context, "appearing to be 'soft on crime' might spell political disaster" (p. 370). News reporting about crime was almost always superficial and supportive of the tough-on-crime lobby. In 2002 legislation, "judges were encouraged to make more use of maximum penalties," parole was to be restricted, and other provisions were brought in that increased levels of imprisonment. A grass roots organization, the Sensible Sentencing Trust, founded in 2001, pressured continually for harsher penalties. The main political parties competed to see who could be 'tougher' on crime.

Soon after the 2005 election, however, planning was initiated to change direction. Efforts involved the New Zealand Law Reform Commission and the government. Ministers and others were sent to Finland to understand how they had reduced imprisonment in the 1970s and 1980s (see *Criminological Highlights 3*(5)#1, 6(1)#7). Ministers started describing New Zealand's imprisonment rate as a scandal pointing out that the country had the second highest imprisonment rate in the western world. The press began reporting on degrading and debasing prison conditions. Prison construction costs began rapidly to exceed earlier estimates. Reports came out that prisoners did essentially nothing in prison and the press covered the rehabilitative inadequacies of New Zealand's prison. British academics were imported to help explain the misinformed nature of public opinion on crime and punishment matters. Though the imprisonment rate hit 202 per hundred thousand residents in September 2007, it had dropped to 185 by April 2008. Obviously, it is impossible to know whether the attempts to change policy will be effective in the long term, especially in light of inevitable high profile violent crimes, one of which occurred in 2007.

Conclusion: The change in policy in New Zealand is interesting because, like that in Finland, the policy explicitly targeted prison population size and because international comparisons were used as arguments in favour of a change in direction. There are signs that those who determine imprisonment policy in other countries – Britain and parts of the United States, in particular – may also be concerned about the size of the prison population, in part because of resource concerns. In the end, however, "just like any other system of power, one that is heavily influenced by penal populism will be dependent on the legitimacy of its promise and what it actually achieves" (p. 379).

Reference: Pratt, John (2008). When Penal Populism Stops: Legitimacy, Scandal and the Power to Punish in New Zealand. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 41*(3), 364-383.

The future impact of laws that 'toughen' sentences can be modelled. In California, legislative efforts to toughen sentencing laws have had – and will continue to have - dramatic effects on the size of the prison population. This increase consists largely of drug – not violent - offenders.

In 1976, California shifted from an indeterminate to a determinate sentencing regime. Since that time, the California legislature has enacted over 1,000 new laws related to sentencing policy (more than 400 in the 1990s alone). In addition, there have been numerous ballot initiatives in which citizens, not their legislators, created sentencing provisions. The result of these changes is that California's imprisonment rate grew by 484% between 1980 and 2006 (from 98 per hundred thousand residents to 475. These figures exclude local jails and those in federal prisons.)

This paper develops a model of California imprisonment during the final two decades of the 20th century, and then uses that model to project what will occur for the next couple of decades based on various political choices. During the period 1980-1998, the number of state prisoners increased from about 20 thousand to about 160 thousand. The proportion of violent prisoners, however, went down from 64% to 44%. In contrast, drug offenders constituted 10% of prisoners in 1980 and 32% in 1998. Given that one of the big changes in policy that took place during this period was to increase sentence length (largely because of the focus of the new sentencing laws on criminal records), it is not surprising that the proportion of prisoners 35 years old and older increased from 23% to 41% and the number of those with two or more prior convictions increased from 11% to 27%. The proportion of female prisoners increased from 5% to 8%.

If the three strikes law of 1994 is fully implemented (e.g., in terms of actual release dates), the proportion of prisoners incarcerated for violent crimes would *decrease* slightly between now and 2030, and the proportion

of drug offenders would continue to increase (to 46%). This scenario also predicts that women, in 2030, would constitute 18% of prisoners. Restricting three strikes eligibility to violent offenders would reduce the increase in prison population to a 65% increase in size by 2030 compared to 79% for the 'full' 3-strikes law. The proportion of violent offenders in prison would remain essentially unchanged, but the proportion of blacks and women would grow in a similar fashion to the predictions for the 'full' three strikes model. However, "as wide and sweeping as the potential consequences of California's Three Strikes law appear in the abstract, they pale in comparison to the cumulative effects of the earlier changes made to California sentencing policy" (p. 260).

Conclusion: These cumulative impacts of California's sentencing laws demonstrate that whatever its stated purposes might be, California's complex sentencing structure (including the three-strikes laws) is "clearly not defensible on the basis that it makes the public safer by incapacitating dangerous offenders" (p. 261). Though a modified system

of 3-strikes that focuses only on those with a violent criminal history might result in a prison population with slightly higher levels of dangerousness, "it still does not perform terribly well in the context of the existing system" (p. 261). Thus far it is clear that "two decades of sentencing policy reforms conceived and implemented with the goal of making California's citizens safer have, in fact, resulted in a prison population that is more than four times the size and substantially less dangerous than it was in 1980" (p. 262). "The most prominent promise of criminal sentencing policy reform in California… has been to protect the public from dangerous offenders…. California has faltered miserably on this promise" (p. 262).

Reference: Auerhahn, Kathleen (2008). Using Simulation Modeling to Evaluate Sentencing Reform in California: Choosing the Future. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 4,* 241-266..

Circle sentencing – as an alternative sentencing process for adult offenders – has no impact on re-offending of Aboriginal people in New South Wales, Australia.

Circle sentencing for Aboriginal people in New South Wales is used as an alternative to traditional sentencing. It involves the offender, magistrate, and various people from the community. In New South Wales "Circle sentencing has the full sentencing powers of the court" (p. 1). It is seen as having a number of distinct purposes, only one of which is to reduce recidivism in Aboriginal communities. This study looks only at that one goal.

The obvious challenge in research of this kind is to find an appropriate comparison group since reoffending rates vary across characteristics of offenders as well as across time within groups of offenders. A sample of 68 circle sentencing participants from courts outside of Sydney who were not imprisoned was tracked for 15 months after their participation in the circle. An equivalent group of Aboriginal offenders matched on age, gender, offence, prior record and prior imprisonment was used for comparison purposes. About half of these offenders were being sentenced for common assault. The next most frequent offences were unlicensed driving and breaching an apprehended violence order.

Three measures of reoffending were used: frequency of offending (defined as the number of proven offences), the time between the end of the circle process (or court process in the case of the comparison group) and the next offence, and change in offence seriousness (for those who did re-offend).

The need for a comparison group is clear when comparing offending during the 15 months prior to the reference offence to offending for the 15 months after. Most (78%) of the circle sentencing participants reduced their frequency of offending, but this is also true of the control group in which 77% showed lower rates of offending in the 15 months after the reference offence. Overall 46% of the circle sentencing group committed at least one offence in the 15 months following the circle, compared to 38% in the comparison group. For both groups, the offence which followed the reference offence tended to be less serious, but the difference was not significant.

A separate analysis using 153 Aboriginal adults who had experienced circle sentencing was used to determine whether there was a difference in the *time* to the next proven offence for the two groups. Using a much larger comparison group, and controlling statistically for various factors related to re-conviction, participation in circle sentencing was not a significant predictor of time to reoffend.

Conclusion: "Taken as a whole, the evidence presented here suggests that circle sentencing has no effect on the frequency, timing or seriousness of offending" (p. 7). However, "it should not be concluded that circle sentencing has no value simply because it does not appear to have any short-term impact on reoffending. Reducing recidivism is just one of several objectives of the process. There is nothing in this analysis to suggest that circle sentencing is not meeting the other objectives" (p. 7).

Reference: Fitzgerald, Jacqueline (2008). Does Circle Sentencing Reduce Aboriginal Offending? *Crime and Justice Bulletin: Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice.* Number 115. New South Wales (Australia) Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Some school programs aimed at reducing the use of illicit drugs do reduce drug use. However, many of the more common types of programs are ineffective.

School-based programs designed to reduce illicit drug use vary widely. Many intuitively sensible sounding ideas have been incorporated into these programs, but relatively few of them have been adequately tested. This study examines what we know about the programs that have been shown to be effective.

It is likely that most school-based attempts to reduce illicit drug use have never been adequately evaluated. For this study, 149 studies evaluating school-based drug prevention programs were located. Unfortunately, however, most (91) of these evaluations were inadequate for a variety of reasons (e.g., the absence of any comparison group; inadequate data on which to evaluate whether a comparison group was, indeed comparable; attitudes towards illicit drugs were measured rather than actual illicit drug use). The remaining 58 studies provided 61 unique treatment comparisons.

Programs that targeted marijuana use showed overall positive effects. However, school-based programs that targeted other illicit drugs (e.g., cocaine and amphetamines) did not show positive effects.

Many *types* of programs appeared to be largely ineffective, for example, those based on passive information dissemination about drugs and those that focused on interpersonal development such as self-esteem enhancement and improving personal decision making through self-reflection. Similarly, programs that were designed to "increase awareness of social influences" and to "develop skills for resisting substance use influences" are also likely to be ineffective. The programs that emphasized the teaching of generic life skills (communication, problem solving, stress management and other socially relevant skills) appeared to have the highest proportion of positive outcomes (i.e., the majority of these programs appeared to be effective in reducing the use of illicit drugs).

All programs – even within a type of intervention – are not equally effective. Programs focusing on all students were more effective than programs targeting those students perceived by the school or others to be in need of such programs. There seemed to be some indication that youths in the middle years of school (i.e., not primary or high school) are most likely to benefit from school based programs. To be effective, programs need to have a high level of interactivity – passive learning is not effective in reducing the use of illicit drugs. The more intensive a program is – defined by the number of sessions involved in it – the more likely it will be effective. Having a booster session after a program was completed seemed to be irrelevant.

Conclusion: There is no guarantee of the effectiveness of any program designed to reduce illicit drug use. However, intensive interactive universal programs delivered during the middle school years that adopt social influence or competency enhancement components appear to have the highest likelihood of being effective. Given the fact that no program can, *a priori*, be assumed to be effective, it is important that any new program be carefully and competently evaluated.

Reference: Soole, David W., Lorraine Mazerolle, and Sacha Rombouts (2008). School-Based Drug Prevention Programs: A Review of What Works. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 41*(2), 259-286.

Even though political leaders sometimes suggest otherwise, members of the public do not generally want youths to be treated as adults in criminal justice matters.

Many youth justice systems have mechanisms whereby young people who commit certain offences can be dealt with as adults – at trial, sentencing, and/or for correctional purposes. In the United States, treating increasing numbers of youths as adults for criminal justice purposes became popular toward the end of the last century, challenging the purpose and the value of having separate justice systems for youths accused of offending.

Simple surveys of ordinary citizens support the conclusion that many people want youths charged with certain serious offences to be dealt with as adults, though this support seems to vary with the age of the offender and certain circumstances of the offence. However, it would appear that support varies somewhat depending on how a question is asked. The public appears to be more punitive in response to 'global questions' than to questions in which they are given information on specific characteristics of the youths or the circumstances of their crimes.

In this study of public attitudes (in the state of Florida), people's views about whether youths should be handled in a separate system were measured in a number of different ways. They were asked whether "having a separate court system to handle juvenile cases makes good sense" and whether "juveniles who commit violent crimes should be tried as adults" (p. 58). In addition, people were given a specific case described in a short vignette that varied by offence and various characteristics of the youth (age, race, sex, criminal record, whether the offence was committed alone or with other youths, and the relative maturity of the youth).

Most respondents (79%) approved in principle the policy that there should be a separate youth court, but most (73%) also thought that youths who commit serious crimes should be tried as adults. At the same time, by far the most popular sentencing goal for youth sentencing was rehabilitation (95% saw it as "extremely important"). Other goals (retribution, specific and general deterrence, and incapacitation) were seen as relatively important, but the proportion of the population seeing them as extremely important was considerably lower (ranging from 57% for retribution to 22% for incapacitation). The perceived importance of these punishment goals did not, however, relate to the respondents' views of whether a youth should be transferred to adult court. Youths who were described as having a criminal record or who were perceived as relatively mature for their age were seen as more appropriate candidates for transfer to adult court. Not surprisingly, those who were described as having committed a violent or drug offence also were seen as more appropriately dealt with in adult court.

Even though all of the offenders described in the vignettes were eligible for transfer, only those who were described as having committed very serious offences and those with extensive criminal record were seen by the majority of respondents as appropriate cases for transfer. Those who believed that adult court would be more likely to impose the punishment that the youth deserved were more likely to want youths to be transferred. Similarly, those who thought that the youth would be more likely to be rehabilitated in the adult system favoured transfer.

Conclusion: It would appear that "People want juveniles who are accused of serious offences to be held responsible for their actions, and they see transfer as a mechanism for achieving this goal. Thus, the extent of transfers in the future may hinge, at least in part, on the capacity of the juvenile justice system to show that is an instrument of accountability" (p. 72-73).

Reference: Applegate, Brandon K., Robin King Davis, and Francis T. Cullen (2009). Reconsidering Child Saving: The Extent and Correlates of Public Support for Excluding Youths From the Juvenile Court. *Crime and Delinquency, 55*(1), 51-77. .