Criminological Highlights

Volume 10, Number 5 — September 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, Rosemary Gartner, Tom Finlay, John Beattie, Andrea Shier, Carla Cesaroni, Maria Jung, Myles Leslie, Ron Levi, Natasha Madon, Nicole Myers, Holly Pelvin, Jane Sprott, Sara Thompson, Kimberly Varma, and Carolyn Yule.

Criminological Highlights is available at www.criminology.utoronto.ca/lib and directly by email. Views – expressed or implied – in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of Justice, Canada.

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

1. How did Hurricane Katrina reduce recidivism in a group of Louisiana inmates released after the hurricane?

2. How can criminal behaviour be effectively deterred?

3. How do delinquent values get passed on to younger youths in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?

4. How does 'being wanted' by the police prevent suspects from engaging in normal non-deviant activities?

5. Why can't we expect crime to be reduced by simply providing supervised after-school programs?

6. When can offenders be considered to be crime free long enough for them to lose the label of 'offenders'?

7. Why might it be counterproductive in the long run to have laws that criminalize youths who simply hang around on the street and make adults nervous?

8. Can we expect to have a noticeable impact on crime by intervening in the lives of those offenders who are deemed likely to be high rate offenders in the future?

Prisoners paroled after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their neighbourhoods in New Orleans, Louisiana (USA) were forced to live elsewhere. As a result, they were less likely to be involved in crime.

Since the data demonstrate that parolees who were forced to change their place of residence were less likely to be reincarcerated (for either a parole violation or a new offence), the next challenge is to determine why this might be the case. One possibility is that "parolees who migrate to… [a new location] may be more likely to sever ties with criminal peers than would parolees who return to… [their old neighbourhoods]" (p. 500). Other research suggests that moving to a new neighbourhood is desired by almost half of those released from prison. "While forcing ex-prisoners to move away from their old neighbourhoods is neither realistic nor ethical, providing opportunities for ex-prisoners to move away from old neighbourhoods is a policy prescription that may be worth pursuing" (p. 501).

Increasing the certainty of punishment for illegal acts can be effective in reducing offending and may generalize to circumstances in which the objective likelihood of apprehension has not changed.

It appears that increasing the objective likelihood of apprehension for offending (transit fare dodging in this case) can have an impact as long as people *perceive* that the probability of being apprehended has increased. In this case, however, the effect of increased surveillance also generalized to periods of the day when there was no objective change in the probability of apprehension. It may be that in this case – and perhaps others – people know of the general increase in the likelihood of apprehension either from their own experience or from hearing that others have been apprehended. At the same time, they may have insufficient information to realize that the increased surveillance and apprehension was limited to specific times of the day.

Youths in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in a city are especially likely to spend time with older youths. These older youths are not likely to provide positive role models for their younger friends.

"Disadvantaged older adolescents and young men are important sources of socialization for boys in poor neighbourhoods, thereby identifying one potential pathway for neighbourhood socialization" (p. 461). And given that one of the reasons for the connections across age groups is protection, the findings show "how the failure of a community to control violence can have spillover effects in other domains through the impact of violence on the age structure of peer networks" (p. 462).

Young men from poor neighbourhoods who are wanted by the police, often for minor crimes, avoid ordinary events (e.g., the birth of their children) and locations (work, a parent's home, or hospitals when they are sick or injured) because they fear being apprehended.

"Once a man is wanted, maintaining a stable routine, being with his partner and family, and using the police may link him to the authorities and lead to his confinement" (p. 351). Said differently, one of the barriers to a traditional life is the fact that these men cannot afford to take the risk of having traditional relationships. "One strategy for coping with these risks is to avoid dangerous places, people, and interactions entirely" (p. 353). The situations that are avoided, of course, are often the very same places, people, and interactions that are seen as reflecting the values of traditional society.

Providing opportunities for 'at risk' youths to attend after-school programs is not sufficient to reduce unsupervised time with other adolescents.

"The goal of reducing the amount of time youth spend with peers away from adult monitoring is an important one, but this study leads to the conclusion that providing after-school programs may not be an efficient method with which to accomplish it…. The data from this study show that students who volunteered for our after school programs were involved in abundant after-school activities other than the [new] after-school program" (p. 406). The reason for the failure of the after-school program to affect crime and drug use would appear to be simple: those who were at highest risk of offending (perhaps because of unsupervised time with delinquent youths) simply never showed any interest in after-school programs. Providing an effective-sounding program is not likely to be an effective approach unless the appropriate population of at-risk youths can be persuaded to participate in it.

Risk of recidivism declines with the number of years since the last conviction. At some point in time, an ex-offender's risk of offending becomes indistinguishable from the risk of offending of someone who never offended.

Ex-offenders who live crime free lives for a number of years eventually become indistinguishable from the general population and become very similar to those who have never offended (in terms of the likelihood that they will offend). It would make sense, then, to incorporate findings such as these into policies that ensure that these "redeemed" offenders who no longer pose special risks are relieved of the stigma that blocks normal employment and other opportunities.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act, young people in Britain are, in effect, told that ordinary behaviour that would normally be considered acceptable can be deemed unacceptable by the police. As a result, the government is "criminalizing youth sociability and alienating… young people on the basis of adults' anxieties…" (p. 23).

At the same time that governments in various countries are, ostensibly, trying to protect children (e.g., by increasing the age at which they can drink, smoke, or leave school), this law criminalizes ordinary legal behaviour of youths because this behaviour makes adults nervous. The latter message – like negative interactions with police – may be the one that has the greatest impact on youths' attachment to traditional social values.

Relying on statistical predictions of which individuals will be high rate offenders is not likely to affect the level of crime in a community.

The suggestion that interventions at the individual level (e.g., efforts to reduce individual drug abuse) will not have a substantial impact on crime rates in a community is not to say that they are unimportant. Rather this paper suggests only that individual interventions are not likely to turn a high crime society into a low crime society. For example, in one collection of studies it was noted that "the predictors [of lethal violence] based on early life conditions are… strikingly similar [in the United States and in the U.K]" (p. 331). Nevertheless, homicide rates in these two countries are quite different. "An explanation for crime and trends in crime over time cannot be provided without taking into consideration history and the broader context, including variations in situational factors and in the societal response to undesired behaviours" (p. 332).

Prisoners paroled after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their neighbourhoods in New Orleans, Louisiana (USA) were forced to live elsewhere. As a result, they were less likely to be involved in crime.

Generally speaking, prisoners who are released on parole return to their former neighbourhoods and released prisoners tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods. At the same time research would suggest that "to decrease the probability of recidivism, it would be beneficial to separate parolees from their criminal past and their peers" (p. 487). For certain prisoners, Hurricane Katrina – which destroyed large parts of New Orleans in 2005 – ensured that offenders could not return to their former neighbourhoods.

This study looked at prisoners who came from neighbourhoods in New Orleans that were badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Re-incarceration for a new offence or for a parole violation within one year of release was examined for prisoners released in September to February 2001-2 and 2003-4 (prior to the hurricane) and in 2005-6 (after the hurricane). Given that prisoners from the most damaged sectors of New Orleans were much less likely to return to their 'home' neighbourhoods, the hurricane acted as a natural experiment, testing the effect of returning to a different neighbourhood. More than twice as many parolees released after Hurricane Katrina were released to new neighbourhoods than had been the case in the years prior to this event.

Taking into account the fact that not all post-Katrina parolees moved to new places and that not all pre-Katrina parolees returned to their old neighbourhoods, "individuals who migrated to a different [location] were

significantly and substantially *less* likely to be re-incarcerated within one year of release from prison" (p. 496). The probability of re-incarceration for male parolees who returned to their old neighbourhoods was .265 whereas those paroled to other neighbourhoods had only a .110 probability of being re-incarcerated within a year. The same effect was demonstrated when parole revocation or a new criminal conviction was used as the dependent variable. Furthermore, "all parolees, whether first releases or those with multiple prior incarcerations, are significantly less likely to be re-incarcerated if they migrate to a different [neighbourhood]" (p. 497).

Conclusion: Since the data demonstrate that parolees who were forced to change their place of residence were less likely to be reincarcerated (for either a parole violation or a new offence), the next challenge is to determine why this might be the case. One possibility is that "parolees who migrate to… [a new location] may be more likely to sever ties with criminal peers than would parolees who return to… [their

old neighbourhoods]" (p. 500). Other research suggests that moving to a new neighbourhood is desired by almost half of those released from prison. "While forcing ex-prisoners to move away from their old neighbourhoods is neither realistic nor ethical, providing opportunities for ex-prisoners to move away from old neighbourhoods is a policy prescription that may be worth pursuing" (p. 501).

Reference: Kirk, David S. (2009). A Natural Experiment on Residential Change and Recidivism: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina. *American Sociological Review, 74*, 484-505.

Increasing the certainty of punishment for illegal acts can be effective in reducing offending and may generalize to circumstances in which the objective likelihood of apprehension has not changed.

Governments often look to deterrence as a way to reduce crime. However, they frequently make the mistake of focusing solely on increasing the *amount* of the punishment rather than its certainty even though there is substantial evidence that the size of the expected punishment does not matter in determining levels of crime (e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, V6N2#1, V7N3#6, V8N1#2). In contrast, this study looked at the general deterrent impact of *certainty* of receiving a punishment on law breaking in the Zurich, Switzerland, transit system.

In the transit system in Zurich, train passengers are required to carry valid tickets, but, after 1993, there were no regular checks to see whether passengers had valid tickets. However, infrequent spot checks were carried out throughout the day and evening (which allowed estimates to be made on the proportion of riders who had not purchased tickets). Punishment for not having a valid ticket was, after December 2003, an on-the-spot fine of the equivalent of about €54 (C$87) escalating to €80 for a third offence.

In the early 2000s, a number of surveys carried out for the transit system revealed that many passengers felt unsafe while riding on evening trains, perhaps because transit staff were not regularly on the trains. In mid-2003, in order to address passengers' sense of insecurity, attendants were brought back onto the trains after 9 p.m. Although they were reintroduced to the trains to provide security to passengers, the attendants were also required to systematically check tickets on the evening trains in the Zurich region. This resulted in about 1 passenger in 3 being checked for valid tickets. No change in the checking of tickets (and hence the objective probability of apprehension) occurred during daytime hours.

Fare-dodging (estimated by the number of checks leading to an on-the-spot fine) dropped from about 3.5% of all riders in early 2003 to about 1% by the end of 2005. In January 2006, data were made available separately for those subject to 'normal' spot checks (that occurred throughout the day) and for those checked by the train attendant (who worked only in the evening hours). It appears that the increased surveillance during the evening hours generalized to the daytime hours such that fare dodging was equally low during that period, even though there had been no increase in the checking of tickets. The results are corroborated by data from surveys in Zurich schools in 1999 and 2007. The lifetime prevalence of fare-dodging decreased from 62% to 52% during this time period, a finding that is consistent with the transit system's data.

Conclusion: It appears that increasing the objective likelihood of apprehension for offending (transit fare dodging in this case) can have an impact as long as people *perceive* that the probability of being apprehended has increased. In this case, however, the effect of increased surveillance also generalized to periods of the day when there was no objective change in the probability of apprehension. It may be that in this case – and perhaps others – people know of the general increase in the likelihood of apprehension either from their own experience or from hearing that others have been apprehended. At the same time, they may have insufficient information to realize that the increased surveillance and apprehension was limited to specific times of the day.

Reference: Killias, Martin, David Scheidegger, and Peter Nordenson (2009). The Effects of Increasing the Certainty of Punishment: A Field Experiment on Public Transportation. *European Journal of Criminology*, *6*(5), 387-400.

Youths in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in a city are especially likely to spend time with older youths. These older youths are not likely to provide positive role models for their younger friends.

Though it is frequently assumed that the neighbourhood in which a youth lives is important in understanding that youth's behaviour, relatively little is known about who, in a given neighbourhood is most likely to serve as a role model to a youth. The concern – especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods – is that youths who have a preponderance of delinquent friends are more likely than others to be delinquent themselves.

However, within poor neighbourhoods, there is "strong support for conventional ideals about education, work, welfare, and marriage…." (p. 446). Nevertheless, it is clear that poor neighbourhoods are heterogeneous, thus providing youths with "multiple cultural models from which to choose" (p. 448). The puzzle, then, is to understand how unconventional cultural models are transmitted to youths in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In a national survey, youths who were about 16 years old were asked to provide the ages of "people with whom you spend most of your time." In the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, 65% of the youths reported that they spent most of their time with older youths (under 26 years old). In the least disadvantaged neighbourhoods, only 49% reported that they spent most of their time with youths older than themselves. With these survey findings (which included older siblings in the group of identified individuals) as a starting point, interviews were carried out with adolescent boys aged 13-18 in three predominantly African American neighbourhoods in Boston, two of which had high rates of family poverty and high rates of violence. In the two poor areas, 75% of the youths

reported "older men from outside their families as part of their peer networks" (p. 452). In the less disadvantaged neighbourhoods only 15% reported interacting with older adolescents and young adults outside their families. In the poor neighbourhoods, helping protect others from violence and being protected by those more able to provide protection went hand in hand and tended to define membership in the community. This was not the case in the more advantaged neighbourhood in which other more conventional activities were more likely to be the reasons for associating with other youths.

Youths from the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods were more likely to spend time in their own neighbourhoods than were youths from the more advantaged neighbourhoods, in part because leaving their neighbourhoods was perceived by the youths from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to put them at risk of altercations with adolescents from other neighbourhoods. But staying in one's own territory limits the range of people one can associate with. Older youths in these areas see it as their duty to protect younger youths – and see it as part of what it means to be part of a community.

In addition, older youths gain status from assuming this community or collective responsibility. In the more advantaged neighbourhood, there are "fewer idle young men and older adolescents of working age with whom younger adolescents might pass time" (p. 456). They are more likely to be working or otherwise engaged. Perhaps as a result, youths from these neighbourhoods are less likely to be associating with older youths.

Conclusion: "Disadvantaged older adolescents and young men are important sources of socialization for boys in poor neighbourhoods, thereby identifying one potential pathway for neighbourhood socialization" (p. 461). And given that one of the reasons for the connections across age groups is protection, the findings show "how the failure of a community to control violence can have spillover effects in other domains through the impact of violence on the age structure of peer networks" (p. 462).

Reference: Harding, David J. (2009). Violence, Older Peers, and the Socialization of Adolescent Boys in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods. *American Sociological Review, 74*, 445-464.

Young men from poor neighbourhoods who are wanted by the police, often for minor crimes, avoid ordinary events (e.g., the birth of their children) and locations (work, a parent's home, or hospitals when they are sick or injured) because they fear being apprehended.

With large numbers of poor Black residents of some American cities under some form of criminal justice control, it is inevitable that a non-trivial number of them would also have warrants out for their arrest – often for violations of those controls (e.g., for failure to appear in court, failure to pay fines, or failure to comply with conditions of release). The question addressed by this paper is a straightforward one: What is the impact of the threat of being arrested on the everyday behaviour of the 'wanted person'? This paper addresses this question based on the author's six years of fieldwork in poor Black areas of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"Once a man finds that he may be stopped by the police and taken into custody, he discovers that people, places, and relations he formerly relied on, and that are integral to maintaining a respectable identity, get redefined as paths to confinement" (p. 344). For example, one man who drove his partner to the hospital for the birth of their son was arrested by police in the hospital for an offence – drinking while on parole – that had taken place some time earlier. The police had come to the hospital for other reasons but had carried out a routine check of the list of visitors to see if there were any visitors who had outstanding warrants. The result of this episode in the community was that other men with warrants out for similar offences no longer attended the births of their children. Similarly, one man who had been robbed and beaten chose to have his face stitched by a nursing assistant he knew rather than take the chance of going to the hospital for proper medical treatment. His assumption was that hospitals often notify the police of injuries of this sort and he would be arrested for a minor outstanding warrant.

Places of employment similarly become dangerous for people with outstanding warrants since they provide easy locations for police to apprehend people. One man whose offence was that he did not return to a halfway house "saying that he could not spend another night cooped up with a bunch of men like he was still in jail" was subsequently arrested leaving work and sent to prison for a year for the violation. The workplace clearly was a risky location for these people. Contact with other parts of the legal system – e.g., family court hearings related to maintaining custody of a child – similarly become risky locations for those who might be suspected of violating conditions of a warrant.

The other side of the coin is that other members of the community are equally aware of the fact that those with outstanding warrants are unable to claim protection of the law. Hence, those with warrants were, themselves, vulnerable to violence or robbery because they could not afford to call the police. For some men, the threat to call the police was used as a tool against them to achieve compliance in unrelated matters. The existence of warrants also served as explanations or excuses for not participating in traditional activities (e.g., attending parents' day at school).

Conclusion: "Once a man is wanted, maintaining a stable routine, being with his partner and family, and using the police may link him to the authorities and lead to his confinement" (p. 351). Said differently, one of the barriers to a traditional life is the fact that these men cannot afford to take the risk of having traditional relationships. "One strategy for coping with these risks is to avoid dangerous places, people, and interactions entirely" (p. 353). The situations that are avoided, of course, are often the very same places, people, and interactions that are seen as reflecting the values of traditional society.

Reference: Goffman, Alice (2009). On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto. *American Sociological Review, 74*, 339-357.

Providing opportunities for 'at risk' youths to attend after-school programs is not sufficient to reduce unsupervised time with other adolescents.

Providing after-school programs for youths who are at risk of offending is sometimes seen as an 'evidence based' solution to crime. The assumption is that these programs are designed to reduce unsupervised time with delinquent peers and provide positive role models for these youths. This study examined the impact of after-school programs on those youths from 5 urban schools (that were underperforming academically) who expressed an interest in participating. These youths were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions: half the youths were given the opportunity to attend special after-school programs, half were not.

The theory that providing after-school programs will reduce crime is based on the assumption that unsupervised time is likely to be associated with offending. But there are reasons to question whether simply increasing the *availability* of after-school programs will reduce unstructured socializing. Specifically, the following facts would imply that after-school programs may not have their desired impact on unsupervised socializing by youths: (a) Participation is voluntary and, as a result, attendance in the programs is often inconsistent and low. Data show that the average youth enrolled in these programs attends approximately once a week. (b) Youths who want to spend unmonitored time with friends can avoid adult monitoring by choosing not to participate in the programs. Those who find the programs attractive may be less likely to offend regardless of the availability of the program. (c) At-risk youth are more likely to drop out of these programs than those not at risk of offending. Said differently, these programs may, in the end, provide services largely to youths who don't need them.

Youths in the study were asked to indicate how many weekdays, in a typical week, they spent "hanging out with your friends with no adults present after school" (p. 399). Although youths who had been assigned to the 'program group' were able to attend the after-school program every weekday, it only reduced their unsupervised socializing by about a half day a week. For all participants, the more unsupervised socializing the youths engaged in, the more likely they were to report engaging in one or more illegal acts and using drugs in the past month. However, the experimental treatment effect – whether the youths were invited to participate in this after-school program – had *no* impact on delinquency or drug use. The data suggest that the program did not manage to attract those youths who would be most likely to benefit from it. In fact, both the treatment youths and the control youths (who had asked to participate in the program, but as a result of random assignment did not have the opportunity) were heavily involved in various kinds of organized after-school activities independent of this program. For these youths – and perhaps many other urban youths – there already are a range of organized activities available away from school.

Conclusion: "The goal of reducing the amount of time youth spend with peers away from adult monitoring is an important one, but this study leads to the conclusion that providing after-school programs may not be an efficient method with which to accomplish it…. The data from this study show that students who volunteered for our after school programs were involved in abundant after-school activities other than the [new] after-school program" (p. 406). The reason for the failure of the after-school program to affect crime and drug use would appear to be simple: those who were at highest risk of offending (perhaps because of unsupervised time with delinquent youths) simply never showed any interest in after-school programs. Providing an effective-sounding program is not likely to be an effective approach unless the appropriate population of at-risk youths can be persuaded to participate in it.

Reference: Cross, Amanda Brown, Denise C. Gottfredson, Denise M. Wilson, Melissa Rorie, and Nadine Connell (2009). The impact of after-school programs on the routine activities of middle-school students: Results from a randomized controlled trial. *Criminology and Public Policy, 8*(2), 391-412.

Risk of recidivism declines with the number of years since the last conviction. At some point in time, an ex-offender's risk of offending becomes indistinguishable from the risk of offending of someone who never offended.

Two findings, taken together, form the basis of this paper. First, it is well established that those who have committed offences in the past are more likely than those who haven't offended to commit offences in the future. Second, the likelihood of offending drops off with age (see, e.g., *Criminological Highlights* 6(4)#3). The question that can be asked is, therefore, whether there is a point in time at which former offenders are no more likely to offend than are non-offenders. This was recently addressed by another set of authors in two almost identical, but separately published, papers (see *Criminological Highlights* V8N4#4). This paper develops this issue further, providing a framework for thinking about the question, "At what point can an ex-offender be considered to have been 'redeemed' from his or her criminal past?"

It has been estimated that 7.8% of all American males and 27% of black American males have been incarcerated by the time they are 40 years old (see *Criminological Highlights* V5N3#7). Obviously many more have acquired criminal records but were sentenced to something less severe than prison. Given the ubiquity of criminal record checks – studies in the U.S. suggest that between 50% and 80% of large employers require them – a criminal record can have long-term devastating impacts on employment (see *Criminological Highlights*,V6N3#2).

Using data from New York State concerning those first arrested as adults (age 16 or older in NY) in 1980, models were developed to estimate two points in time: the point at which those offenders who remained crime-free were no more likely to offend than the general population, and the point at which those with a criminal record might be considered to be 'sufficiently close' in their likelihood of re-offending to those without any record of offending that the difference is not important. In general, those who were young (age 16) at the time of their first adult arrest maintained a higher likelihood of reoffending than those who were older (age 20) at the

time of their first offence. These two groups did not look equivalent (in terms of the likelihood of reoffending) until about 15 crime-free years had passed. However, the likelihood of reoffending after a given crime-free period varies with offence. For example, those whose first offence was robbery were more likely to reoffend than were those first convicted of burglary or aggravated assault. This difference held for crime-free periods of up to about 11 years.

However, those arrested at age 16 for burglary or aggravated assault were indistinguishable *from the general population* if they managed to remain crime free for a period of about 4.9 years. Those first convicted of robbery at age 16 had a higher likelihood of reoffending than did the general population until 8.5 years had passed since their conviction. Those arrested for the first time at age 20 became indistinguishable from the general population in their propensity to re-offend within 4 years for robbery and within 3.2 and 3.3 years for burglary and aggravated assault, respectively.

When estimating the point at which a former offender has become 'sufficiently close' to those who have

never offended, one obviously has to decide what 'sufficiently close' means. If, for example, an employer can accept a 'risk difference' of 5%, then for property offenders first arrested at age 20, one would only have to wait 4 crime-free years for these offenders to be 'sufficiently close' to those who never offended. However, for those first arrested at age 18 for a violent offence, one would have to wait about 8 crime-free years for these offenders to become 'sufficiently close.'

Conclusion: Ex-offenders who live crime free lives for a number of years eventually become indistinguishable from the general population and become very similar to those who have never offended (in terms of the likelihood that they will offend). It would make sense, then, to incorporate findings such as these into policies that ensure that these "redeemed" offenders who no longer pose special risks are relieved of the stigma that blocks normal employment and other opportunities.

Reference: Blumstein, Alfred and Kiminori Nakamura (2009). Redemption in the Presence of Widespread Criminal Background Checks. *Criminology, 47*(2), 327-359.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act, young people in Britain are, in effect, told that ordinary behaviour that would normally be considered acceptable can be deemed unacceptable by the police. As a result, the government is "criminalizing youth sociability and alienating… young people on the basis of adults' anxieties…" (p. 23).

Anti-social behaviour in Britain is now defined so as to include behaviour that is likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress to others. The law reflects evidence suggesting that about a third of the respondents to the British Crime Survey report that youths hanging around on the street in their neighbourhoods is a 'big problem.' Similar to attempts to deal with worried residents in other locations at other times (see *Criminological Highlights*, V10N4#3), the law gives police the power to disperse two or more people who were in previously designated locations. If youths fail to disperse as ordered, they become liable to imprisonment and/or a substantial fine. In other words, the law criminalizes the failure to stop doing something which itself is not criminal.

The research reported in this paper is based on an examination of police data on orders that have been issued, interviews with police and municipal officials in 13 police force areas, and intensive studies in two study sites which include interviews and focus groups with youths and adults, as well as interviews with various key informants. Many of the orders (about half in London) were authorized for either city/town centres or in shopping areas suggesting, perhaps, commercial interests in ensuring that adult consumers feel comfortable. In Scotland, none of the initial authorizations were in the most deprived areas, perhaps reflecting greater tolerance among less advantaged adults for groups of young people hanging out on the street.

Young people who were interviewed as part of the research often acknowledged that they might look threatening, but at the same time they pointed out that they felt safer when they were with a group of their friends. Some youths thought that the anti-social behaviour laws increased the likelihood that youths would engage in truly troublesome behaviour because they could not hang around areas near their homes simply to meet and talk. Many also noted that they don't really have alternative places to meet with friends. In that context, some youths pointed out that the dispersal of youths for reasons other than their own behaviour "puts across the message that every young person is delinquent" (p. 13). One of the perverse effects of the law is that those who comply with it – those who disperse and go home when ordered to do so – become those most adversely affected by it in that their liberties are intruded upon more than those who simply move to a different location not covered by the law. Youths often saw the law – and the implementation of it – as demonstrating a lack of respect by the police and others for youths. As noted elsewhere (see *Criminological Highlights*, V8N5#5), negative experiences with police are much more important in shaping views of police than are positive experiences.

The ultimate youth dispersal device that is being used in some locations is 'The Mosquito' – a device designed to emit high frequency screeching sounds, audible only to young people (roughly age 20 and younger) but not to adults. By using this device, commercial establishments like shopping malls are able to disperse all youths whether or not they are congregating and without the involvement of the police.

Conclusion: At the same time that governments in various countries are, ostensibly, trying to protect children (e.g., by increasing the age at which they can drink, smoke, or leave school), this law criminalizes ordinary legal behaviour of youths because this behaviour makes adults nervous. The latter message – like negative interactions with police – may be the one that has the greatest impact on youths' attachment to traditional social values.

Reference: Crawford, Adam (2009). Criminalizing Sociability through Anti-social Behaviour Legislation: Dispersal Powers, Young People, and the Police. *Youth Justice, 9*(1), 5-26.

Relying on statistical predictions of which individuals will be high rate offenders is not likely to affect the level of crime in a community.

One often hears statements such as "a group as small as 5-6 percent of offenders accounts for up to 50% of offences" (p. 318). Such assertions often are used to justify crime control strategies based on predictions of who these high rate offenders are. There are a number of problems with these assertions. For one thing, they typically refer only to offences resulting in convictions, and often refer only to offences known to have been carried out by those in prison. Most importantly the observations in studies cited in support of these sorts of assertions are made retrospectively. The authors of the present study note: "We have not been able to find a study that could identify a group comprising only a few percent of a cohort at a pre-school age that would then account for half of the cohort's criminal convictions" (318).

The present study examines the problems inherent in a crime control policy based largely on identifying and intervening with people who are likely to commit criminal offences. For such a policy to be effective, interventions need to reduce dramatically the frequency of future offending for a group of high rate offenders who can be accurately identified.   The first problem is that *effective* interventions into the lives of youth, on average, reduce the frequency or likelihood of offending by no more than about 10-20%. In addition, prospective or population studies suggest that crime – even crime leading to convictions – is not highly predictable. One study, for example, showed that the *most* 'at risk' youths (about 20% of all youths) in a sample of Swedish males who had been convicted of criminal offences were responsible for only about half of the offences committed by the full sample. Furthermore, only about half of this highly 'at risk' group of youths was ever convicted of *any* offence and only 17% of them could be considered 'high rate offenders.'   In other words,

it does not appear that strategies that might rely on identifying relatively high risk youths and treating them will have an appreciable impact on crime rates.

In addition, from data collected in Sweden in the past 90 years, it does not appear that 'crime' as recorded by the police varies in parallel to changes in youths' social circumstances (e.g., serious intra-family conflict, divorce). In contrast, another factor – societal alcohol consumption – appears to be almost the only variable necessary to understand changes in homicide rates. Similarly, variation in the rate of car thefts for most of the 20th century can be explained by changes in automobile ownership, not individual factors subject to therapeutic intervention.

Conclusion: The suggestion that interventions at the individual level (e.g., efforts to reduce individual drug abuse) will not have a substantial impact on crime rates in a community is not to say that they are unimportant. Rather this paper suggests only that individual interventions are not likely

to turn a high crime society into a low crime society. For example, in one collection of studies it was noted that "the predictors [of lethal violence] based on early life conditions are… strikingly similar [in the United States and in the U.K]" (p. 331). Nevertheless, homicide rates in these two countries are quite different. "An explanation for crime and trends in crime over time cannot be provided without taking into consideration history and the broader context, including variations in situational factors and in the societal response to undesired behaviours" (p. 332).

Reference: Tham, Henrik and Hanns von Hofer (2009). Individual Prediction and Crime Trends. *European Journal of Criminology, 6*(4), 313-335.