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. Does the public care whether the police act fairly when their community is faced with serious terrorism threats?

2. Policing hot spots may work, but are the effects long-lasting?

3. What determines whether the incarceration of a parent makes things worse for the person left caring for the prisoner's children?

4. What should be the first challenge for those running programs aimed at reducing the involvement of youths in gangs?

5. Do jobs for those being released from prison really matter?

6. Why are Black youths more likely to be involved in violence than White youths?

7. Do judges really set aside coerced confessions in their decisions concerning guilt?

8. What policies are associated with lower levels of assaults of women by intimate partners?

Even in situations in which citizens face terrorist threats and attacks, the legitimacy of the local police is determined, in large part, by whether the police are perceived to be treating people in a procedurally just fashion.

"The results of the present study suggest that the desire for procedural justice is an enduring, stable trait, regardless of the security situation. Under conditions of security threats, individuals do value police performance to a greater extent when forming evaluations of police legitimacy. However, there does not seem to be a zero-sum game between performance and procedural justice: under threat, while performance increases in importance, procedural justice does not decline in importance and indeed remains the primary antecedent of legitimacy, as is the case when there is no security threat in the background" (p. 19). In more mundane terms, the police cannot afford to minimize the importance of dealing with citizens in a procedurally just fashion just because the community is facing serious external threats.

Intensive foot patrols by police can reduce street crime, but the effects don't last after police strength is reduced to normal.

It would seem that "the effects of crackdowns [in the form of intensive police foot patrols] are short term and [they] decay rapidly" (p. 87).   It has been suggested that intensive foot patrols deter crime because, in deterrence terms, they act as a "certainty communicating device." "In Philadelphia, once the 'certainty communicating device' was removed, no differences between the treatment [high intensity foot patrols] and control locations were detectable" (p. 87). Since "most police agencies allocate patrol resources disproportionately at high-crime places…., it is questionable whether better funded crackdowns will elicit the aggregate crime reductions predicted. It would appear that "more holistic strategies" (p. 92) are needed to fulfill the goal of effectively reducing the amount of crime in a neighbourhood.

Although parental incarceration is likely to have negative consequences on the prisoner's children and those taking care of the prisoner's children, the actual effect depends on the dynamics of the pre-existing relationships among prisoners, their families, and the caregivers.

The factors that were important in determining the impact on caregivers of children of incarcerated parents appeared to be the same across types of caregivers. The pre-existing relationship with the incarcerated parent, and financial and emotional support from friends and families were important in understanding the impact on the caregiver. For example, incarcerated mothers, in this study, appeared to have been different from incarcerated fathers in that they were more likely to have experienced various serious life traumas. Many of the remaining family members (fathers, grandparents) had distanced themselves from the mother prior to the incarceration. Hence the impact of her incarceration was not seen as being as negative as the incarceration of the father. This finding underlines the importance of understanding the nature of the pre-existing relationships. Prior parental involvement, support systems, and interpersonal relationships combine to determine what the impact will be on those caring for the prisoner's child.

Those running anti-gang programs designed to target youths most at risk of gang involvement are not always successful in attracting such youths to their programs.

These findings suggest "that the ability of local agencies to identify youths most at risk for delinquency and gang membership should not be taken for granted" (p. 286). The various social service providers in the city were given contracts to identify youths most at risk. Obviously these youths were hard to identify and, probably, even harder to bring to the program. But not only are the most 'at risk' youth not being targeted, it is well established that lower risk youths do not benefit from intensive programs, and indeed in some cases appear to respond to intervention programs by *increasing* their involvement in delinquent acts (see *Criminological Highlights*, V5N4#1). In other studies it has been demonstrated that many of those involved in programs have self-selected into the program. The programs, then, may quite possibly be "targeting 'success prone' clients, while excluding those individuals who may be more difficult to change – a practice [that is apparently] widespread in crime and delinquency interventions" (p. 287).

Getting offenders jobs after they are released from prison contributes to lower recidivism.

Obviously it is possible that the relationship between having some kind of employment and reduced reoffending could be, at least in part, due to self-selection: those motivated and able to get jobs may be less likely to reoffend not because of the job but because of other unmeasured factors. The analysis shows that some of the variation in reoffending rates is due to these selection effects. However, the extensive controls that were included in the model would support the conclusion that having some employment after being released from prison had some causal impact in reducing reoffending. The findings underline, therefore, the importance of reducing barriers to employment for those being released from prison.

Black-White differences in involvement in adolescent violence can be explained by examining the effects of differences in the neighbourhoods in which youths live and in the schools that they attend.

"These results support the view that neighbourhood and family disadvantages have detrimental repercussions for the acquisition of verbal ability which, in term, serves as a significant protective factor against violence" (p. 153). Because Black youths are more likely to grow up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it follows that they would be more likely to have lower levels of verbal ability. This in turn disadvantages Black youths in school and in later life. It would appear that "interventions to improve conditions in poor neighbourhoods" and to strengthen "families and early childhood learning in distressed neighbourhoods may help reduce the substantial risk for violence associated with frustration and in some cases failure in school" (p. 156). Policies that address neighbourhood and educational disadvantage, then, may be good crime control policies and could, in addition, reduce youth violence by Black youths to levels exhibited by White youths.

Judges are very good at recognizing coerced confessions by accused people. Nevertheless, in the absence of strong evidence, judges appear to be willing to convict an accused on the basis of the coerced confession.

Judges had no difficulty identifying coerced confessions. Nevertheless, they gave confession evidence a lot of weight. On the basis of an uncorroborated low-pressure confession, guilty verdicts in the 'weak evidence' conditions went from 17% to 95%. More surprising is the fact that with essentially no other evidence, a confession obtained with substantial coercion increased the judges' guilty findings from 17% to 69%. At the same time, judges generally, but not always, identified the 'high pressure' confession as being coerced, and saw its admission as being prejudicial. Nevertheless, when asked to decide whether the accused should be found guilty, perceptions of evidence strength predicted the verdict while ratings of the voluntariness of the confession did not, even though the coerced confession was responsible for the significant increase in the ratings of the strength of the evidence.

The rate of intimate partner violence in a community is related to the adequacy of social services in the community as well as the ability of the police to respond to individual incidents.

These findings demonstrate that women who live in communities that invest in social services are less at risk of intimate partner violence. Similarly, women living in cities with sufficient police to respond sensitively to intimate partner violence are less at risk of this form of victimization. It seems likely that both of these factors relate to the more sensitive handling of the problem – both in terms of providing services for 'at risk' women and responding to the specific circumstances of the women who have been victimized. The presence of mandatory arrest policies, however, had no impact on victimization demonstrating, perhaps, that simplistic responses to complex problems are not likely to be effective.

Even in situations in which citizens face terrorist threats and attacks, the legitimacy of the local police is determined, in large part, by whether the police are perceived to be treating people in a procedurally just fashion.

"Increasing public evaluations of the legitimacy of the police is considered one of the most important goals of policing in democratic countries" (p. 5). A number of studies have highlighted the importance of perceptions of procedural justice – the fairness and appropriateness of police interactions with ordinary citizens – in understanding public assessments of, and cooperation with, the police (*Criminological Highlights*, V4N4#1, V7N1#4, V11N4#1, V12N5#2). The suggestion is sometimes made, however, that in situations in which people feel under severe threat – e.g., acute crises or terrorism threats – it is police efficacy rather than fairness that is seen as important.

The data for this study come from a study of public attitudes in the jurisdictions of 6 Israeli police stations, one of which (Sderot) has been "a primary target for missile threats and attacks originating from the Gaza Strip" (p. 10). It was expected that "in situations of high threat and insecurity… concerns for safety [would] take priority over issues of fair processes such as respect, dignity and participation [the main 'pillars' of procedural justice]" (p. 11). The five other 'comparison' districts had not experienced recent security threats. Only members of 'majority communities' were included in the analysis (i.e., Israeli Arabs, Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and other minorities were excluded).

Police legitimacy – the main dependent variable – was assessed with four questions: "The police are guided by the public's well-being;" "The police carry out their job well;" "If a relative/friend was a victim of a crime I would encourage them to turn to the police;" and "I have trust in the Israeli police" (p. 15). Police performance/ efficiency was operationalized with two questions: "The Police efficiently handle crime in my area of residence;"

and "Police presence in my area of residence is adequate" (p. 16).

Perceptions of procedural justice were measured with four questions: "The police allow citizens to express their opinion before making a decision…;" "The police explain their activities well…;" "The police treat all citizens equally;" and "Officers treat citizens they encounter with respect" (p. 15). Various other controls were also included (e.g., previous contact with the police, whether the respondent had been a crime victim, and demographic characteristics of respondents).

The results were quite straightforward. The performance/ efficiency of the police was important in both the 'high terrorism' area and in the comparison areas, but, as predicted "under conditions of threat, evaluations [of performance] play a significantly larger role in predicting police legitimacy than when there is no specific threat in the background" (p. 18). More interesting, however, is the fact that procedural justice was *equally* important in predicting police legitimacy in both the 'high threat' and the 'low threat' areas.

Conclusion: "The results of the present study suggest that the desire for procedural justice is an enduring, stable trait, regardless of the security situation. Under conditions of security threats, individuals do value police performance to a greater extent when forming evaluations of police legitimacy. However, there does not seem to be a zero-sum game between performance and procedural justice: under threat, while performance increases in importance, procedural justice does not decline in importance and indeed remains the primary antecedent of legitimacy, as is the case when there is no security threat in the background" (p. 19). In more mundane terms, the police cannot afford to minimize the importance of dealing with citizens in a procedurally just fashion just because the community is facing serious external threats.

Reference: Jonathan-Zamir, Tal and David Weisburd (2013). The Effects of Security Threats on Antecedents of Police Legitimacy: Findings from a Quasi-Experiment in Israel. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 50* (1), 3-32.

Intensive foot patrols by police can reduce street crime, but the effects don't last after police strength is reduced to normal.

Previous research has demonstrated "that highly intensive policing can modestly reduce the number of violent crimes that take place in an area" (*Criminological Highlights* V12N3#3). This study is a follow-up of an earlier study that examined the impact on crime of intensive 2-person patrols during a 12-week period. The earlier study compared the rate of street crime in areas that received intensive 2-person foot patrols (as well as adjacent areas) to the street crime rates in similar locations that (on a random basis) did not receive intensified foot patrols. The crime reducing effect of the foot patrols was demonstrated, but the amount of crime reduction was not large. It was estimated for every 2174 person-hours of patrol, one crime was averted.

Aside from the cost of implementing high intensity police foot patrols in a neighbourhood, little is known about their long term impact. In particular, it is important to know whether the crime-reducing effects of intensive patrols remain after policing strength (and, therefore, visible presence) returns to 'normal' levels. During the 'intensified foot patrol' period of the original study, foot patrol officers were responsible for a 64% increase in pedestrian stops, a 7% increase in vehicle stops, and a 13% increase in arrests.

This study focuses on the first 15 month period *after* the intensive foot patrols ceased. From a practical perspective, this period is important because it tests whether the effects of intensive patrols were long-lasting, or whether the effect only lasted while the police officers were present and visible on the street. Previous research (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* V7N6#1) would suggest that one should not expect the effects of the intensive patrol to last after the patrols stop.

In fact, that is what happened. As soon as the extra patrols left, the crime suppressing effect disappeared. "No significant differences were found between the treatment and control areas on levels of violence from the beginning to the end of the post-treatment period" (p. 83). In fact, there was no evidence of a gradual decay: the effects of the intervention ended abruptly when the intensive patrols ended. Crime, in effect, returned to expected levels.

The original study also looked at displacement of crime into adjacent areas. After the intensive patrols stopped, crime in the areas adjacent to where the intensive patrols had taken place went down suggesting that some crime might have moved back to the areas from which it had been displaced during the intensive foot patrols.

Conclusion: It would seem that "the effects of crackdowns [in the form of intensive police foot patrols] are short term and [they] decay rapidly" (p. 87). It has been suggested that intensive foot patrols deter crime

because, in deterrence terms, they act as a "certainty communicating device." "In Philadelphia, once the 'certainty communicating device' was removed, no differences between the treatment [high intensity foot patrols] and control locations were detectable" (p. 87). Since "most police agencies allocate patrol resources disproportionately at high-crime places…., it is questionable whether better funded crackdowns will elicit the aggregate crime reductions predicted. It would appear that "more holistic strategies" (p. 92) are needed to fulfill the goal of effectively reducing the amount of crime in a neighbourhood.

Reference: Sorg, Evan T., Cory P. Haberman, Jerry H. Ratcliffe, and Elizabeth R. Groff (2013). Foot Patrol in Violent Crime Hot Spots: The Longitudinal Impact of Deterrence and Posttreatment Effects of Displacement. *Criminology, 51* (1), 65-101.

Although parental incarceration is likely to have negative consequences on the prisoner's children and those taking care of the prisoner's children, the actual effect depends on the dynamics of the pre-existing relationships among prisoners, their families, and the caregivers.

Research on the impact of parental incarceration has generally shown that the impact on the prisoner's children (and spouses) is generally negative (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* V1N1#6, V9N5#6, V12N5#1, V12N6#7&8, V13N1#7). However, this research typically ignores the nature of the pre-existing relationship between prisoners and their families.

This study reports the results of detailed in-depth interviewers with 100 caregivers of children with at least one incarcerated parent – 54 fathers, 44 mothers, and two children with both parents incarcerated. Caregivers were the mother (n=39) or grandparents (n=40), fathers (n=12) or other family members (n=9). In most cases (n=58), the caregiver reported that parental incarceration had an overall negative impact on their lives, though in 20 cases there was a positive effect for the caregiver. In the remaining 22 cases, the caregiver reported no overall impact.

Negative impacts were easy to find: there was added financial stress on the family, but also the caregivers were left with fewer people who could help out in child rearing. There were many reports of additional emotional stress on the caregiver as a result of the child's distress at the loss of a parent. "Many of these caregivers reported feeling 'helpless,' 'overly stretched,' and lost'" (p. 941). On the other hand, the impact was not always negative. Some prisoners, when in the community, had been inconsistent or dysfunctional parents. Their absence, then, made life for the (remaining) caregiver somewhat easier. Caregivers who reported that there was no impact of the incarceration of the parent typically said that the prisoner had not been very involved in raising the child; hence the absence of the parent made no real difference. "To assess the impact of incarceration on families, the extent and degree of parental involvement prior to incarceration must be considered… . Not all parents are involved in their children's lives" (p. 936).

"Those [caregivers] who experienced a positive change [in their lives] reported having supportive family systems in their lives… For many, … family support was present before the incarceration of the parent and remained a key source of assistance in their ability to provide for their children" (p. 942). "Caregivers with cohesive, integrated family support systems fared differently… Variation in family support is critical for understanding whether caregivers will experience positive or negative changes in life circumstances as a result of parental incarceration" (p. 943).

Conclusion: The factors that were important in determining the impact on caregivers of children of incarcerated parents appeared to be the same across types of caregivers.

The pre-existing relationship with the incarcerated parent, and financial and emotional support from friends and families were important in understanding the impact on the caregiver. For example, incarcerated mothers, in this study, appeared to have been different from incarcerated fathers in that they were more likely to have experienced various serious life traumas. Many of the remaining family members (fathers, grandparents) had distanced themselves from the mother prior to the incarceration. Hence the impact of her incarceration was not seen as being as negative as the incarceration of the father. This finding underlines the importance of understanding the nature of the pre-existing relationships. Prior parental involvement, support systems, and interpersonal relationships combine to determine what the impact will be on those caring for the prisoner's child.

Reference: Turanovic, Jillian J., Nancy Rodriguez, and Travis C. Pratt (2012). The Collateral Consequences of Incarceration Revisited: A Qualitative Analysis of the Effects on Caregivers of Children of Incarcerated Parents. *Criminology, 50* (4), 913-959.

Those running anti-gang programs designed to target youths most at risk of gang involvement are not always successful in attracting such youths to their programs.

In many cities, governments have made youth gang prevention and intervention in the lives of youths who might join gangs primary goals of their crime prevention programs. The logic of these programs is to target "high rate offenders, especially youth most at risk of future gang membership" (p. 279-280). While the logic is simple, there are two problems: identifying the most 'at risk' youths and getting them to participate in the program. The problem is that "only a small proportion of youth will ever become gang members… and very few youth have no risk factors associated with violence and gang membership, especially those who live in chronic gang communities. [Hence]… the identification of youths with one or two risk factors associated with gang membership provides little discriminate validity for proper risk classification [as potential gang members]" (p. 281).

This study examined a targeted gang intervention program in Cleveland, Ohio. The intervention was part of a national anti-gang initiative funded by the U.S. government. Two samples were compared. The first sample consisted of the 146 African American male youths who actively participated in the Cleveland program between 2007 and 2009. They were compared to 1,438 African American males in the metropolitan Cleveland area who were approximately the same age and were assessed in their schools during the same two year period. All respondents – those in the program and those assessed in school – were given a 57-item questionnaire assessing their "risks" across 11 domains. For the purpose of this study four domains known to be associated with gang membership and delinquency were examined: education, mental health, family, and delinquent peers.

The problem with the selection of youths for the gang-prevention program became evident when the four overall risk domains and 12 sub-domains were examined. There were significant differences between the two groups on three of the four domains – mental health, family and delinquent peer groups. The problem was that the *non-program* (non-targeted) youths were significantly *more* at risk than were the targeted youths who were in the program. On education risks, there were no differences. But on seven of the nine other sub-domains the *non*-targeted youths were, on average *more* at risk than the youths who were in the program. Essentially, then, the youths in the program were, on average, less at risk of becoming gang members than were ordinary Black youths in the Cleveland school system.

One explanation for this finding may be that agencies seek out motivated youths. "Street-level workers typically define motivation in terms of cooperation. The motivated citizen-client is… deemed morally superior to the unmotivated. Conversely, the unmotivated, regardless of their need or circumstance, are deemed unworthy" (p. 288). More bluntly, the agencies may be seeking out youths who turn out not to be the most at risk of joining gangs.

Conclusion: These findings suggest "that the ability of local agencies to identify youths most at risk for delinquency and gang membership should not be taken for granted" (p. 286). The various social service providers in the city were given contracts to identify youths most at risk. Obviously these youths were hard to identify and, probably, even harder to bring to the program. But not only are the most 'at risk' youth not being targeted, it is well established that lower risk youths do not benefit from intensive programs, and indeed in some cases appear to respond to intervention programs by *increasing* their involvement in delinquent acts (see *Criminological Highlights*, V5N4#1). In other studies it has been demonstrated that many of those involved in programs have self-selected into the program. The programs, then, may quite possibly be "targeting 'success prone' clients, while excluding those individuals who may be more difficult to change – a practice [that is apparently] widespread in crime and delinquency interventions" (p. 287).

Reference: Melde, Chris, Stephen Gavazzi, Edmund McGarrell and Timothy Bynum (2011). On the Efficacy of Targeted Gang Interventions: Can We Identify Those Most At Risk? *Youth Violence and Youth Justice, 9* (4) 279-294.

Getting offenders jobs after they are released from prison contributes to lower recidivism.

"A wide range of theoretical approaches assumes a crime-preventative effect of employment" (p. 630). However, it is well known that those released from prison, like those with criminal records generally, have a great deal of difficulty getting a job (e.g. *Criminological Highlights* V6N3#2). Given that prisoners tend to have lower levels of education and fewer job skills than other members of the community, it is not surprising that many do not have jobs even months after their release from prison.

This study, carried out in Norway, takes advantage of the fact that in Norway, each person has a unique numerical identifier which allows researchers to track (legal) employment, the receipt of social assistance, job training programs, education, and arrests of those released from prison. The study tracked all 7,476 individuals who were released from prison in 2003 in Norway after serving a sentence. For those who served more than one sentence during that year, the first sentence was used as the focus of attention. These offenders were then tracked until the end of 2006. 54% re-offended by the end of 2006 and 44% had obtained some amount of legal employment before re-offending or coming to the end of the follow-up period.

Various controls were included in the analysis including age, sex, number of months at risk after release from prison, sentence length and the type of offence they had been imprisoned for as well as various other 'control variables' (drug use, education, immigrant background, income in the year prior to being sentenced, marital and family status, and education). These former prisoners were followed from their release until the date of their first subsequent offence. Some inmates took a long time to find any employment, and employment was not necessarily consistent after ex-prisoners started working.

Without controls, it is not surprising that those who had employment at some point subsequent to their release were less likely to reoffend than those who never were gainfully employed. The size of this effect decreased – but was still statistically significant – after the numerous controls (e.g. their previous employment income) were included in the model.

Reoffending was reduced for those who had some form of employment even if the amount that they earned was relatively little. Similarly the impact of having some employment could be seen across all types of offenders (drug, economic, violence, property crimes and driving) though there was some indication that the effects were larger for those originally sentenced for property and economic offences.

Conclusion: Obviously it is possible that the relationship between having some kind of employment and reduced reoffending could be, at least in part, due to self-selection: those motivated and able to get jobs may be less likely to reoffend not because of the job but because of other unmeasured factors. The analysis shows that some of the variation in reoffending rates is due to these selection effects. However, the extensive controls that were included in the model would support the conclusion that having some employment after being released from prison had some causal impact in reducing reoffending. The findings underline, therefore, the importance of reducing barriers to employment for those being released from prison.

Reference: Skardhamar, Torbjørn and Kjetil Telle (2012). Post-release Employment and Recidivism in Norway. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 28*, 629-649.

Black-White differences in involvement in adolescent violence can be explained by examining the effects of differences in the neighbourhoods in which youths live and in the schools that they attend.

Many studies have demonstrated that Black American youths exhibit higher rates of violence than do White American youths. There is an increasing amount of evidence that these differences disappear "once neighbourhood and family disadvantages are held constant" (p.141). Knowing how those disadvantages have an impact on violence rates may help understand violence generally and Black-White differences in violence more specifically. More importantly, understanding the causes of this difference in violence rates might help identify policies that can reduce violence rates for all youths.

This study looks at data associated with 1,801 Black and 3,521 White adolescents in 1,237 U.S. neighbourhoods. These youths were interviewed first when they were age 12-16. After that, they were interviewed yearly for 5 years. The major dependent variable was whether the person had "attacked someone with the intention of hurting them in the past year" (p. 146). If they had, they were asked "to indicate the frequency with which they did so" (p. 146). Blacks reported higher levels of violence. But Black respondents were also from families with lower incomes, were more likely to have delinquent peers and lower levels of verbal ability, and were more likely to attend schools rated as less conducive to learning and prosocial behaviour. Blacks were also more likely than Whites to live in neighbourhoods with large numbers of people living below the poverty line, high unemployment, and many female-headed households.

In simple analyses, each of these forms of disadvantage appeared to be related to self-reported violence by the youth. Previous studies have suggested that "verbal ability is influenced by the neighbourhood and family contexts in which children live…. Neighbourhood disadvantage weakens the family learning environment and fosters inconsistency in parental practices…. Poor families lack the social and economic resources required for the nurturing of effective learning within the home (e.g., help with homework, computer access)…." (p. 143).

The effects of race of the youth were reduced to statistical non-significance, however, when verbal ability of the youth and other demographic and neighbourhood variables were taken into account. It would appear that "low verbal ability and diminished school attainment are criminogenic risk factors that are in part outcomes of exposure to neighbourhood disadvantage" (p. 154-5). In addition, the effect of neighbourhood disadvantage on violent behaviour was reduced considerably when the verbal ability of the youth was taken into consideration. "Much of the effect of verbal ability on violence appears to be indirect, operating primarily though school achievement" (p. 152).

Conclusion: "These results support the view that neighbourhood and family disadvantages have detrimental repercussions for the acquisition of verbal ability which, in term, serves as a significant protective factor against violence" (p. 153). Because Black youths are more likely to grow up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it follows that they would be more likely to have lower levels of verbal ability. This in turn disadvantages Black youths in school and in later life. It would appear that "interventions to improve conditions in poor neighbourhoods" and to strengthen "families and early childhood learning in distressed neighbourhoods may help reduce the substantial risk for violence associated with frustration and in some cases failure in school" (p. 156). Policies that address neighbourhood and educational disadvantage, then, may be good crime control policies and could, in addition, reduce youth violence by Black youths to levels exhibited by White youths.

Judges are very good at recognizing coerced confessions by accused people. Nevertheless, in the absence of strong evidence, judges appear to be willing to convict an accused on the basis of the coerced confession.

When judges hear a confession that was obtained by improper coercive methods, they have a responsibility to exclude it from juries. If the case is heard by a judge (alone), the assumption is that the judge can respond appropriately and give the confession no weight. Similarly, it is assumed that if a confession is erroneously heard by a jury, judges can determine whether the error was harmless. Given that false confessions constitute a leading cause of wrongful convictions, admitting a coerced confession would appear to have definite risks (see *Criminological Highlights* V11N3#4, as well as V2N6#8, V5N4#5, V7N4#7).

Previous research has shown that "wittingly or unwittingly, judges, like juries, often do not disregard inadmissible information" (p. 152). Juries are able to "perceive confessions as coerced when elicited through high-pressure tactics; yet, they use that evidence anyway as a basis for conviction" (p. 152).

In this study, judges from three US states (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Missouri) participated in a study in which they were asked to evaluate written 'trial evidence' (p. 152). Specifically, they were given one of six versions of a hypothetical murder case. For half of the judges, there was strong incriminating evidence that the accused had committed the murder (a hair found at the scene that could have been his; some of the victim's property was found at the defendant's home). In the 'weak case', the hair evidence was described as being inconclusive and a search of the defendant's home found nothing.

There were three confession conditions: (1) no confession; (2) a low pressure confession in which the accused had been questioned for 30 minutes before confessing, with videotape evidence showing no coercive behaviour by the

interrogators; and (3) a high pressure condition in which the defendant had been interrogated for 15 hours and the videotape showed the police threatening him with the death penalty, waving a gun, etc.

Judges rated the strength of the evidence against the accused and were asked for the verdicts that they felt were appropriate. In the strong evidence condition, the confession had little effect on either the ratings of the evidence strength or the verdicts: judges almost always said they would find the accused guilty and rated the evidence as very strong.

In the weak evidence conditions, however, the evidence against the accused person in the 'high pressure' confession condition was seen as considerably stronger than in the 'no confession' condition and only slightly less strong than in the 'low pressure' confession condition. Verdicts mirrored these findings. In the weak evidence condition with no confession, only 17% of the judges would find the accused guilty. In the high pressure confession condition, 69% would find him guilty which was slightly lower than in the low pressure confession condition (95%).

Conclusion: Judges had no difficulty identifying coerced confessions. Nevertheless, they gave confession evidence a lot of weight. On the basis of an uncorroborated low-pressure confession, guilty verdicts in the 'weak evidence' conditions went from 17% to 95%. More surprising is the fact that with essentially no other evidence, a confession obtained with substantial coercion increased the judges' guilty findings from 17% to 69%. At the same time, judges generally, but not always, identified the 'high pressure' confession as being coerced, and saw its admission as being prejudicial. Nevertheless, when asked to decide whether the accused should be found guilty, perceptions of evidence strength predicted the verdict while ratings of the voluntariness of the confession did not, even though the coerced confession was responsible for the significant increase in the ratings of the strength of the evidence.

Reference: Wallace, D. Brian and Saul M. Kassin (2011). Harmless Error Analysis: How Do Judges Respond to Confession Errors? *Law and Human Behaviour, 36* (2), 151-157.

The rate of intimate partner violence in a community is related to the adequacy of social services in the community as well as the ability of the police to respond to individual incidents.

Debate about responding to intimate partner violence (IPV) has often focused solely on the question of whether there should be policies requiring automatic arrest and prosecution of those charged with IPV. Focusing on only this one issue has the effect of ignoring the possibility that other approaches – by the police and others – might be effective in reducing the incidence of this form of violence.

The size of a police force as well as its policies on the arrest of those accused of IPV may be important in understanding this form of victimization. Police strength (measured as number of police *per capita*) might be related to the incidence of IPV because more adequately staffed police services may have developed detailed policies on how to respond to IPV (e.g., instructions to those receiving 911-calls) and may be more likely to have specialized domestic violence units. Each of these may relate to the quality of the response of police to IPV calls. Mandatory arrest laws, on the other hand, have not, in previous research, consistently been related to favourable outcomes for victims of intimate partner violence. Independent of policing issues, there is some indication from previous research that providing social services to the victim of IPV (temporary shelter and housing support, counselling, children's services, etc.) might help reduce IPV in that these services provide choices to women who can reasonably accurately predict (and therefore avoid) future incidents of IPV (see *Criminological Highlights* V3N2#7).

This study looked at self-reported violence experienced by women at the hands of intimate partners in the six months prior to being interviewed in US victimization surveys. A total of 487,166 women responded to the surveys between 1989 and 2004 in the 40 largest American cities. The number of sworn (local) police officers per 1000 residents in the year the woman was interviewed was used as a measure of police strength. The number of social service employees per 1000 population in the city was used as a broad based indication of social services that might be available to the women. Various other characteristics of the cities (e.g., economic disadvantage, female workforce participation) as well as for the women (e.g., age, household income, marital status) were controlled.

The results demonstrated that women who lived in areas with larger police services and with higher concentrations of social service workers were less likely to have experienced IPV in the 6-month period prior to being interviewed. Living in an area with mandatory arrest laws was unrelated to being victimized. Neither of these measures

(police strength and concentration of social service workers) gives much information about exactly what the mechanism might be for the effect.

Conclusion: These findings demonstrate that women who live in communities that invest in social services are less at risk of intimate partner violence. Similarly, women living in cities with sufficient police to respond sensitively to intimate partner violence are less at risk of this form of victimization. It seems likely that both of these factors relate to the more sensitive handling of the problem – both in terms of providing services for 'at risk' women and responding to the specific circumstances of the women who have been victimized. The presence of mandatory arrest policies, however, had no impact on victimization demonstrating, perhaps, that simplistic responses to complex problems are not likely to be effective.

Reference: Xie, Min, Janet L. Lauritsen, and Karen Heimer (2012). Intimate Partner Violence in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: The Contextual Influences of Police and Social Services. *Criminology, 50* (4), 961-992..