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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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Criminological Highlights is available at www.criminology.utoronto.ca and directly by email.

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

1. What is the effect of arresting a youth on future offending and arrests?
2. Can the police keep a youth from completing high school?
3. Are young sex offenders likely to repeat their offences?
4. Does contact with the criminal justice system affect people's willingness to have contact with other institutions in the community?
5. What are the effects of electronically monitored house arrest on future offending?
6. How is forensic evidence in a trial evaluated?
7. Is parole in Canada alive and well or has it turned into a zombie?
8. How does the criminal justice system create single parent families?

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Being arrested increases subsequent violent offending. And it increases the likelihood of being rearrested. Hence it appears that being arrested makes the youth more likely to offend. But quite independent of offending rates, "a first juvenile arrest seems to increase subsequent law enforcement responses to those youth compared to other youth who offend at a comparable level but have managed to evade a first arrest. This could result from increased scrutiny of the individual's future behaviour, by police as well as others… as well as from reduced tolerance by police and actors of an arrestees' future transgressions" (p. 363).

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Arresting young people when they commit offences reduces the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.

"Arrest in adolescence hinders the transition to adulthood by undermining pathways to educational attainment." (p. 54). Youths who are arrested are more likely to drop out of school than are equivalent youths who are not arrested while in high school. Given the effects of arrest on high school completion and on enrolment in 4-year post-secondary programs, juvenile arrest can, therefore, be viewed "as a life-course trap in the educational pathways of a considerable number of adolescents in contemporary American cities" (p. 55).

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The vast majority of young sex offenders will never be convicted of another sex offence.

As previous research has shown, the idea that convicted sex offenders have a high likelihood of committing another sex offence is simply wrong. If they reoffend, they are much more likely to commit an offence *other than* a sex offence. In this study, 87% of young men convicted of a sex offence before age 21 were not convicted of a sex offence again during the 20 to 35 year follow-up period. But in addition, if they were to commit another sex offence, it was very likely to be in the first few years after the initial conviction. The usefulness, therefore, of sex offence registry and notification systems – especially those with long (or indefinite) registration periods, needs to be questioned.

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Contact with the criminal justice system leads people to avoid contact with other organizations – such as banks, medical facilities, formal work places and schools – that keep formal records of contacts with individuals.

It would appear that contact with the criminal justice system – even when that contact does *not* involve a finding of guilt – has negative consequences for a person's willingness to engage with institutions in society. "Given that involvement with the criminal justice system is highly stratified by race and class, the negative consequences of system avoidance will be disproportionately distributed, thus exacerbating pre-existing inequalities for an expanding group of already disadvantaged individuals… Efforts to evade the gaze of different systems involves an attendant trade-off. That trade-off is full participation in society" (p. 385).

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Punishing young people with electronically monitored home detention rather than imprisonment reduces their dependence on welfare benefits after they complete their sentences.

It would appear that for offenders under age 25 sentenced to 3 months or less in prison, being able to serve the sentence under house arrest while being electronically monitored is a strategy that interferes less with employment than being imprisoned. For older offenders, however, there is no such benefit on this measure. For all offenders who serve their sentence in the community, however, there are lower costs and, presumably, less collateral damage than imprisonment (see the *Highlights* compendium *The Effects of Imprisonment* on our website).

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People's judgement of forensic evidence – in this study whether a note ostensibly written by a robber was written by the accused – can easily be biased by other quite independent evidence implicating the accused.

It appears that "judgements of forensic science evidence can be shaped by the knowledge and expectation of the observer" (p. 265). In other words, judgements about forensic evidence "may be tainted… [by observers'] *a priori* belief in the defendant's guilt or innocence, which will have been shaped by their knowledge of other aspects of the case (e.g., a prior confession)" (p. 265). This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "corroboration inflation" gives the illusion that the evidence is stronger than it actually is. Weak – or excluded – evidence, in other words, makes other evidence appear to be more trustworthy.

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Parole for those serving determinate sentences in Canada has virtually disappeared.

It would appear that many people – even those close to the criminal justice system – assume that parole is likely to be granted early in a sentence. Given that this is not true, and Canada's parole system has little effect on the country's overall incarceration rate, it would appear that there may be a serious misperception about what a sentence of imprisonment means in Canada.

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Even short periods of time in prison increase dramatically the likelihood that young couples will divorce.

There is little doubt that the incarceration of one partner in a marriage puts the marriage at risk, even if the incarceration period is very short. This is consistent with research showing that "incarceration inhibits prosocial life-course transitions that can lead to cumulative and compounded disadvantages as ex-inmates return home." Incarceration, then "has unintended consequences by disrupting conventional achievement prospects that have been shown to lower criminal offending (e.g., employment and marriage)" (p. 391).

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Being arrested by the police increases the likelihood that a youth will commit further offences and, quite independently, also increases the likelihood that the youth will be arrested again.

There is a substantial literature demonstrating that criminal justice processing does not generally decrease offending and, in fact, may increase it (see *Criminological Highlights 11*(4)#3). This paper seeks to understand the mechanism whereby the arrest of young people might increase their subsequent involvement in the justice system.

There are two straightforward mechanisms whereby the arrest of a youth might increase the youth's subsequent involvement in the justice system. First, arrest could stigmatize the youth which in turn could increase the youth's likelihood of offending. Second, arrest could make the youth more of a target for law enforcement in the future, regardless of the youth's rate of offending.

The study was carried out using data from a longitudinal study in Chicago, in which 12- and 15-year-olds were interviewed 3 times, with 2.5 year intervals between the 3 waves of interviews. Some of the youths were arrested between the 1st and 2nd wave. To determine the effect of arrest on subsequent offending and subsequent arrests, equivalent groups of youths were created on the basis of data collected at Wave 1 – prior to being arrested. Given that most youths commit offences, but most youths are not arrested, for most youths who were arrested (between Wave 1 and Wave 2) there were others who had the same propensity to be arrested (e.g., similar rates of self-report offending) but who weren't arrested.

Hence two equivalent groups were created: those arrested between the 1st and 2nd interview and those not arrested who were equivalent to the arrested sample (on 79 variables). Without matching, arrested and non-arrested youths are obviously different. However, for a matched group of 38 arrested youths and 111 non-arrested youths (each arrested youth was matched with up to 3 non-arrested youths), there were no important differences between the groups before the arrest.

By the time of the third interview, the self-report violent *offending* of the arrested group was considerably higher than that of the youths who had not experienced arrest (but were originally equivalent). The previously arrested group was also considerably more likely to have been *arrested* by the time of the third interview. However, offending as reported at Wave 3 was not predictive of re-arrest. Said differently, the two effects of the original arrest – increased subsequent *offending* and increased subsequent *arrest* by the police – are *not* related.

Conclusion: Being arrested increases subsequent violent offending. And it increases the likelihood of being rearrested. Hence it appears that being arrested makes the youth more likely to offend. But quite independent of offending rates, "a first juvenile arrest seems to increase subsequent law enforcement responses to those youth compared to other youth who offend at a comparable level but have managed to evade a first arrest. This could result from increased scrutiny of the individual's future behaviour, by police as well as others… as well as from reduced tolerance by police and actors of an arrestees' future transgressions" (p. 363).

Reference: Liberman, Akiva M., David S. Kirk, and Kideux Kim (2014). Labeling Effects of First Juvenile Arrests: Secondary Deviance and Secondary Sanctioning. *Criminology, 52*, 345-370.

Arresting young people when they commit offences reduces the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.

In Canada in 2013, only about 45% of youths recorded as having been apprehended by the police for a criminal offence were formally charged. The rest, consistent with Part I of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, are dealt with more informally. Previous research suggests that being apprehended by the police as well as being formally processed by the justice system will, if anything, increase the likelihood of future offending (e.g., *Criminological Highlights, 14*(4)#5, *11*(4)#3).

This paper examines the impact of arresting a youth on the likelihood that the youth will successfully complete high school. Arrests in the US are common: it is estimated that in a year, 9 out of every 100 US youths age 10-17 are arrested (15 per 100 youths in Chicago are arrested). Given that most youths commit offences, "compared with incarceration, arrest is more 'random' or variable in the juvenile population…" (p. 37).

The study uses data from youths in Chicago collected in three waves starting in 1995-7 (when they were 12-15 years old) and ending in 2000-2. Data on school dropout were obtained from the Chicago public schools. Arrest records came from the Chicago and Illinois State Police. Only formal arrests were counted; informal "station adjustments" or warnings by police were not considered arrests. Previous research has demonstrated the simple effect: arrested youths are more likely to drop out of school than nonarrested students, but much of this effect is, almost certainly due to pre-existing individual, family, and neighbourhood differences between those arrested and those not. The challenge is to create two groups of students who, prior to the arrest of one group, were similar. This was done using 82 different variables (individual variables including self-report offending and race, family variables including family structure and home environment, and neighbourhood and school characteristics including concentrated poverty in the neighbourhood and school).

Most of the youths who were arrested were successfully matched on these 82 variables with youths who had not been arrested. Arrested youths were more likely to drop out of school than those matched youths who were not arrested (73% vs. 51%). A second analysis was carried out on those who graduated from high school or received equivalent educational certification to see if arrest affected enrolment in a four year post-secondary college program. 34% of the nonarrested group who graduated from high school (or equivalent) enrolled in a college program; only 18% of the arrested group who managed to graduate from high school (or equivalent) enrolled in a 4-year college program.

The effect of arrest was not mediated by changes in educational expectations or school attachment of the youth or supportive friends. It is possible, therefore, that the effect of arrest on high school dropout is mediated, instead, by "institutional responses and the increasingly punitive 'zero tolerance' educational climate…" (p. 55).

Conclusion: "Arrest in adolescence hinders the transition to adulthood by undermining pathways to educational attainment." (p. 54). Youths who are arrested are more likely to drop out of school than are equivalent youths who are not arrested while in high school. Given the effects of arrest on high school completion and on enrolment in 4-year post-secondary programs, juvenile arrest can, therefore, be viewed "as a life-course trap in the educational pathways of a considerable number of adolescents in contemporary American cities" (p. 55).

Reference: Kirk, David S. and Robert J. Sampson (2012). Juvenile Arrest and Collateral Educational Damage in the Transition to Adulthood. *Sociology of Education, 86*, 36-62.

The vast majority of young sex offenders will never be convicted of another sex offence.

Although many criminal justice systems have special measures targeting those who have been found guilty of sex offences, it is well established that sex offenders are not especially likely to reoffend (see *Some Recent Research on Sex Offenders and Society's Responses to Them* at http://criminology.utoronto.ca/criminological-highlights).

This paper examines the criminal justice involvement of young men in England & Wales first convicted of a sex offence before age 21. After their conviction, they were followed for at least 20 years. Their reoffending history is compared to that of two groups of young men: those convicted of violent offences before age 21 and those convicted of burglary before age 21. The offending histories of young men born in 8 different years (every fifth year beginning in 1953 and ending in 1988) were examined to ensure the results weren't specific to one historical period.

13.1% of the group first convicted of a sex offence before age 21 were subsequently convicted of another sex offence. Not surprisingly, the *sex offence re-conviction rate* for the young sex offender group was higher than the rates for the other two groups (2.4%, 2.7%).

Those who were convicted of a sex offence before age 21 were more likely to be convicted subsequently of a violent offence (33%) than a sex offence. They were, however, *less* likely to be convicted of a violent offence than the young violent or burglary offenders (42%, 37%). The three groups were equally likely to have a reconviction for any offence after age 21 (between 60% and 64% were reconvicted of some offence).

Most of the reconvictions – sexual, violent, or general reoffending – occurred when the offender was in his early 20s. In fact, the sex offence reoffending rate for the first 10 year period was 10%. 35 years after the initial conviction, the cumulative reoffending rate had only risen to 13.1%. In fact, 10 years after their initial sex offence conviction, the sex offender group was no more likely to be convicted of a sex offence than were those initially convicted (before age 21) of a non-sex violent offence. 15 years after their initial conviction for a sex offence, these men had the same likelihood of committing a sex offence as those convicted of burglary before age 21.

Conclusion: As previous research has shown, the idea that convicted sex offenders have a high likelihood of committing another sex offence is simply wrong. If they reoffend, they are much more likely to commit an offence *other than* a sex offence. In this study, 87% of young men convicted of a sex offence before age 21 were not convicted of a sex offence again during the 20 to 35 year follow-up period. But in addition, if they were to commit another sex offence, it was very likely to be in the first few years after the initial conviction. The usefulness, therefore, of sex offence registry and notification systems – especially those with long (or indefinite) registration periods, needs to be questioned.

Reference: Hargreaves, Claire and Brian Francis (2014). The Long Term Recidivism Risk of Young Sexual Offenders in England and Wales – Enduring Risk or Redeption? *Journal of Criminal Justice, 42*, 164-172.

Contact with the criminal justice system leads people to avoid contact with other organizations – such as banks, medical facilities, formal work places and schools – that keep formal records of contacts with individuals.

Previous research (see *Criminological Highlights 10*(5)#4, *14*(4)#1, *14*(5)#2) has suggested that involvement with the criminal justice system or even simply being stopped by the police can lead to reduced contact with social service agencies as well as lower civic engagement. This paper examines the possibility that contact – even contact not leading to a conviction – with the criminal justice system leads people to avoid ordinary organizations in the community that keep records of contacts.

The paper suggests that through 'system avoidance' – the practice of avoiding contact with institutions that keep formal records – those involved with the criminal justice system even in minor ways withdraw from involvement with institutions – medical care, schools or work, banks – that keep records. It is estimated that a quarter of American adults and about 13.6% of Canadians age 12 or older have some form of criminal record. Hence if having contact with the criminal justice system makes people wary of, for example, seeking medical care when it is necessary or seeking regular employment, criminal justice records can have very negative impacts on society.

The data for the study come from two American surveys of young adults (age 18-34). Contact with the criminal justice system was operationalized as being the most intrusive of 5 types of contact that a person might have: no contact, stopped and questioned by the police, arrest, convicted, and incarcerated. Institutional involvement was divided into two types: contact with surveilling institutions (schools, banks, etc.) and contact with non-surveilling institutions (performing unpaid volunteer or community service work or participation in activities in the past 12 months that were organized by religious groups). A number of different analytic techniques were used including regression models and "propensity score matching" in which people were matched on their likelihood of having criminal justice contact on the basis of their similarities on 21 sociodemographic and behavioural indicators.

The results were very consistent across measures and analytic approaches. Holding all other factors constant, "Individuals who have been stopped, arrested, convicted, or incarcerated are less likely to interact with institutions that keep formal records, such as hospitals, banks, employment, and schools, than their counterparts without criminal justice contact" (p. 385). There were, however, no such effects of criminal justice contacts on involvement in non-surveilling institutions (volunteer organizations or religious groups). The fact that this does not hold for non-surveilling institutions suggests that it is not simply withdrawal from institutional contact generally. The "system avoidance" is focused only on surveilling institutions.

Conclusion: It would appear that contact with the criminal justice system – even when that contact does *not* involve a finding of guilt – has negative consequences for a person's willingness to engage with institutions in society. "Given that involvement with the criminal justice system is highly stratified by race and class, the negative consequences of system avoidance will be disproportionately distributed, thus exacerbating pre-existing inequalities for an expanding group of already disadvantaged individuals… Efforts to evade the gaze of different systems involves an attendant trade-off. That trade-off is full participation in society" (p. 385).

Reference: Brayne, Sarah (2014). Surveillance and System Avoidance: Criminal Justice Contact and Institutional Attachment. *American Sociological Review, 79*(3), 367-391.

Punishing young people with electronically monitored home detention rather than imprisonment reduces their dependence on welfare benefits after they complete their sentences.

The electronic monitoring of offenders on house arrest has been touted as saving money and reducing recidivism, though the evidence of its success at accomplishing these goals is, at best mixed (see *Criminological Highlights 3*(2)#4, *4*(3)#7).

At an operation level, those on electronically monitored house arrest have often been those who would not have ordinarily been imprisoned in the first place; hence it often acts not as a substitute for imprisonment but as a supplement to another non-custodial sentence. Hence there are often no cost savings. In Denmark, however, electronically monitored house arrest is not a sentence by the court. Instead, those actually sentenced to prison can, in certain circumstances, apply to prison authorities to serve their sentence at home while being electronically monitored. For non-traffic offences, the practice was introduced in April 2006 for offenders under age 25 serving a sentence of 3 months or less. The age restriction was removed in June 2008. This study examines the impact of electronic monitored house arrest on welfare dependence after the end of the sentence.

Because those serving their sentences in the community with electronic monitoring in Denmark are different from ordinary prisoners (e.g., they have to have a permanent address and a job), the challenge, in assessing the impact of the sanction, is to find an appropriate comparison group. This study examines male non-traffic offenders who were sentenced to 3 months or less in prison. A group of men under age 25 sentenced after April 2006 who were offered electronic monitored house arrest instead of imprisonment were matched (on 26 demographic and criminal justice indicators) with comparable men sentenced to prison prior to this date (when electronic monitored house arrest was not available). Similarly, a group of men over age 25 sentenced after June 2008 (who were eligible for electronic monitoring) were matched with men sentenced before this date.

The dependent measure was the 'average weekly dependency rate' – the proportion of weeks in the year following the end of the sentence that the offender received social welfare benefits (an indicator, essentially, of employment status).

Prior to being incarcerated, the dependency rates for the electronically monitored and imprisoned groups were comparable. Looking first at those under age 26, the men who were sentenced before the reform (and therefore served their prison sentences in prison) were more likely to be unemployed in the year following release than those who were sentenced to prison but served their sentences in their homes while being electronic monitored. However, there was no such effect for older offenders: those who served their sentences while being electronically monitored at home were equally likely to be unemployed as those who were imprisoned. For younger offenders – but not older offenders – imprisonment decreases the likelihood that the offender will be self-sufficient after the end of the sentence.

Conclusion: It would appear that for offenders under age 25 sentenced to 3 months or less in prison, being able to serve the sentence under house arrest while being electronically monitored is a strategy that interferes less with employment than being imprisoned. For older offenders, however, there is no such benefit on this measure. For all offenders who serve their sentence in the community, however, there are lower costs and, presumably, less collateral damage than imprisonment (see the *Highlights* compendium *The Effects of Imprisonment* on our website).

Reference: Andersen, Lars H. and Signe H. Andersen (2014). Effect of Electronic Monitoring on Social Welfare Dependence. *Criminology & Public Policy, 13*(3), 349-379.

People's judgement of forensic evidence – in this study whether a note ostensibly written by a robber was written by the accused – can easily be biased by other quite independent evidence implicating the accused.

It is often difficult to judge whether an accused person is, in fact, the offender. But when the prosecution presents what might appear to be independent pieces of evidence implicating the accused, an inference of guilt becomes, of course, more reasonable. This study suggests that knowledge of one piece of evidence can affect judgements concerning completely independent evidence. In other words, the weight given to 'independent' pieces of evidence is not determined independently.

"Confirmation biases – that is the tendency to seek out, interpret, and create new evidence in ways that validate one's pre-existing beliefs – are a pervasive psychological phenomenon" (p. 256). Furthermore, there is a "growing body of evidence indicating that even expert judgments of forensic science evidence are subjective and susceptible to bias" (p. 256). The studies reported in this paper examine the possibility that ordinary people – jurors, for example, as well as others making forensic judgments – might be influenced in their judgements of handwriting evidence by the knowledge that the accused had made a confession (that was subsequently retracted).

Lay people's judgements of the similarity of two handwriting samples turn out to be highly varied and generally inaccurate. Nevertheless, people appear to be quite comfortable making judgements on whether two samples of handwriting were written by the same person.

In the first study, a sample of ordinary people (recruited online for an experiment) were asked to imagine that they were jurors. They were given two handwriting samples: one was described as a note that a perpetrator in a robbery had handed a bank teller; the other was described as a handwritten 'waiver of rights' written by the accused person at the police station. The case was modeled after an actual case in which the accused gave a confession that he subsequently stated had been coerced by the police. Half of the study participants were told that the suspect had confessed (and subsequently said that the confession was not true). The other half were told that he had been questioned at length by the police but had not confessed. 27% of those who heard that the suspect had confessed reported that the two handwriting samples were written by the same person. Where the study respondents heard that there was no confession, only 11% thought that the two samples matched. Furthermore, the perception that the handwriting samples matched was highly correlated with judgements that the accused was guilty.

A second study was similar to the first except it was run in two sessions, separated by 5-9 days. In the first session, the study participants simply rated the similarity of 8 pairs of handwriting samples. In the second session, they read the same case summary as in the first study. Half were told that the accused had confessed (but subsequently withdrew his confession); the other half were told that he had not confessed. They then were given one of the pairs of handwriting samples that they had rated previously. In the confession present condition, respondents were more likely to judge the samples as coming from the same person than they did previously (36% after hearing about the confession vs. 14% before hearing about it). There was no change in the beliefs that the same person had written the notes in the confession-absent condition.

Conclusion: It appears that "judgements of forensic science evidence can be shaped by the knowledge and expectation of the observer" (p. 265). In other words, judgements about forensic evidence "may be tainted… [by observers'] *a priori* belief in the defendant's guilt or innocence, which will have been shaped by their knowledge of other aspects of the case (e.g., a prior confession)" (p. 265). This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "corroboration inflation" gives the illusion that the evidence is stronger than it actually is. Weak – or excluded – evidence, in other words, makes other evidence appear to be more trustworthy.

Reference: Kukucka, Jeff and Saul M. Kassin (2014). Do Confessions Taint Perceptions of Handwriting Evidence? An Empirical Test of the Forensic Confirmation Bias. *Law and Human Behaviour, 28*, 256-270.

Parole for those serving determinate sentences in Canada has virtually disappeared.

Most offenders in Canada serving determinate sentences of 6 months or more are eligible for release on parole after serving 1/3 of their sentences. They are almost certain to be released automatically after serving 2/3 of their sentences. During that middle third, parole boards have the power to release them.

This study demonstrates that in Canada, discretionary parole for adults serving fixed length sentences occurs rarely and when it does occur, it happens relatively late in the sentence. The net effect is that the existence of full parole has little effect on the number of adults in Canadian prisons. The Canadian parole system was created in part to reflect a very simple fact: almost all Canadian prisoners will, within a few years of being sentenced, be released back into the community. Parole was based on the assumption that an administrative board could determine when best to release a prisoner to maximize successful reintegration into society.

The challenge of a discretionary parole system is easy to understand: the prediction of whether or not a prisoner will reoffend if released on parole is necessarily imperfect. In fact, "The parole board will be seen as responsible for *any* serious offence by someone granted parole regardless of some calculation of risk… As the Government [of Canada] noted in… 1990… 'It is often said that everyone notices the failures of the release system, and no one notices its many successes'" (p. 321).

Calculating the 'net effect' of the parole system on imprisonment is not straightforward. Many prisoners do not apply for parole (knowing, probably, their low likelihood of success). Hence the 'success rate' at parole hearings is not, by itself, very meaningful. In addition, people may be granted parole at various points in the middle third of their sentences. The effect of being granted parole early (e.g., after serving 34% of the sentence) is considerable. Being granted parole after serving 65% of a sentence has almost no impact on imprisonment since the prisoner would virtually automatically be released at the 2/3 point in the sentence.

This paper, therefore, estimated the actual effect of parole as it currently operates for federal prisoners (those serving determinate sentences of 2 years or more) as well as for provincial prisoners (those serving sentences of less than 2 years). The "effect" that was measured is easy to understand: how many additional prisoners would there be if parole was abolished and, instead, all prisoners were released at the 2/3 point in their sentences?

In April 2013, there were 14,745 incarcerated federal offenders. If full parole had been abolished, there would be 664 more prisoners (or an additional 4.5%). In 2011-12, there were 24,822 provincial prisoners. Abolishing parole for provincial prisoners would increase their number by 395 people (or 1.6%). Overall, then, abolishing full parole would increase the Canadian imprisonment rate from 113.1 adult prisoners per 100,000 total residents to 116.1 or an overall increase of 2.7%. Abolishing 'day parole' (whereby federal prisoners are released into a community correctional centre) would add an additional 966 prisoners to federal institutions. The change that would have a very large effect, of course, would be a decision to end the virtually automatic release of prisoners at the 2/3 point in their sentences: that would create an increase in federal imprisonment of 2727 prisoners or an increase of 18.5% in the federal prison population.

Conclusion: It would appear that many people – even those close to the criminal justice system – assume that parole is likely to be granted early in a sentence. Given that this is not true, and Canada's parole system has little effect on the country's overall incarceration rate, it would appear that there may be a serious misperception about what a sentence of imprisonment means in Canada.

Reference: Doob, Anthony N., Cheryl Marie Webster, and Allan Manson (2014). Zombie Parole: The Withering of Conditional Release in Canada. *Criminal Law Quarterly, 61*, 301-328.

Even short periods of time in prison increase dramatically the likelihood that young couples will divorce.

There is substantial research demonstrating that there are collateral effects of incarceration on those incarcerated and their families (see the *Criminological Highlights* collection on *The Effects of Imprisonment: Specific Deterrence and Collateral Effects* at http://criminology.utoronto.ca/criminological-highlights). This paper examines a finding that is especially important for those who believe children should grow up in stable families. Incarceration that occurs during a marriage appears to be an important cause of divorce.

This study examines the impact of incarceration on couples who are young and only recently married. From the (U.S.) National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 1847 respondents were identified who were married when they were interviewed at age 18-28. They were interviewed again 6 years later. 62 had been incarcerated between these two interviews. 33 had been incarcerated prior to the first of these interviews (but were still married at the second interview). The incarceration periods were typically short (mean=3.9 months): 63% were imprisoned for less than a month. Only 9% served a year or more in prison.

The challenge addressed by the study was to determine whether the divorce contributed to marriage dissolution or if those who are likely to find themselves in prison are also likely to have divorced even if they hadn't been incarcerated. For this reason data on 22 variables, derived from data from the first of these two interviews, were included as control variables to ensure that prior to the incarceration, the groups were similar. The variables included relationship characteristics (e.g., relationship violence, extramarital sex) demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, race, education, employment, children in the home), personal characteristics (e.g., religiosity, drinking, incarceration before marriage), and relationship history (e.g., years married at first interview).

The marriages of those who experienced incarceration during marriage lasted fewer months than did the marriages of the other respondents. Even when all the control variables were included in a model of marriage dissolution, incarcerations during marriage were associated with increased risk of the dissolution of the marriage. Incarcerations that took place *before* a marriage were not predictive of marriage breakup.

Detailed analysis of the role of low levels of reported marital love, economic strain, relationship violence, and extramarital sex suggest that these problems are made more acute by incarceration and that these problems then led to the dissolution of the marriage. Exactly why these brief periods of incarceration are associated with these causes of marital strain is not clear. One possibility is that the stigma associated with incarceration plays "a role in shaping marital love, conflict, openness to outside relationships, and ultimately divorce" (p. 391).

Conclusion: There is little doubt that the incarceration of one partner in a marriage puts the marriage at risk, even if the incarceration period is very short. This is consistent with research showing that "incarceration inhibits prosocial life-course transitions that can lead to cumulative and compounded disadvantages as ex-inmates return home." Incarceration, then "has unintended consequences by disrupting conventional achievement prospects that have been shown to lower criminal offending (e.g., employment and marriage)" (p. 391).

Reference: Siennick, Sonja E., Eric A. Stewart, and Jeremy Staff (2014). Explaining the Association Between Incarceration and Divorce. *Criminology, 52*, 371-398.