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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. Do conditions placed on youths on release while awaiting trial serve any useful purpose?
2. How is the manner in which police treat citizens related to the strength of citizens' beliefs that violence is justified?
3. What kinds of employment programs for ex-prisoners are effective?
4. Did prison overcrowding legislation in the US reduce the use of imprisonment?
5. Why do offenders have a hard time finding a place to live?
6. Are all racialized groups in the US disadvantaged at sentencing?
7. When violent crime rates decreased in the US, who benefitted most?
8. Do residents of Scandinavian countries want harsher sentences?

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Bail conditions placed on youths released pending trial do not have their intended effects.

Youth bail conditions are not accomplishing the goals that justify their imposition. Placing large numbers of conditions on youths does not have an impact on attending court or on whether a youth commits new substantive offenses. It does, however, increase the likelihood of administration of justice charges. "What release conditions can end up doing, then, is criminalizing the risks or vulnerabilities youths have, under the [false] assumption that simple criminalization is sufficient to produce behavioural change" (p. 74).

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People who believe that the police act unfairly are likely to believe that it is all right for ordinary people to use violence for personal protection, to resolve disputes, or to achieve political goals.

Consistent with previous research, this study found that perceptions of the legitimacy of the police are correlated with perceptions that the police act in a procedurally fair manner. Those who see the police as acting with legitimacy, then, are less likely to support the use of violence for personal protection, to resolve disputes, or to achieve political goals. Although causal statements cannot be drawn from these correlational results, the findings underline the likely importance of police acting in a manner that elicits perceptions that they are acting in a procedurally fair manner.

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Focusing resources on helping former prisoners locate, gain, and retain reasonably paid employment can reduce subsequent offending.

This employment program may have worked to reduce reoffending by those released from prison because "providing a continuum of care from prison to community is critical in helping [former prisoners] successfully re-enter society…. [The program] provides post release employment assistance to offenders while they are in the institution but also during the first year after they get released from prison" (p. 582). In addition, of course, the positive results could reflect the fact that a non-trivial amount of focused time was spent attempting to help former prisoners reintegrate effectively.

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Prison overcrowding litigation in the United States between 1971 and 1996 had no impact on prison admissions, release rates, or prison crowding.

State officials, it seems, responded to overcrowding litigation not by adjusting admissions and release rates, but by increasing prison capacity, "since this response was the only one in line with both the professional interests of correctional officials and political interests of state leaders during this period" (p. 426). Successful overcrowding litigation, often brought by those wanting to reduce the use of prison, is not enough. The fact that "overcrowding litigation had no discernible impact on prison overcrowding while also contributing to the expansion of prison capacity" is ironic because many of those bringing behind the litigation "hoped that state decision makers would embrace less costly, non-custodial alternatives when forced to bear the cost of maintaining constitutional prisons. Instead, their efforts appear to have had nearly the opposite of the intended effects" (p. 427).

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Having a criminal record directly impacts the ability of people to obtain housing, even when those with records are forthright and tell potential landlords about their backgrounds.

It is clear that people with criminal records face special challenges in renting apartments, whether their record is for a drug offence or a sexual offence. In fact, having a criminal record cut by half the likelihood that a person applying to rent an apartment would even get a chance to see the apartment. Given that people released from prison have to live somewhere, and given the evidence that recidivism rates are lower if they do not return to the neighbourhoods they lived in before being sent to prison (*Criminological Highlights 10*(5)#1), it would appear that restrictions are, from a public safety perspective, counterproductive.

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When violent crime decreased in the United States, it appears to have decreased both in neighbourhoods with high and low crime. However, the biggest changes were in the high crime neighbourhoods.

The problem of violence in cities is not equally distributed across neighbourhoods, "but rather was concentrated within a small segment of neighbourhoods that were characterized by racial and ethnic segregation and poverty" (p. 354-5). These, however, were the neighbourhoods that disproportionately became less violent when crime dropped from 1990 onwards. "The decline of violent crimes in these 6 cities served to ameliorate, but not to eliminate, socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in community violence" (p. 355). Exactly why crime declined so precipitously in these areas, however, is not clear.

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When being sentenced in US state courts, Asian-Americans – who are often viewed as "model minorities" (e.g., educationally and economically successful) – are less likely to receive a prison sentence than are comparable Black, White, and Hispanic offenders.

Though before controls were included, Black Americans were more likely to be incarcerated than Whites, this effect disappeared when case controls were included. However, the increased likelihood of incarceration of Hispanics and decreased likelihood of incarceration of Asian-Americans remained even after the various control variables were included in the analysis. These two effects are consistent with the theory that judges base their judgements, in part, on stereotypes about whether the offender comes from a group that is crime prone and dangerous. Sentence length decisions, once controls were included, did not show any differences among racial groups.

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Like citizens of other countries, residents of Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland suggest, in response to simple survey questions, that they would like judges to be more punitive. But also like residents of other countries, when given adequate information, they appear to be quite content with the sentences actually imposed on offenders in their countries.

When people were given more information about criminal cases – and in addition when they were given an opportunity to discuss and hear other perspectives on criminal cases – they generally appear to be considerably less likely to desire harsher sentences than when they are asked general questions about sentences. These results are similar to those from actual jurors who, generally, do not desire harsher sentences than the sentences handed down by judges in 'their' cases (*Criminological Highlights 11*(6)#2, *15*(2)#4, *14*(1)#6). Even though respondents tended to say that they wanted harsher sentences (when asked simple general questions), the results suggest the view that the public demands harsher sanctions is wrong. Said differently "it would be difficult to justify increases in the harshness of criminal sanctions by referring to the presence of a public demand for such a shift" (p. 359).

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Bail conditions placed on youths released pending trial do not have their intended effects.

Canada's 2003 Youth Criminal Justice Act is credited with reducing the number of youths sent to youth court as well as reducing the number of custodial sentences imposed on young people who commit offences (*Criminological Highlights 10*(1)#1, *10*(3)#1). Nevertheless, concerns about the operation of the Act remain.

Specifically, it appears that there are problems with the operation of pretrial release (*Criminological Highlights 13*(1)#1, *12*(5)#3, *13*(5)#5). This paper addresses a straightforward question: Do multiple bail conditions imposed on youths awaiting trial accomplish the goals that justify their imposition: appearing for court as required and refraining from committing additional offences while awaiting trial.

When Canadian bail courts release youths into the community prior to their trial, they often place large numbers of conditions on them, some of which bear almost no relationship to the current charge (*Criminological Highlights 13*(5)#5). Ontario justices of the peace appear to subscribe to the theory that more conditions will lead to better behaviour.

Using data from one of the largest youth courts in Ontario (Canada), this paper examined court records from a representative sample of 358 cases from 2009-2011 in which the youth was released on bail awaiting trial. Justices imposed a median of 8 (mean = 7.6 conditions) separate distinct bail conditions on these youths. The impact of the number of these conditions was examined on three outcome measures. The first was whether the youth was charged with "failure to appear" in court. Youths had many opportunities not to appear: cases generally consumed between 2 and 37 court appearances (mean 12.4) with one outlying case in which the youth was required to appear in court 65 times. 63% of the youths were required to appear at least 10 times (typically on school days). The second outcome measure was whether there were new substantive charges laid against the youth. Finally, the number of "failure to comply with a court order" charges were examined.

The main independent variable of interest was the number of conditions placed on the youth who was awaiting trial. Only 3 of the youths were charged with failure to appear in court. Hence, there was no evidence that large numbers of conditions served to ensure court appearance, since those with relatively few conditions also appeared.

Two background factors predicted whether the youth was returned to court for new substantive offences (i.e., offences other than 'administration of justice' offences): their current charge and whether they had been facing charges before the bail hearing in which the conditions were imposed. In addition, boys were more likely than girls to be returned for new offences. However, there was absolutely no evidence that the number of bail conditions had any impact on subsequent substantive charges.

However, consistent with previous research, those with large numbers of bail conditions were more likely to be returned to court with new charges for 'failure to comply with a court order.' In other words, by placing large numbers of conditions on their release, the court was successful in ensuring that youths would fail, even when gender and previous charges before the court were taken into account.

Conclusion: Youth bail conditions are not accomplishing the goals that justify their imposition. Placing large numbers of conditions on youths does not have an impact on attending court or on whether a youth commits new substantive offenses. It does, however, increase the likelihood of administration of justice charges. "What release conditions can end up doing, then, is criminalizing the risks or vulnerabilities youths have, under the [false] assumption that simple criminalization is sufficient to produce behavioural change" (p. 74).

Reference: Sprott, Jane B. and Jessica Sutherland (2015). Unintended Consequences of Multiple Bail Conditions for Youth. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 57(1), 59-81.

People who believe that the police act unfairly are likely to believe that it is all right for ordinary people to use violence for personal protection, to resolve disputes, or to achieve political goals.

Previous research has suggested that "when police act in line with the norms and values of procedural justice, members of the public tend to believe that the police have the right to [use force]" (p. 479). This study examines whether there are "empirical links between how the police [are seen to] exercise their authority (procedural justice)… and whether those [who are subject to the police] believe it is acceptable to use violence to achieve certain social and political goals" (p. 480).

Studies have suggested that those who perceive the justice system to be more legitimate are more likely to comply with the law, cooperate with the police, and support the police in their exercise of their power (*Criminological Highlights, 4*(4)#1, *7*(1)#4, *11*(4)#1, *12*(5)#2). This study examines whether those who see the police as acting in a legitimate manner "also believe that one should not use violence to achieve certain goals – that is that the police have a right and just monopoly over violence in society" (p. 481).

The study was carried out in 4 boroughs of London, England. Within each of these locations, males, age 16-30 "self-identifying as members of a non-majority ethnic or racial group" (p. 483) were sampled. The acceptability of three types of violence was assessed: violence to protect oneself from attack or intruders, violence to resolve disputes or take revenge, and violence for political goals. In addition, trust in the fairness of the police, belief in the effectiveness of the police, and belief in the legitimacy of the police were assessed. Finally, fear of crime, feelings of belonging in Britain, and attitudes toward democracy were included along with various demographic measures and experiences with police stops.

Controlling for all other measured factors, "the study's core finding is that [perceived] procedural justice explains variation in police legitimacy, which in turn is negatively correlated with attitudes to [all three types of] private violence (p. 486). In other words, the relationship of procedural justice to the acceptability of violence appears to be indirect – by its impact on the perceived legitimacy of the police. This suggests the more people perceive the police to be acting legitimately "via compliance with standards of procedural justice, the less favourable are people's views about the acceptability of private violence" (p. 486). There is little evidence that judgments of police *effectiveness* are related to attitudes concerning the legitimacy of using private violence. Independent of these effects, "A positive view of democracy and feelings of belonging to the nation are negatively correlated with approval of political violence" (p. 486).

Conclusion: Consistent with previous research, this study found that perceptions of the legitimacy of the police are correlated with perceptions that the police act in a procedurally fair manner. Those who see the police as acting with legitimacy, then, are less likely to support the use of violence for personal protection, to resolve disputes, or to achieve political goals. Although causal statements cannot be drawn from these correlational results, the findings underline the likely importance of police acting in a manner that elicits perceptions that they are acting in a procedurally fair manner.

Reference: Jackson, Jonathan, Aziz Z. Huq, Ben Bradford, and Tom R. Tyler (2013) Monopolizing Force? Police Legitimacy and Public Attitudes Toward the Acceptability of Violence. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 19,* 479-497.

Focusing resources on helping former prisoners locate, gain, and retain reasonably paid employment can reduce subsequent offending.

Although work programs for ex-prisoners are often believed to be useful for reducing subsequent offending, the data suggest that they may not reduce offending for some groups. This paper looks at an unusual employment assistance program for prisoners: one that begins in prison but provides a full year of community support after the prisoner is released.

In this program, prisoners who have voluntarily acquired work experience and skills in Minnesota's state prison industry programs and who have a clean discipline record meet with a job training specialist for at least 16 hours prior to release. One week before release, a specialist begins searching for jobs that meet the prisoner's skills and are in the location where he is expected to live. The potential employer is informed of the prisoner's criminal background. When the prisoner is released, a job retention specialist meets with him, helps him with job leads (and helps the former prisoner with transportation costs to the interviews and obtaining appropriate clothing). Regular meetings are scheduled thereafter throughout the year.

The program ran between July 2006 and December 2008. In order to create a comparable group of prisoners who had not participated in the program, propensity score matching was used. This technique matches those who did and did not participate on the basis of a statistical prediction of whether a person is likely to be in the program. In other words, prisoners were located who – using a wide range of predictors – look similar to those who participated in the employment program. The predictors included 26 variables such as LSI-R scores (a risk assessment tool), the LSI education/employment score, sex, race, age, time employed in prison, prior convictions, prior supervision failures, offence type, institutional discipline record, education, length of stay in prison. There were 232 prisoners who participated in the program who had adequate data for the matching procedure. Matches were found for them from the 3959 prisoners who had participated in prison work but not in the employment program.

The main dependent variables were rearrest, reconviction, reincarceration or revocation for a violation of a condition of release. Those who participated in the program had lower rates of recidivism on all four of these measures. The data show that they reoffended less, and were in the community longer before reoffending than those who were equivalent but had not participated in the employment program. Not surprisingly, those who participated in the program were also more likely to be employed than those who were released at roughly the same time but did not participate in the program. Those in the special program worked more hours, but their hourly wage (when employed) did not differ from those who did not participate in the program.

Conclusion: This employment program may have worked to reduce reoffending by those released from prison because "providing a continuum of care from prison to community is critical in helping [former prisoners] successfully re-enter society…. [The program] provides post release employment assistance to offenders while they are in the institution but also during the first year after they get released from prison" (p. 582). In addition, of course, the positive results could reflect the fact that a non-trivial amount of focused time was spent attempting to help former prisoners reintegrate effectively.

Reference: Duwe, Grant (2015). The Benefits of Keeping Idle Hands Busy: An Outcome Evaluation of a Prisoner Reentry Employment Program. *Crime & Delinquency, 61*(4), 559-586.

Prison overcrowding litigation in the United States between 1971 and 1996 had no impact on prison admissions, release rates, or prison crowding.

In a number of areas, it has been suggested that "organizations blunt the impact of regulations and lawsuits by shaping judicial conceptions of what counts as legal compliance in ways that are aligned with professional and organizational interests" (p. 402). "Regardless of what measures are taken, compliance is likely to remain symbolic" (p. 407). This paper examines this idea in the context of prison overcrowding litigation.

Formal adherence to court ordered reduction in prison overcrowding could occur in three ways: lowering the admission rate, releasing prisoners earlier, or building more prisons. There was, however, "considerable political inertia against prison construction in the 1970s and 1980s, despite widespread support for getting tough on crime" (p. 405). Part of this has to do with the fact that local people (e.g., locally elected prosecutors) are responsible for sending people to prison but states are responsible for prisons. In addition, little political support is garnered for doing something 'good' for prisoners such as reducing overcrowding. For corrections officials, however, increased spending on prison construction might be seen as a favourable outcome for various reasons including the possibility that less overcrowding makes it easier for them to maintain order and control.

This study uses data from 49 states from 1971 to 1996 (when federal law came into effect that limited the ability of courts to intervene in crowding cases). During this period, there were 80 overcrowding cases (in 41 states). The impact of these cases was assessed against year-over-year change in five measures: prison admissions rates, prison release rates, per capita capital spending on prisons, the incarceration rate, and prison crowding (measured as the ratio of the average daily population to a prison system's rated capacity). Control variables included two measures of Republican political power (a Republican governor and control of the legislature), interparty competition (how evenly split the legislature was), unemployment rate, racial threat (% black), and fiscal capacity (per capita income and ratio of state revenues to debt).

Prison litigation did not appear to be followed by either a reduction in prison admissions or an increase in release rates. In the first two years after court action, spending on prison construction increased. However, "overcrowding litigation had no impact on its intended target, prison crowding" (p. 424). Although there was no direct impact of litigation on incarceration rates, "increased capital outlay spending [the result of overcrowding litigation] is associated with increased incarceration rates 4 years later" (p. 425).

Conclusion: State officials, it seems, responded to overcrowding litigation not by adjusting admissions and release rates, but by increasing prison capacity, "since this response was the only one in line with both the professional interests of correctional officials and political interests of state leaders during this period" (p. 426). Successful overcrowding litigation, often brought by those wanting to reduce the use of prison, is not enough. The fact that "overcrowding litigation had no discernible impact on prison overcrowding while also contributing to the expansion of prison capacity" is ironic because many of those bringing behind the litigation "hoped that state decision makers would embrace less costly, non-custodial alternatives when forced to bear the cost of maintaining constitutional prisons. Instead, their efforts appear to have had nearly the opposite of the intended effects" (p. 427).

Reference: Guetzkow, Joshua and Eric Schoon (2015). If You Build It, They Will Fill It: The Consequences of Prison Overcrowding Litigation. *Law & Society Review, 49*(2), 401-432.

Having a criminal record directly impacts the ability of people to obtain housing, even when those with records are forthright and tell potential landlords about their backgrounds.

It is well established that men – especially black men – with prison records in America will have considerably more difficulty in obtaining entry level jobs than will those who have never been incarcerated. In fact, records of arrests by police *not* leading to convictions also make it difficult to get a job. (*Criminological Highlights 6*(3)#2, *15*(1)#7). Getting a job is not the only difficulty facing those who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

People released from prison often need, almost immediately, to find a stable place to live. For some offenders – most notably sex offenders – society often imposes special residence restrictions on where they can live that cannot be justified empirically (*Criminological Highlights 8*(6)#5, *11*(4)#7, *7*(4)#4, *12*(2)#5). This study extends the investigation of the special hurdles facing those with criminal records in finding a place to live.

Advertisements for apartment rentals in New York state with listed rents of $1500 or less were located on internet sites such as Craigslist. An attempt was made to choose only those where the telephone contact person was the landlord or owner rather than a real estate broker. Each landlord was called twice. One call was from a person who did not mention having a criminal record. In the other call (the order of the calls was random), the person mentioned being on parole and that their parole officer required them to mention that they had a criminal record. The criminal record was described as being for child molestation, statutory rape or drug trafficking. The tester than asked the landlord, in those conditions in which the tester had said that he or she had a criminal record, "Would my conviction be a problem for renting the apartment? Would you still be able to show me the apartment?" (p. 29). In the other condition, the tester simply asked whether they could make an appointment to see the apartment.

Prospective tenants without a criminal record received agreement from 96% of the landlords to view the apartment. Those with a criminal record were only able to get the landlord to agree to show them the apartment in 43% of the cases. The criminal record had similar effects for both male and female testers. Landlords rejected those with criminal records either directly (e.g., by mentioning that there were children nearby) or by simply saying that they would have to check with others. Follow-up calls from the tester to these landlords went unanswered.

Landlords were equally willing to follow up and consider the rental request with male and female testers who did not have criminal records. However, of those with a criminal record, males were less likely than females to have the landlord say that they could see the apartment (39% of the cases with a male tester with a criminal record received a positive reply compared to 48% for females). Testers who said that their criminal conviction was for child molestation were less likely than those who described their convictions as either drug trafficking or statutory rape to be offered an opportunity to view the apartment. Male landlords were more likely to show an apartment to a potential tenant with a criminal record than were female landlords.

Conclusion: It is clear that people with criminal records face special challenges in renting apartments, whether their record is for a drug offence or a sexual offence. In fact, having a criminal record cut by half the likelihood that a person applying to rent an apartment would even get a chance to see the apartment. Given that people released from prison have to live somewhere, and given the evidence that recidivism rates are lower if they do not return to the neighbourhoods they lived in before being sent to prison (*Criminological Highlights 10*(5)#1), it would appear that restrictions are, from a public safety perspective, counterproductive.

Reference: Evans, Douglas N., and Jeremy R. Porter (2015). Criminal History and Landlord Rental Decisions: A New York Quasi-Experimental Study. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 11*, 21-42.

When being sentenced in US state courts, Asian-Americans – who are often viewed as "model minorities" (e.g., educationally and economically successful) – are less likely to receive a prison sentence than are comparable Black, White, and Hispanic offenders.

If Black and Hispanic offenders are sometimes treated more harshly at sentencing than White offenders because Blacks and Hispanics are seen as being more prone to involvement in crime, then Asian-American offenders should be less likely than White Americans to be treated harshly since, as a group, Asian-Americans are seen as less likely to be involved in crime.

One theory about the manner in which judges arrive at difficult sentencing decisions is that they are influenced by at least two 'focal concerns': the blameworthiness of the offender and protection of the community. Judgements about these matters may be guided, in part, by a kind of 'perceptual shorthand' based not only on case characteristics but also stereotypes that "identify different groups as being more or less crime prone and dangerous" (p. 98). This study examines whether Asian-Americans might benefit from this perceptual shorthand.

Detailed state court felony sentencing data from 9,384 cases from 7 cities in 3 states between 1996 and 2004 were examined. The main dependent variable was the decision to incarcerate or not. Those who were sentenced were identified as White, Black, Hispanic or Asian. (Unfortunately, the study was not able to examine differences across sub-groups of any of these racial groups.) Other factors known to affect sentencing decisions were controlled statistically: sex, age, offence, number of charges, criminal history, whether the offender had a previous failure to appear, whether the offender was under some form of criminal justice control at the time of the arrest, whether there was a guilty plea, and whether the accused was represented by a private lawyer.

Many of the control variables (e.g., criminal history, number of charges, etc.) predicted whether an offender received a prison sentence. But above and beyond these factors, Asian-American offenders were less likely to receive prison sentences than whites. Hispanics were more likely to receive prison sentences than Whites. Black Americans were equally likely to receive prison sentences as Whites (after number of charges, criminal history, whether they were under some form of criminal justice control, and presence of a prior failure to appear were controlled).

Conclusion: Though before controls were included, Black Americans were more likely to be incarcerated than Whites, this effect disappeared when case controls were included. However, the increased likelihood of incarceration of Hispanics and decreased likelihood of incarceration of Asian-Americans remained even after the various control variables were included in the analysis. These two effects are consistent with the theory that judges base their judgements, in part, on stereotypes about whether the offender comes from a group that is crime prone and dangerous. Sentence length decisions, once controls were included, did not show any differences among racial groups.

Reference: Franklin, Travis W. and Noelle E. Fearn (2015). Sentencing Asian Offenders in State Courts: The Influence of a Prevalent Stereotype. *Crime & Delinquency, 61*(1), 96-120.

When violent crime decreased in the United States, it appears to have decreased both in neighbourhoods with high and low crime. However, the biggest changes were in the high crime neighbourhoods.

Since the early 1990s, crime rates have decreased in the US and in various other countries (including Canada). The decreases are evident in various measures of crime. However, given that violent crime appears to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods (*Criminological Highlights 14*(2)#5, *14*(3)#5), it is important to know whether these high crime neighbourhoods also benefitted from the drop in crime. Did the crime drop exacerbate neighbourhood differences in crime rates, maintain these differences, or decrease the differences between 'high' and 'low' crime neighbourhoods?

To better understand the impact of the 'crime drop' on neighbourhood violence rates, police-reported crime data in neighbourhoods in 6 American cities – Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Philadelphia, St. Petersburg Florida, and Seattle – were examined for periods of at least 10 years beginning between 1990 and 2001 and ending between 2007 and 2012. Neighbourhoods were defined as census tracts for all cities except Denver (in which crime rates in somewhat larger neighbourhoods were examined). The absolute drop in crime in the initially most violent 20% of city neighbourhoods could then be compared to the size of the crime drop in the remaining neighbourhood in each city.

In the cities in which there was an overall drop in violent crime (during any specific 10 to 20 year period), the drop in violent crime was considerably larger in the high crime neighbourhoods. The result of this, of course, is that high crime neighbourhoods during these periods of change became less distinctive (in their rates of violent crime) from the rest of the city. In other words, the difference in crime rates between high and low crime neighbourhoods decreased when crime, overall, decreased.

Another consequence of this differential decrease in crime is that those who lived in relatively poor neighbourhoods (the poorest 20%) also experienced the largest crime drops. "For example, the decline was more than 120 [violent] crimes per 10,000 residents in Seattle's poor [census] tracts, compared with only about 15 crimes per 10,000 residents elsewhere" (p. 348). In cities with neighbourhoods that had a majority of black residents "the absolute decline in violent crime in majority-black neighbourhoods far exceeded that in majority-white neighbourhoods. For instance, Chicago's majority-black neighbourhoods experienced a decline of 74 violent crimes per 10,000 residents, versus 19 per 10,000 in its majority-white tracts" (p. 349).

At the same time, it should be noted that "there is a very strong correlation between the initial and final violent crime rates of the neighbourhoods in each city" (p. 353). In other words, neighbourhoods with higher crime rates in the early 1990s also had higher crime rates in the early 2000s.

Conclusion: The problem of violence in cities is not equally distributed across neighbourhoods, "but rather was concentrated within a small segment of neighbourhoods that were characterized by racial and ethnic segregation and poverty" (p. 354-5). These, however, were the neighbourhoods that disproportionately became less violent when crime dropped from 1990 onwards. "The decline of violent crimes in these 6 cities served to ameliorate, but not to eliminate, socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in community violence" (p. 355). Exactly why crime declined so precipitously in these areas, however, is not clear.

Reference: Friedson, Michael, and Patrick Sharkey (2015) Violence and Neighbourhood Disadvantage after the Crime Decline. Annals, AAPSS, July 2015, 341-358.

Like citizens of other countries, residents of Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland suggest, in response to simple survey questions, that they would like judges to be more punitive. But also like residents of other countries, when given adequate information, they appear to be quite content with the sentences actually imposed on offenders in their countries.

Politicians in the Scandinavian countries, like politicians in some other countries, are under pressure to do what is necessary to ensure that sentences reflect what the public demands. The problem, as elsewhere, is to determine what the public really wants. Research conducted in various countries suggests that "With more information and more possibility to understand the situation and people involved, the more nuanced the recommended punishment [from ordinary citizens] becomes" (p. 344).

Studies were carried out in Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Finland between 2009 and 2012. Three types of assessments were used. The *general sense* of punishment was measured by asking people simple questions about sentencing (e.g., whether sentences are too lenient, too severe, about right, etc.). An *informed sense of justice* was assessed by giving respondents detailed descriptions of cases (about a page in length). Finally, *a concrete sense of justice* was assessed by showing respondents, in focus groups, a film of a fictitious case in which they saw details of the offence, offender and victim after which they discussed the case for 1-2 hours. Not all studies were carried out in all countries, however.

In the countries in which a *general sense* of punishment was assessed (Sweden, Denmark, Iceland), the majority of respondents (59% to 77%) – as elsewhere – thought that sentences were too lenient, and most (73% to 78%) thought that sentences in violent crimes, in particular, should be harsher. In order to assess *an informed sense of justice*, one-page summaries of cases (domestic violence, assault, rape, armed robbery, embezzlement, and heroin smuggling) were given to people in all four countries. Judges, given these same cases, tended almost invariably to suggest that a prison term was the sentence that would be imposed. Ordinary respondents varied somewhat across cases and countries. Swedish respondents appeared to be most likely to recommend imprisonment, but even for them the range was from about 62% to 83% recommending prison (though the consensus among judges was that prison would be the expected sentence). Those from Finland were least likely to recommend imprisonment (range 30% to 70%). However, only in Finland did the public sometimes want sentences to be harsher than the sentences judges said would be appropriate. However, this was true for only three of the cases (rape, street violence, domestic violence) and was particularly true when the person being sentenced was described as a first offender. First offenders are rarely imprisoned in Finland.

Though not completely consistent across the three countries in which an *informed sense* of justice was assessed by using focus groups, in general, after discussing cases in groups, respondents were less likely to believe that prison was the most appropriate sanction.

Conclusion: When people were given more information about criminal cases – and in addition when they were given an opportunity to discuss and hear other perspectives on criminal cases – they generally appear to be considerably less likely to desire harsher sentences than when they are asked general questions about sentences. These results are similar to those from actual jurors who, generally, do not desire harsher sentences than the sentences handed down by judges in 'their' cases (*Criminological Highlights 11*(6)#2, *15*(2)#4, *14*(1)#6). Even though respondents tended to say that they wanted harsher sentences (when asked simple general questions), the results suggest the view that the public demands harsher sanctions is wrong. Said differently "it would be difficult to justify increases in the harshness of criminal sanctions by referring to the presence of a public demand for such a shift" (p. 359).

Reference: Balvig, Flemming, Helgi Gunnlaugsson, Kristina Jerr, Henrik Tham, and Aarne Kinnunen (2015). The Public Sense of Justice in Scandinavia: A study of Attitudes Towards Punishments. *European Journal of Criminology, 12*(3), 342-361. 24455