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Criminological Highlights

Volume 6, Number 3

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Criminological Highlights is produced with the support of the
Department of Justice, Canada and the Correctional Service of Canada.

Criminological Highlights is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is currently being published. There are six issues in each volume. Copies of the original articles can be obtained (at cost) from the Centre of Criminology Information Service and Library. Please contact Tom Finlay or Andrea Shier.

This issue of *Criminological Highlights* will address the following questions:

- 1) Why do African Americans have higher crime rates than do white people?
- 2) What is the impact of being black and having a criminal record on the likelihood of getting an entry level job?
- 3) Are sex offenders likely to be re-arrested for sex offences?
- 4) Why are Australian Aboriginal people over-represented in the criminal justice system?
- 5) Do police raids on bars in which drugs are being sold reduce neighbourhood drug dealing?
- 6) What is the relationship between drug use and property crime?
- 7) When are "conferences" with youths likely to be successful in reducing recidivism?
- 8) Did the Columbine High School shooting increase the level of fear in American high school students?

Contents: Three pages containing "headlines and conclusions" for each of the eight articles. One-page summaries of each of the eight articles.

Criminological Highlights is prepared by Anthony Doob, Tom Finlay, Cheryl Webster, Rosemary Gartner, John Beattie, Carla Cesaroni, Dena Demos, Elizabeth Griffiths, Michael Mopas, Andrea Shier, Jane Sprott, Sara Thompson, and Carolyn Yule.

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African American youths in the U.S. who are exposed to substantial amounts of racial discrimination are more likely to be involved in crime than are comparable black adolescents who have experienced less discrimination.

This paper “found that discrimination predicted delinquent behaviour in [a] sample of African American children after [the researchers] controlled for quality of parenting, affiliation with deviant peers, and prior conduct problems” (p.848) for both girls and boys. These findings do not challenge other well established explanations for group differences in offending. Instead, they highlight another factor that helps explain high rates of offending among certain black youths. The results of this study clearly suggest that societies that systematically expose their most vulnerable members to discriminatory rhetoric and practices are likely to pay the price in increased crime.

Reference: Simons, Ronald L; Yi-Fu Chen; Eric A. Stewart and Gene H. Brody (2003). Incidents of Discrimination and Risk for Delinquency: A Longitudinal Test of Strain Theory with an African American Sample. *Justice Quarterly*, 20, 827-854. **[Item 1]**

Men – especially black males – with a prison record in America will have considerably more difficulty in obtaining entry level jobs than will those who have never been incarcerated.

The presence of a criminal record renders the reintegration of ex-offenders into the community as productive citizens more difficult. One important hurdle for individuals who want to achieve the goal of successful reintegration is to acquire a job. This study demonstrates conclusively that having a criminal record makes this objective a considerably greater challenge. In addition, it demonstrates that being black and having a criminal record constitute two enormous, but separate, impediments to getting a job. These results are consistent with previous research (*Criminological Highlights*, 5(3) #7) which shows that imprisonment has a permanent effect on wages. More specifically, those who have been incarcerated are likely to have reduced wage income. Further, the effect of imprisonment *increases* as workers get older. Hence, the rise in wages that ex-offenders experience as they age is smaller than the increases received by non-offenders. Taken together, these findings demonstrate not only that a criminal record renders it more difficult for the ex-inmate to enter the work force but that people with criminal records are also more likely – once employed – to be trapped in low paying jobs. Clearly, a criminal record has costs for both the offender as well as society.

Reference: Pager, Devah (2003). The Mark of a Criminal Record. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108, 937-975. **[Item 2]**

Sex offenders are *not* more likely than other types of lawbreakers to be re-arrested for a crime. In fact, the vast majority of them - if re-apprehended - are arrested for an offence that is not sexual in nature.

Conclusion. The existing evidence suggests that sex offender registries are not likely to be effective in stopping crime. (See *Criminological Highlights*, 4(1), #2 and 5(6), #1). These registries, along with community notification laws, are based on the theory that the same-offence recidivism rates for sexual offenders are remarkably high. This study demonstrates exactly the opposite, with re-apprehension rates for this type of criminal activity being comparatively low. Clearly, policies based on misconceptions about the nature of sexual offending will inevitably be ineffective and divert attention and resources away from other more promising strategies.

Reference: Sample, Lisa L. and Timothy M. Bray (2003). Are Sex Offenders Dangerous? *Criminology and Public Policy*, 3, 59-82. **[Item 3]**

The most likely cause of the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison in Australia is their relatively high rate of involvement in serious crime. Hence, focusing on the factors known to be causes of Aboriginal crime is likely to be more effective in reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system than will be searching for the location of discriminatory behaviour.

The self-report data are consistent with the arrest information. On both measures, Aboriginal people are considerably more likely to appear to be offenders. Furthermore, of those cases in which the accused is ultimately convicted, Aboriginal offenders have a substantially higher likelihood of having an extensive relevant criminal record. Given these findings, it would appear that even if there were no discriminatory decisions being made with respect to Aboriginal offenders, they would still be over-represented in prisons. Consequently, it would seem that “the scope for reducing rates of Aboriginal imprisonment without reducing Aboriginal offending is... limited” (p.69). Said differently, it would appear that “more progress in reducing Aboriginal rates of imprisonment might be made... if [efforts were concentrated] on the underlying causes of crime in Aboriginal communities” (p.70) such as unemployment rather than on diverting this minority group from the criminal justice system or from simply attempting to identify areas in which they experience discrimination.

Reference: Weatherburn, Don; Jackie Fitzgerald and Jiuzhao Hua (2003). Reducing Aboriginal Over-Representation in Prison. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 62 (3), 65-73. **[Item 4]**

Police raids on bars in which illegal drug selling apparently was taking place had a relatively brief effect on the suppression of drug dealing in the neighbourhood. In the long term, this intervention was almost completely ineffective.

Though drug dealing enforcement - in the form of raids on bars in which dealing is thought to be occurring - can reduce drug problems on the streets during the time that the police are active in suppressing it, there is, unfortunately, “little indication that these reductions are sustained after the special enforcement is withdrawn” (p.289). In this light, claims that a crime suppression or deterrence program is successful should be tempered by the knowledge that the success of these programs may be a criminological will-o'-the-wisp.

Reference: Cohen, Jacqueline; Wilpen Gorr and Piyusha Singh (2003). Estimating Intervention Effects in Varying Risk Settings: Do Police Raids Reduce Illegal Drug Dealing at Nuisance Bars? *Criminology*, 41 (2), 257-292. **[Item 5]**

Users of cocaine and heroin are considerably more likely to be involved in money-making crimes shortly after they use drugs than during drug-free periods of their lives. This is particularly the case when they are not legally employed and when they are not in a spousal relationship.

“Embeddedness in conventional social relationships, licit and illicit opportunities, and subjective perceptions of risk and rewards all influence criminal earnings.... [There is] strong evidence that drug use is an independent cause of illegal earnings rather than a mere epiphenomenon... Chronic heroin and cocaine use creates a need for money that is analogous to the need for food... (pp. 174-5). As such, these data would suggest that the problem of crime associated with drug use might be more effectively addressed by reducing the demand for drugs and by policies that encourage drug users to “become more embedded in conventional activities” (p.177). Indeed, “[a]s offenders gain more lawful opportunities and become more embedded in work and family relationships, their illegal earnings quickly diminish” (p.179).

Reference: Uggen, Christopher and Melissa Thompson (2003). The Socioeconomic Determinants of Ill-Gotten Gains: Within-Person Changes in Drug Use and Illegal Earnings. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 146-185. [Item 6]

Young offenders participating in restorative conferences who appear - according to neutral observers - to be genuinely remorseful were less likely to re-offend than were those rated as not showing regret.

Conclusion. The young offenders most likely to re-offend after participating in conferences seem either to share the same characteristics as those identified by most research as having the strongest association with recidivism (*i.e.* youth with criminal records) or to have cooperated least with the conference process and goals (*i.e.* individuals not showing remorse or disagreeing with an outcome). While victims were not optimistic about the effect of conferences on re-offending, over 90% of them were still in favour of continuing to fund this criminal justice initiative with public money. In this light, it could be argued that “evidence of reductions in reoffending may be more salient to policy makers or politicians than to their constituents” (p.757).

Reference: Hayes, Hennessey and Kathleen Daly (2003). Youth Justice Conferencing and Reoffending. *Justice Quarterly*, 20, 725-764. [Item 7]

The killing of 13 people at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado had a negligible impact on the level of fear among U.S. secondary school students.

The fact that the vast majority of U.S. high school students felt safe in their schools both prior to and following the Columbine tragedy “appears to present a paradox because of the incongruence with commonly-held expectations that students’ fear greatly increased after Columbine” (p.380). Nonetheless, this finding is similar to estimates of the effects of other incidents involving extreme violence in the U.S. on those not directly involved (*e.g.*, September 11 or the Oklahoma City bombing). Given that school is, and most youths perceive it to be, a safe place (See, for example, *Criminological Highlights*, 2(2)#1 and 4(4)#6), we should be wary of spending scarce resources in an effort to make students feel even more protected than they already do.

Reference: Addington, Lynn A. (2003). Students’ Fear after Columbine: Findings from a Randomized Experiment. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 19, 367-387. [Item 8]

African American youths in the U.S. who are exposed to substantial amounts of racial discrimination are more likely to be involved in crime than are comparable black adolescents who have experienced less discrimination.

Background. Homicide rates involving African American youths in the U.S. are approximately 9 times higher than those for white youths. Similarly, self-reports of assaults, robberies and other crimes by black adolescents are typically considerably higher than those reported by whites. Various explanations have been offered for these group differences. In particular, explanations have focused on differential exposure to certain conditions (*e.g.*, weak social bonds, lack of economic opportunity) that are known to be related to involvement in crime.

This study “investigated the possibility that racial-ethnic discrimination fosters negative emotions and attitudes that directly increase a child’s propensity for delinquent behaviour” (p.829). Unlike much of the research examining the link between discrimination and delinquency, this study examined the subjective consequences (such as anger) of discrimination. Data were examined from a sample of 718 black children living in Georgia and Iowa who were interviewed in 1997 and 1999. The youths were between 10 and 12 years old at the time of the first interview. Their primary care giver was also interviewed. The experience of discrimination was assessed through a set of 13 questions (*e.g.*, “How often has someone yelled a racial slur or racial insult at you just because you are an African American?” or “How often have the police hassled you just because you are African American?”). Delinquency was also measured through self-reports.

The results demonstrated that most of the youths had experienced some form of racial discrimination. In addition (and consistent with other studies), the majority of the participants reported at least one instance of delinquent behaviour in the previous year. Moreover, a relationship between delinquency and the experience of discrimination was found for both boys and girls at each interview. Further, it was demonstrated statistically that the causal path is likely to go from discrimination to delinquency. In other words, the data were consistent with the hypothesis that increased discrimination leads to greater offending. Equally noteworthy, an examination of those youths who did not report any delinquency at the first interview suggests that the experience of discrimination is associated with the onset of delinquent behaviour. These findings hold even when other variables (*e.g.*, association with deviant peers, inadequate parenting) are held constant. The analysis further suggests that – for boys - the effects of discrimination increased feelings of anger, depression and the belief that violence is often necessary to defend one’s rights, to achieve respect, *etc.* In turn, these sentiments led to increased delinquency. For girls, the intervening factors were similar but not identical (that is, only anger and depression appeared to mediate the effect of discrimination).

Conclusion. This paper “found that discrimination predicted delinquent behaviour in [a] sample of African American children after [the researchers] controlled for quality of parenting, affiliation with deviant peers, and prior conduct problems” (p.848) for both girls and boys. These findings do not challenge other well established explanations for group differences in offending. Instead, they highlight another factor that helps explain high rates of offending among certain black youths. The results of this study clearly suggest that societies that systematically expose their most vulnerable members to discriminatory rhetoric and practices are likely to pay the price in increased crime.

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Men – especially black males – with a prison record in America will have considerably more difficulty in obtaining entry level jobs than will those who have never been incarcerated.

Background. As in Canada, most prisoners in the U.S. will eventually be returned to the community. In fact, approximately half a million American inmates are released from U.S. prisons each year. Roughly 91,000 offenders were released from Canadian prisons in 2001 after serving time for a criminal offence. These figures are of particular concern when one recalls findings from previous research which demonstrated a relationship between imprisonment and the (in)ability of a person to find employment. However, one of the problems with these prior studies is that they have only been correlational in nature. As such, the possibility remains that it is not incarceration *per se* that disadvantages a person in search of a job, but rather some other related factor (e.g., possessing fewer relevant job skills).

This study used an experimental design in which black and white male research assistants pretended to be ordinary job applicants and applied for entry level jobs with 350 different employers in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. They randomly described themselves as either having a criminal record or not. Two different people applied for each position - one of whom either indicated that he had a criminal record when asked (a situation which occurred in 74% of the jobs applications or interviews) or simply listed his parole officer as a reference if information about his criminal history was not requested. In all other ways, the two applicants did not differ.

The results were dramatic. Of the white applicants, 34% of those without a criminal record were “called back” (to be offered the job or for a formal interview) compared to only 17% with a criminal history. For black applicants, while 14% of those without a criminal record were called back, a mere 5% of those with a prison record were contacted. In other words, when comparing the white applicant with no criminal record to the black person with a criminal record, the likelihood of the latter obtaining a job was reduced by approximately 85%. This effect held for those employers who specifically asked about the applicant’s criminal record as well as those who did not explicitly request this information. Similarly, the pattern of findings was the same for applicants with and without personal contact with a decision maker (*i.e.* those who were either asked simply to fill out an application or were given an initial interview).

Conclusion. The presence of a criminal record renders the reintegration of ex-offenders into the community as productive citizens more difficult. One important hurdle for individuals who want to achieve the goal of successful reintegration is to acquire a job. This study demonstrates conclusively that having a criminal record makes this objective a considerably greater challenge. In addition, it demonstrates that being black and having a criminal record constitute two enormous - albeit separate - impediments to getting a job. These results are consistent with previous research (*Criminological Highlights*, 5(3) #7) which shows that imprisonment has a permanent effect on wages. More specifically, those who have been incarcerated are likely to have reduced wage income. Further, the effect of imprisonment *increases* as workers get older. Hence, the rise in wages that ex-offenders experience as they age is smaller than the increases received by non-offenders. Taken together, these findings demonstrate not only that a criminal record renders it more difficult for the ex-inmate to enter the work force but that people with criminal records are also more likely – once employed – to be trapped in low paying jobs. Clearly, a criminal record has costs for both the offender as well as society.

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Sex offenders are *not* more likely than other types of lawbreakers to be re-arrested for a crime. In fact, the vast majority of them - if re-apprehended - are arrested for an offence that is not sexual in nature.

Background. In all 50 U.S. states, certain types of sex offenders are required to register their addresses with law enforcement agencies and are additionally liable - in many jurisdictions - to have their whereabouts disclosed to the public. The theory behind these practices appears to be that “without intervention or some sort of surveillance, sex offenders will never stop committing sex crimes” (p.60). However, previous research (e.g., *Criminological Highlights*, 5(1), #4) has suggested that the rate at which apprehended sex offenders commit subsequent sex crimes is low – typically less than 10% within 3-5 years of release. Nevertheless, some jurisdictions – working on the belief that sex offence registries and notification procedures are effective and that “gateway” crimes exist which predict sex offending – have begun considering the expansion of registration obligations to include other criminal activity such as burglary. Since many sex offenders also have records of burglary, the theory seems to rest upon the assumption that these other crimes (e.g., burglary) are predictors of sex offending. The difficulty with this logic is that most repeat offenders (of sexual crimes or otherwise) have records of property offences such as burglary.

This study examines ‘sex offence’ re-offending relative to the re-offending rates of other criminal groups in a cohort of people arrested in Illinois in 1990. Sex offences constituted only a small proportion (1.2%) of all criminal charges. Most of the sex offenders (69%) were not, in fact, incarcerated for their initial offences.

The results showed that those arrested for robbery were the most likely offence group to re-offend (for any offence) within a 5-year follow-up period (75%). In contrast, 45% of sexual offenders were rearrested within five years for some crime. Further, the theory that ‘once-a-sex-offender-always-a-sex-offender’ is challenged by the data on re-arrest for the same offence. Looking across 10 crime groupings, 6.5% of sex offenders were rearrested for the same offence within 5 years – a *same-offence* recidivism rate that was comparable to those initially charged with homicide, kidnapping, and stalking. In contrast, 18% of robbers, 23% of burglars and 37% of those initially arrested for non-sexual assaults were re-apprehended for the same offence within the identical follow-up period.

Not surprisingly, those initially arrested for sex crimes were more likely than other lawbreakers to be re-apprehended for a sex offence within 5 years. Since only 6.5% of sex offenders were re-arrested within this period for a crime of a sexual nature, it is not clear that registries for this type of offender would be an efficient means of reducing future criminal activity.

Conclusion. The existing evidence suggests that sex offender registries are not likely to be effective in stopping crime. (See *Criminological Highlights*, 4(1), #2 and 5(6), #1). These registries, along with community notification laws, are based on the theory that the same-offence recidivism rates for sexual offenders are remarkably high. This study demonstrates exactly the opposite, with re-apprehension rates for this type of criminal activity being comparatively low. Clearly, policies based on misconceptions about the nature of sexual offending will inevitably be ineffective and divert attention and resources away from other more promising strategies.

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The most likely cause of the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison in Australia is their relatively high rate of involvement in serious crime. Hence, focusing on the factors known to be causes of Aboriginal crime is likely to be more effective in reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system than will be searching for the location of discriminatory behaviour.

Background. Like their counterparts in Canada, Aboriginal people in Australia are over-represented in their country's prisons. In 2001, the Australian imprisonment rate for Aboriginal people was 15 times that for non-Aboriginal populations. In fact, "[m]ost agree that this over-representation [in prison]... is but one manifestation of their general over-representation at every stage of the criminal justice system" (p.65). Two types of explanations have been offered to account for Aboriginal over-representation in prisons: disproportionate criminal activity (rooted, for instance, in economic disadvantage, unemployment or substance abuse) and bias in decision making. Although it would seem safe to assume that discriminatory decisions within the criminal justice system were an important determinant of this phenomenon in the past, its importance as a factor today is less clear.

This study looked initially at the arrest rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations for a selection of relatively serious offences. Aboriginal people were shown to have considerably higher arrest rates (per hundred thousand individuals in the population) than non-Aboriginal people. For instance, their murder rate was 5.7 times as high (9.7 vs. 1.7 per hundred thousand), and their rate for sexual assault was 3.8 times higher. Similarly, Aboriginal robbery levels were 6.1 times higher, and levels for assault occasioning grievous bodily harm were 11.1 times as high as those for non-Aboriginal people.

Given that individuals with a prior conviction have a considerably greater likelihood of being incarcerated than those without a criminal history, the records of those being sentenced were examined. For those convicted of a violent offence, Aboriginal offenders were dramatically more likely to have extensive prior convictions for violent offences. Specifically, while 17.9% of Aboriginal offenders convicted of a violent offence had 3 or more prior convictions for violent offences, only 3.7% of non-Aboriginal offenders had the same criminal history. The findings were similar for individuals convicted of theft: in comparison with non-Aboriginal lawbreakers, Aboriginal offenders had a higher probability of having previous convictions for this offence.

It has been argued that official data sources may reflect biases within the criminal justice system itself. Hence, self-report data on offending were also examined. This self-report study of more than 3600 secondary students in New South Wales produced parallel results. Aboriginal adolescents were twice as likely to report committing at least one assault and were five times as likely to report a motor vehicle theft. Similarly, this ethnic minority also disclosed more offending than did non-Aboriginal youths for each of four other offences. Of those who claimed to have been involved in some criminal activity, Aboriginal students were much more likely than non-Aboriginal adolescents to report being high rate offenders (that is, involvement in more than 5 offences in the previous 12 months).

Conclusion. The self-report data are consistent with the arrest information. On both measures, Aboriginal people are considerably more likely to appear to be offenders. Furthermore, of those cases in which the accused is ultimately convicted, Aboriginal offenders have a substantially higher likelihood of having an extensive relevant criminal record. Given these findings, it would appear that even if there were no discriminatory decisions being made with respect to Aboriginal offenders, they would still be over-represented in prisons. Consequently, it would seem that "the scope for reducing rates of Aboriginal imprisonment without reducing Aboriginal offending is... limited" (p.69). Said differently, it would appear that "more progress in reducing Aboriginal rates of imprisonment might be made... if [efforts were concentrated] on the underlying causes of crime in Aboriginal communities" (p.70) such as unemployment rather than on diverting this minority group from the criminal justice system or from simply attempting to identify areas in which they experience discrimination.

Reference: Weatherburn, Don; Jackie Fitzgerald and Jiuzhao Hua (2003). Reducing Aboriginal Over-Representation in Prison. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 62 (3), 65-73.

Police raids on bars in which illegal drug selling apparently was taking place had a relatively brief effect on the suppression of drug dealing in the neighbourhood. In the long term, this intervention was almost completely ineffective.

Background. Given that crime is not evenly distributed across neighbourhoods within cities, there is a natural interest in identifying strategies that can be used to address problems of illegal activity in high crime areas. In some cities (such as the site of this study - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), certain bars have sometimes been labelled by police as likely sites of illicit drug selling. A common response by police to such problems is to increase the frequency of raids on these locations. The underlying theory behind this practice is deterrence, based on the idea that certainty of apprehension is considerably more likely than severity of punishment to reduce criminal activity (p.259; See also *Criminological Highlights*, 6(2), #1).

This study examines the impact of police raids carried out between 1990 and 1992 on establishments that had been identified as “nuisance bars” by the Pittsburgh police narcotics squad. The number of raids as well as the period of time over which they took place varied considerably. The amount of drug dealing was estimated indirectly by using “drug-related 911 calls” in the area immediately surrounding the nuisance bar.

The results of this study are complex. First, it was found that enforcement – in the form of raids on these nuisance bars – suppressed drug dealing in the immediate 2 to 3 block radius. That is, within one month of the commencement of a series of drug raids, some reduction in the number of drug calls was apparent. However, this decrease was only temporary in nature. Second, the size of this decrease – assumed to be an indication of reduced drug dealing in the immediate area of the nuisance bar – increased as the amount of enforcement rose. Yet, while this effect continued after the enforcement ended, the suppression of drug dealing only lasted for a few months. Indeed, although “[l]arger reductions in drug calls accompany longer enforcement periods... enforcement effects achieved during an intervention do not persist after treatment is withdrawn” (p.286). An unexpected finding was that the closure of a nuisance bar appeared to *increase* the amount of visible drug dealing in the area – possibly constituting “further indirect evidence of limits on residual suppression effects after enforcement ceases” (p.279). Both of these outcomes – the relatively short duration of the initial enforcement effects and the negative impact of closing problematic establishments – highlight the importance of looking beyond the short term when evaluating enforcement strategies. Finally, the nature of the areas in which the bars were located was also important. For example, the (temporary) enforcement effects were largest in “low risk” areas (*e.g.*, areas with little vacant land, few bars and a low proportion of commercial properties). However, “even these most responsive enforcement targets... show little evidence of being able to sustain the suppression effects achieved during periods of active police enforcement into post-enforcement periods” (p.290).

Conclusion. Though drug dealing enforcement - in the form of raids on bars in which dealing is thought to be occurring - can reduce drug problems on the streets during the time that the police are active in suppressing it, there is, unfortunately, “little indication that these reductions are sustained after the special enforcement is withdrawn” (p.289). In this light, claims that a crime suppression or deterrence program is successful should be tempered by the knowledge that the success of these programs may be a criminological will-o’-the-wisp.

Reference: Cohen, Jacqueline; Wilpen Gorr and Piyusha Singh (2003). Estimating Intervention Effects in Varying Risk Settings: Do Police Raids Reduce Illegal Drug Dealing at Nuisance Bars? *Criminology*, 41 (2), 257-292.

Users of cocaine and heroin are considerably more likely to be involved in money-making crimes shortly after they use drugs than during drug-free periods of their lives. This is particularly the case when they are not legally employed and when they are not in a spousal relationship.

Background. It is well established that drug users get the money for their drugs - to some extent - through illegal means. However, it is also known that non-trivial amounts of this income come from conventional legal activity (See *Criminological Highlights*, 5(4), #7). One of the problems with most of the research examining the impact of drug consumption on criminal behaviour is that it is difficult to identify whether drug use is a cause of economic crime or merely a co-existing factor in the same individuals (who, for example, are simply embedded in communities in which acquisitive crimes and drug use are both common).

This study examines changes in illegal earnings over an 18-36 month period in a group of so-called marginalized Americans (*i.e.* dropouts, drug addicts, and parolees) from nine cities who were involved in an experimental study in the 1970s that examined the impact on crime of being offered a job (see *Criminological Highlights*, 4 (3), #6). On a monthly basis, the participants were asked about income from all sources as well as drug use and a number of other factors which could be expected to vary over time (such as their employment status and the unemployment rate in their community). One advantage of this “within individual” analytic approach is that effects cannot be attributed to differences in individuals since the analyses look at the changes in drug use *within* the same participants across time. These “within individual” changes in drug use were subsequently related to alterations (in the next month) in the participant’s sources of income.

The results are clear. First, the use of cocaine or heroin raised illegal earnings in the month immediately following drug consumption. (Pharmacologically, cocaine and heroin have substantially different effects on a person, yet their effects on illicit income are the same.) Second, those either working or with some other form of legal earnings in a given month had lower criminal income. Furthermore, when workers were optimistic about the possibility of making money, they were less likely to be involved in illegal income-gathering activities. Third, the unemployment rate in the offender’s community was also important. More specifically, these marginalized people tended to commit more income-earning crime when the local labour market was depressed. On the other hand, cohabitation with a spouse or partner reduced illegal income.

It is equally noteworthy that the impact of drug use on illegal earnings was largest in the month immediately following a period of drug use and decreased in magnitude thereafter. On the other hand, those who had used heroin or cocaine over the longest time showed the strongest effects. This finding is consistent with the fact that those with the most sustained drug habits are also most likely to find that an increased drug dose is necessary to maintain a consistent psychological effect.

Conclusion. In sum, “[e]mbeddedness in conventional social relationships, licit and illicit opportunities, and subjective perceptions of risk and rewards all influence criminal earnings.... [There is] strong evidence that drug use is an independent cause of illegal earnings rather than a mere epiphenomenon... Chronic heroin and cocaine use creates a need for money that is analogous to the need for food... (pp. 174-5). As such, these data would suggest that the problem of crime associated with drug use might be more effectively addressed by reducing the demand for drugs and by policies that encourage drug users to “become more embedded in conventional activities” (p.177). Indeed, “[a]s offenders gain more lawful opportunities and become more embedded in work and family relationships, their illegal earnings quickly diminish” (p.179).

Reference: Uggen, Christopher and Melissa Thompson (2003). The Socioeconomic Determinants of Ill-Gotten Gains: Within-Person Changes in Drug Use and Illegal Earnings. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109, 146-185.

Young offenders participating in restorative conferences who appear - according to neutral observers - to be genuinely remorseful were less likely to re-offend than were those rated as not showing regret.

Background. One of the relatively recent approaches to resolving criminal justice disputes - particularly minor ones involving youths - is the use of various forms of conferences involving offenders and victims. Arguments have been repeatedly made that conferencing should reduce re-offending. However, the data supporting the effectiveness of this strategy are more apparent than real. Even the field experiment in Canberra, Australia – probably considered the best overall study of this recent criminal justice approach - did not find statistically significant effects supporting the conclusion that conferences were more effective than courts in reducing re-offending.

This study examines conferences that took place in South Australia in 1998-9. Forty-three percent of the participants had not had any prior official contact with the police before the incident that led to the conference. Detailed observations were made by trained observers and additional data were obtained from the various participants involved in the conferences. This combination of qualitative and quantitative information permits a systematic examination of the nature and processes of conferences. For instance, it was found that 62% of offenders “mostly or fully” accepted responsibility for what they had done, 49% were mostly or fully remorseful and 41% spontaneously offered apologies. In addition, the researchers indicated that “there was mutual good will and positive movement between the offender and victim by the end of the conference” in 55% of the cases (p.740). Further, offenders were seen as being actively involved in 78% of the conferences. While there were clearly positive findings overall, it is still noteworthy that this criminal justice approach was not inevitably and unambiguously restorative.

With regard to recidivism rates, it is interesting to note that a total of 40% of the participants re-offended (defined as any new official incident to which the police responded) within 8-12 months after their conference. The characteristics of those most likely to re-offend included the following:

- Those with (pre-conference) criminal records.
- Those who had moved their residence numerous times.
- Those who did not demonstrate remorse at their conference.
- Those whose conference outcomes were not decided by true consensus.

Interestingly, all conference observers, police officers, conference coordinators, offenders and victims were asked to predict whether the accused would re-offend. Overall rates of accuracy varied from 46% (for victims) to 65% (police), with victims being the most likely group to over-predict re-offending and offenders being the most likely group to over-predict non-offending.

Conclusion. The young offenders most likely to re-offend after participating in conferences seem either to share the same characteristics as those identified by most research as having the strongest association with recidivism (*i.e.* youth with criminal records) or to have cooperated least with the conference process and goals (*i.e.* individuals not showing remorse or disagreeing with an outcome). While victims were not optimistic about the effect of conferences on re-offending, over 90% of them were still in favour of continuing to fund this criminal justice initiative with public money. In this light, it could be argued that “evidence of reductions in reoffending may be more salient to policy makers or politicians than to their constituents” (p.757).

Reference: Hayes, Hennessey and Kathleen Daly (2003). Youth Justice Conferencing and Reoffending. *Justice Quarterly*, 20, 725-764.

The killing of 13 people at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado had a negligible impact on the level of fear among U.S. secondary school students.

Background. In the aftermath of the shooting by two students of 34 people at Columbine High School in 1999 which left 13 dead and 21 others injured, “news accounts proclaimed that students nationwide were markedly more fearful” (p.368) than they had been in the past. In light of the extensive media coverage of the event, it would not be surprising that this media claim were true. Further, in the case that students were, in fact, fearful, it is possible that they would not be able to receive the full benefit of school.

This study takes advantage of the fact that the National Crime Victimization Survey in the United States was being carried out at the time of the Columbine shootings. Because of the nature of the design of this comprehensive survey, those interviewed before and after the shootings were, in effect, randomly sampled from the same population and, as such, were equivalent on all dimensions. Approximately two-thirds of the total sample of 8397 high school students were interviewed between January 1999 and 20 April 1999 (the day of the shooting) and the remaining one third between the day of the event and June of the same year. Data from 1995 were used as a “control” group to ensure that any effects found in 1999 could not be plausibly attributed to other factors unrelated to the Columbine tragedy (*e.g.*, the time of the year in which the interview took place).

Students were asked about their fear of victimization, areas of the school that they avoided because of fear of being victimized, and any special security measures that they perceived to be in place to ensure school safety.

The results were simple. The pre-Columbine data showed that 81.3% of American high school students who were interviewed were “never” afraid at school. Following the tragedy, this figure dropped only slightly to 77.5%. A similar pattern was also found with the overall findings which combined “never” and “almost never afraid at school.” Specifically, 95.2% of American secondary school students rated themselves as part of this response category prior to the Columbine event compared to 94.3% after the tragedy. Clearly, two conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, most U.S. high school students feel safe in their schools. Second, the events at Columbine had little impact on their levels of fear. Interestingly, the only security measure that apparently changed - from the students’ reports - following the Columbine incident was an increased likelihood of finding entrance and exit doors at the school locked. Ironically, this alteration would probably have had no impact on the Columbine shootings since they were carried out by students enrolled at the school who, as such, enjoyed unchallenged access to the institution.

Conclusion. The fact that the vast majority of U.S. high school students felt safe in their schools both prior to and following the Columbine tragedy “appears to present a paradox because of the incongruence with commonly-held expectations that students’ fear greatly increased after Columbine” (p.380). Nonetheless, this finding is similar to estimates of the effects of other incidents involving extreme violence in the U.S. on those not directly involved (*e.g.*, September 11 or the Oklahoma City bombing). Given that school is, and most youths perceive it to be, a safe place (See, for example, *Criminological Highlights*, 2(2)#1 and 4(4)#6), we should be wary of spending scarce resources in an effort to make students feel even more protected than they already do.

Reference: Addington, Lynn A. (2003). Students’ Fear after Columbine: Findings from a Randomized Experiment. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 19, 367-387.