



# *Criminological Highlights:* **Children and Youth**

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This issue of *Criminological Highlights: Children and Youth* addresses the following questions:

1. Does formal court processing of young offenders reduce recidivism?
2. What factors influence members of the New York Muslim community to cooperate with the police in combating terrorism?
3. Are young sex offenders likely to repeat their offences?
4. Does allowing young people to spend a lot of unsupervised time with other youths encourage offending?
5. Do police ‘stop, question, and frisk’ activities reduce crime?
6. Do Black and White Americans see crime in the same way?

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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. These summaries of high quality, policy related, published research are produced by the Centre for Criminology & Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto. The *Children and Youth* edition constitutes a selection of these summaries (from the full edition) chosen by researchers at the National Center for Juvenile Justice and the University of Toronto. It is designed for those people especially interested in matters related to children and youth. Some of the articles may relate primarily to broad criminal justice issues but have been chosen because we felt they also have relevance for those interested primarily in matters related to children and youth. Each issue of the *Children and Youth* edition contains “Headlines and Conclusions” for each of 6 articles, followed by one-page summaries of each article.

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**Formal processing of youths in the youth justice system does not reduce subsequent offending. If anything, youths processed formally are more likely to re-offend than those screened out of the formal system or processed informally.**

A conservative conclusion would be that court processing does not reduce subsequent offending. “Given that the evidence indicates that there is no public safety benefit to [youth justice] system processing, and its greater costs when compared to release, even the most conservative cost-benefit analyses would favour release over [youth justice] system processing” (p. 38). Obviously some youths, because they have committed serious offences, will be brought to court in any jurisdiction and one cannot generalize the findings from these studies to those youth because these studies focused largely on youths charged with relatively minor offences. At the same time it should be noted that “the data from these studies do not support a policy of establishing [formal] diversion programs for juveniles who normally would not have been officially processed...” (p. 39).

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**The willingness of members of the Muslim community in New York to work voluntarily with the police in combating terrorism is determined, in part, by how Muslims are treated by the police and others in the community.**

Most New York Muslim respondents indicated that they would engage in cooperative actions if asked to do so by the police, and most indicated that they would report possible terrorist related activities to the police. The variation that did exist in Muslims’ willingness to combat terrorism appears to be in large part affected by the degree to which Muslims have had positive versus discriminatory interactions with others in American society. Those who felt excluded from American society through overt discrimination, for example, as well as those who reported that the police did not treat them fairly were less likely to be cooperative on terrorism matters. If the cooperation of the western Muslim communities is important, therefore, it appears that western societies have the opportunity to increase that cooperation in large part by examining and addressing aspects of their own treatment of Muslims in their communities.

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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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**In general, youths who spend a lot of unsupervised time with other youths are more likely than youths whose leisure time is supervised by adults to be involved in violence. However, the impact of unsupervised time on involvement in violent crime does not hold for youths who live in close-knit neighbourhoods in which people help and get along with one another.**

Youths are more likely to engage in unstructured socializing with peers in neighbourhoods high in collective efficacy (neighbourhoods in which people look after one another). Parents may be more likely to allow unstructured socializing in neighbourhoods considered to be well-monitored and in which the neighbours are thought of as being trustworthy. It would appear that, at least in terms of violence, parents are making intelligent decisions: unstructured socializing is unrelated to violence in high collective efficacy neighbourhoods. Involvement in violence, then, is not simply a function of the characteristics of the youth or the characteristics of the youth's friends. The neighbourhood in which youths find themselves can, in effect, eliminate the violence-enhancing risk involved with having friends who are involved in crime. From this perspective, policies that support neighbourhoods may serve to reduce violence.

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**The police practice of “Stop, question, and frisk” appears to be an ineffective way to reduce street crime.**

The results “show few significant effects of several ‘stop, question and frisk’ (SQF) measures on precinct robbery and burglary rates” (p. 116) and those results that are significant do not hold across crimes or type of analyses. A cautious conclusion might be that one “cannot conclude from the current investigation that SQF has no impact on crime in New York. But we can be more certain that, if there is an impact, it is so localized and dissipates so rapidly that it fails to register in annual precinct crime rates, much less the decade-long citywide crime reductions that public officials have attributed to the policy. If SQF is effective, but its effects are highly focused and fleeting, policy-makers must decide whether expansions in a policy that already produces nearly 700,000 police stops a year are warranted, especially given the ongoing controversy regarding the disproportionate impact of SQF on racial and ethnic minorities and the possibility that it reduces police legitimacy, which may erode its crime-reduction effects over the long term” (p. 117-118).

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**Race and crime are intimately linked in the US: White and Black Americans explain crime in different ways, favour different policies, and experience crime in quite different ways.**

Blacks’ and Whites’ experiences with victimization and the criminal justice system are different. Their perceptions of the system reflect, to some extent, these differences. Given that Whites and Blacks have different implicit ‘theories’ of the causes of crime, it is not surprising that they come to different conclusions about how best to deal with crime.

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## **Formal processing of youths in the youth justice system does not reduce subsequent offending. If anything, youths processed formally are more likely to re-offend than those screened out of the formal system or processed informally.**

Those making decisions about how to process young offenders often have choices on how to respond to these offenders – especially when youths have committed relatively minor offences. In Canada, police are required to consider measures other than court-based procedures and it is presumed that it is better for many young offenders to be dealt with outside of the formal justice system. To some extent, Canada's 2003 youth justice law has been successful in reducing the use of youth court (see *Criminological Highlights* 10(1)#1, 10(3)#1).

This paper reviews research on the impact of youth court processing on subsequent offending, comparing it to a non-youth-justice-system response to offending. It is limited to 'random assignment' studies in order to ensure that any findings cannot be attributed to pre-existing differences between the two groups of youths.

In all, 29 separate sets of findings, involving 7,304 youths, in studies published between 1973 and 2008 were located that met this very strict (random assignment) criterion. In each study, youths were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: normal court processing or some form of less formal processing. Across studies, the 'less formal processing' varied somewhat. What was important, however, was that by assigning the youths to treatment on a random basis, the two groups ('court processing' and 'no formal processing') can be considered to be equivalent. The authors looked at the longest follow-up period reported in each study (when more than one was reported). These follow-up periods were, on average about 12-13 months long (range 4 to 36 months).

Overall, court processing appeared to *increase* the likelihood that youths would be involved in at least some subsequent offending, though there were non-trivial differences across studies. For those 7 experiments that reported the total number of offences that the youth were involved in (instead of or in addition to simply whether the youth committed a subsequent offence), court processing also had a criminogenic effect. Youths processed by the courts were, on average, involved in more crime than those processed in other ways. Similar effects were found for severity: formal court processing of youths, if anything, increased the severity of subsequent offending.

These criminogenic effects are, however, very small. The studies were broken down in various ways (e.g., those carried out early in the period vs. later, whether the comparison involved the provision of services or the youth was not offered any services if diverted, etc.). None of the sub-sets of studies showed a significant crime-reducing impact of court processing.

*Conclusion:* A conservative conclusion would be that court processing does not reduce subsequent offending. "Given that the evidence indicates that there is no public safety benefit to [youth justice] system processing, and its greater costs when compared to release, even the most conservative cost-benefit analyses would favour release over [youth justice] system processing" (p. 38). Obviously some youths, because they have committed serious offences, will be brought to court in any jurisdiction and one cannot generalize the findings from these studies to those youth because these studies focused largely on youths charged with relatively minor offences. At the same time it should be noted that "the data from these studies do not support a policy of establishing [formal] diversion programs for juveniles who normally would not have been officially processed...." (p. 39).

*Reference:* Petrosino, Anthony, Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, and Sarah Guckenburg (2010). Formal System Processing of Juveniles: Effects on Delinquency. The Campbell Collaboration. Oslo, Norway: [www.campbellcollaboration.org](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org)

## **The willingness of members of the Muslim community in New York to work voluntarily with the police in combating terrorism is determined, in part, by how Muslims are treated by the police and others in the community.**

As in some other countries since September 11, 2001, “Muslim American communities have become a focus for anti-terror policing efforts in the United States” (p. 366). Hence it is not surprising that there is interest in “what circumstances are associated with voluntary cooperation by Muslim Americans in anti-terror policing efforts and in particular, which policing strategies enhance or diminish that cooperation” (p. 366). This study addresses this issue with data from a 2009 survey of 300 randomly selected Muslim Americans living in the New York City area.

The study focuses in large part on issues surrounding procedural justice. Research on procedural justice suggests that people are more likely to comply with the police and cooperate with them when they believe that the police authorities are acting in a legitimate and fair manner. Previous research (*Criminological Highlights*, 4(4)#1, 7(1)#4) has demonstrated that the more police and other justice authorities are viewed as legitimate, the more likely it is that their rules and decisions are accepted.

Muslim Americans’ views of police legitimacy in fighting terrorism were assessed by the level of agreement with statements such as “You should trust these law enforcement agents to make decisions that are good for everyone when they are investigating and prosecuting terrorism” (p. 390). Police legitimacy in fighting terrorism was greatest for those respondents who saw the police as acting in a procedurally fair manner (e.g., making decisions based on facts rather than opinions, applying the law consistently, giving people a chance to express their views before making decisions). Police legitimacy was, however, also related to the extent to

which respondents identified with being American and expressed support for U.S. policies in fighting terrorism.

Those respondents who indicated that they thought that the police acted in a procedurally fair manner within their (Muslim) communities were more likely to indicate their willingness to alert the police to possible terrorism threats. In addition, those respondents who believed that anti-terrorism policies had been created in a legitimate fashion (e.g., that the community had been given an opportunity to provide input and community views were considered) were more likely to cooperate with the police in averting terrorism and they were more willing to alert the police to possible terrorism activities. Those Muslim Americans who reported experiencing discrimination at school, work, or in dealing with authorities, were less likely to be willing to cooperate with the police or report possible terrorism activities to the police. Finally, those respondents who had strong identification with America (e.g., who agreed with the statement that “Being an American is important to the way I think of myself as a person”) were more likely to be willing to alert the police.

*Conclusion:* Most New York Muslim respondents indicated that they would engage in cooperative actions if asked to do so by the police, and most indicated that they would report possible terrorist related activities to the police. The variation that did exist in Muslims’ willingness to combat terrorism appears to be in large part affected by the degree to which Muslims have had positive versus discriminatory interactions with others in American society. Those who felt excluded from American society through overt discrimination, for example, as well as those who reported that the police did not treat them fairly were less likely to be cooperative on terrorism matters. If the cooperation of the western Muslim communities is important, therefore, it appears that western societies have the opportunity to increase that cooperation in large part by examining and addressing aspects of their own treatment of Muslims in their communities.

*Reference:* Tyler, Tom R., Stephen Schulhofer, and Aziz Z. Hug (2010). Legitimacy and Deterrence Effects in Counterterrorism Policing: A study of Muslim Americans. *Law & Society Review*, 44(2), 365-401.

## 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 Redemption? *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42, 164-172.

**In general, youths who spend a lot of unsupervised time with other youths are more likely than youths whose leisure time is supervised by adults to be involved in violence. However, the impact of unsupervised time on involvement in violent crime does not hold for youths who live in close-knit neighbourhoods in which people help and get along with one another.**

A good deal of research has shown that “unstructured socializing with peers [is] associated with general delinquency, substance abuse, and alcohol use” (p. 446). Other research (e.g., *Criminological Highlights* 1(2)#2) has shown that neighbourhoods in which people trust one another and where one can expect neighbours to act for the common good (i.e., neighbourhoods high in what is termed ‘collective efficacy’) tend to have less crime than would be expected on the basis of the characteristics of the residents themselves. This paper looks at the impact of unstructured socializing in neighbourhoods that differ in levels of collective efficacy, the hypothesis being that in neighbourhoods high in collective efficacy (where, among other things, the residents of the neighbourhood appear to have a stake in keeping the neighbourhood safe), unstructured socializing will be unrelated to involvement in violence.

Eighty relatively small neighbourhoods in Chicago were assessed for collective efficacy using residents’ agreement or disagreement with questions such as “People around here are willing to help their neighbours” or “Parents in this neighbourhood generally know each other.”

A separate (but related) longitudinal survey of youths obtained data on unstructured socializing using such questions as “How often do you hang out with friends”. A measure of violent offending was constructed from questions such as “During the last 12 months have you hit someone with whom you do not live?... carried a hidden weapon?... been in a gang fight?” (p. 453). Each youth’s involvement with deviant peers was assessed using questions such as “How many of the people you spend time with have gotten involved in behaviours such as damaging property, attacking someone with a weapon and using drugs” (p. 454). The youths were interviewed for the first time when they were 8-13 years old and were interviewed for the third time when they were 12-19 years old.

The study found that youths who had a larger number of ‘deviant peers’ at their second interview were more likely to come from a family whose parents were not married. Similarly, the authors found some consistency over time. Those youths who reported being involved in violence at their second interview were more likely to report involvement in violence at their third interview. Being involved in large amounts of unstructured socializing was also associated with self-reported violent behaviour. However, the most interesting finding came from an analysis that controlled for involvement with deviant peers, parental supervision, family structure, etc., and looked how unstructured socializing and the type of neighbourhood had an impact on self-reported violent behaviour in the third interview. Unstructured socializing was only associated with increased violence in “low collective efficacy” neighbourhoods. In neighbourhoods that were cohesive and people looked after one another, unstructured socializing was not associated with violence.

*Conclusion:* Youths are more likely to engage in unstructured socializing with peers in neighbourhoods high in collective efficacy (neighbourhoods in which people look after one another). Parents may be more likely to allow unstructured socializing in neighbourhoods considered to be well-monitored and in which the neighbours are thought of as being trustworthy. It would appear that, at least in terms of violence, parents are making intelligent decisions: unstructured socializing is unrelated to violence in high collective efficacy neighbourhoods. Involvement in violence, then, is not simply a function of the characteristics of the youth or the characteristics of the youth’s friends. The neighbourhood in which youths find themselves can, in effect, eliminate the violence-enhancing risk involved with having friends who are involved in crime. From this perspective, policies that support neighbourhoods may serve to reduce violence.

*Reference:* Maimon, David and Christopher R. Browning (2010). Unstructured Socializing, Collective Efficacy, and Violent Behaviour among Urban Youth. *Criminology*, 48(2), 443-474.

## The police practice of “Stop, question, and frisk” appears to be an ineffective way to reduce street crime.

Stop, question, and frisk (SQF) approaches to policing urban areas have often been criticized because they target innocent people and are sometimes used in a racially biased fashion. In New York City, the documented number of police stops increased dramatically in the first decade of this century. In 2010, there were about 26 stops of Black people per 100 Black residents compared to about 3 stops of White people per 100 White residents. Because crime dropped between 2000 and 2010, it is sometimes suggested that SQF approaches were responsible for this decrease. Between 2003 and 2010 about 6.6% of stops in New York City resulted in arrest.

This study examines the impact of police stops on rates of robbery and burglary in 75 New York City precincts between 2003 and 2010. The annual rate of police stops varied from 33 to 4,381 stops per 10,000 people in the general population. Various controls were used in multivariate analyses including neighbourhood disadvantage, neighbourhood stability, the percent Black in the neighbourhood, as well as the overall trend in crime rates. In addition, the analyses were carried out examining the impact of police stops on crime in the current year as well as the impact of stops in each of the two previous years. The research question was straightforward: Do SQF activities in a given year reduce crime in that year and/or the two following years?

There was a small, but somewhat inconsistent effect of police stops on robbery rates in the precinct. Depending on the specific analysis, larger numbers of police stops in the current year or in the year before were associated with a decrease *or an increase* in robbery

rates. The results for burglary suggest that police stops were not associated with a reduction in this form of crime. These same analyses were repeated to determine if there was a consistent effect of SQF *arrests* (the *percent* of SQF events leading to arrest and the SQF *arrest rate*). There were no effects. When the effect of misdemeanor arrests were examined, it was again found that there were no consistent effects on the robbery or burglary rates when full controls were included (a finding similar to previous research: see *Criminological Highlights* 8(4)#1, 8(5)#8).

*Conclusion:* The results “show few significant effects of several ‘stop, question and frisk’ (SQF) measures on precinct robbery and burglary rates” (p. 116) and those results that are significant do not hold across crimes or type of analyses. A cautious conclusion might be that one “cannot conclude from the current investigation that SQF has no impact on crime in New York. But we can be more certain that, if there is an

impact, it is so localized and dissipates so rapidly that it fails to register in annual precinct crime rates, much less the decade-long citywide crime reductions that public officials have attributed to the policy. If SQF is effective, but its effects are highly focused and fleeting, policy-makers must decide whether expansions in a policy that already produces nearly 700,000 police stops a year are warranted, especially given the ongoing controversy regarding the disproportionate impact of SQF on racial and ethnic minorities and the possibility that it reduces police legitimacy, which may erode its crime-reduction effects over the long term” (p. 117-118).

*Reference:* Rosenfeld, Richard and Robert Fornango (2012). The Impact of Police Stops on Precinct Robbery and Burglary Rates in New York City, 2003-2010. *Justice Quarterly*, 37(1), 96-122.



## Race and crime are intimately linked in the US: White and Black Americans explain crime in different ways, favour different policies, and experience crime in quite different ways.

Explanations of the popularity of punitive crime policies in the US without taking into account issues related to race are almost certain to be inadequate. Black and White Americans view crime differently. Understanding the differences in the perceptions of these two groups is important if one wants to understand levels of support for various policies related to crime.

White Americans are more likely than Black Americans to believe that “people commit crime because they don’t care about the rights of others or their responsibilities to society” (p. 31). Black Americans are more likely to explain crime by reference to social or structural factors (e.g., disadvantage). Not surprisingly, therefore, Whites are more likely than Blacks to support capital punishment, three strikes laws, and trying juveniles as adults. More generally, Whites are more likely than Blacks to believe that sentences are not harsh enough.

Blacks, on the other hand, are more likely than Whites to be victims of crime. For example, they are considerably more likely than Whites to experience household burglary and motor vehicle theft, sexual and non-sexual assaults and robberies. The rate of homicide victimization for Blacks is 6.2 times higher than the rate for Whites, a difference that has existed for more than 30 years. Not surprisingly, therefore, people of colour are considerably more likely to report that they avoid certain areas in their neighbourhoods because of crime and that they would be afraid if they did have to venture into these areas.

There are data suggesting that the decisions by the police about which crimes to target disadvantage Black Americans. For example, one study found that Blacks, compared to Whites, were 1.3 times more likely to report using marijuana in the month prior to being interviewed, but were 3.7 times more likely to have been arrested for marijuana possession. Not surprisingly, over the past 20 years, Blacks are considerably more likely than Whites to believe that the American justice system is biased against Black people. This difference does *not* disappear when social class is controlled for. “In fact, highly educated Blacks and Whites are more sceptical of the criminal justice system than their less-educated counterparts” (p. 33). Even simple ‘factual’ information about crime can have surprising effects. One study showed that people who were given information about the over-representation of Blacks among those who are executed were *more* likely to support the death penalty for murder than those who did not receive this information.

Although White Americans are much more likely to suggest that the best way to reduce crime is to invest in police and prisons (10% of Whites endorsed this view compared to only 1% of Blacks), large numbers of both Whites and Blacks did suggest that investment in education and job training would be the most effective way (Whites: 35%; Blacks 58%). More Whites than Blacks (45% vs. 35%) thought that equal investments should be made for both approaches. A small number of each group did not like either approach.

*Conclusion:* Blacks’ and Whites’ experiences with victimization and the criminal justice system are different. Their perceptions of the system reflect, to some extent, these differences. Given that Whites and Blacks have different implicit ‘theories’ of the causes of crime, it is not surprising that they come to different conclusions about how best to deal with crime.

*Reference:* Ghandnoosh, Nazgol (2014). *Race and Punishment: Racial Perceptions of Crime and Support for Punitive Policies*. Washington, D.C.: The Sentencing Project.