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Measuring crime prevention
effectiveness: the social policy
possibilities of 'flourishing'

Rick Sarre

School of Law, University of
South Australia

The prevention of evil

The Danish solstitial celebration is called sankthans. It takes place on the evening of 23 June. It celebrates the day where the medieval wise men and women would gather special herbs and burn witches on a bonfire to cure people.

People were cured =cause and effect.



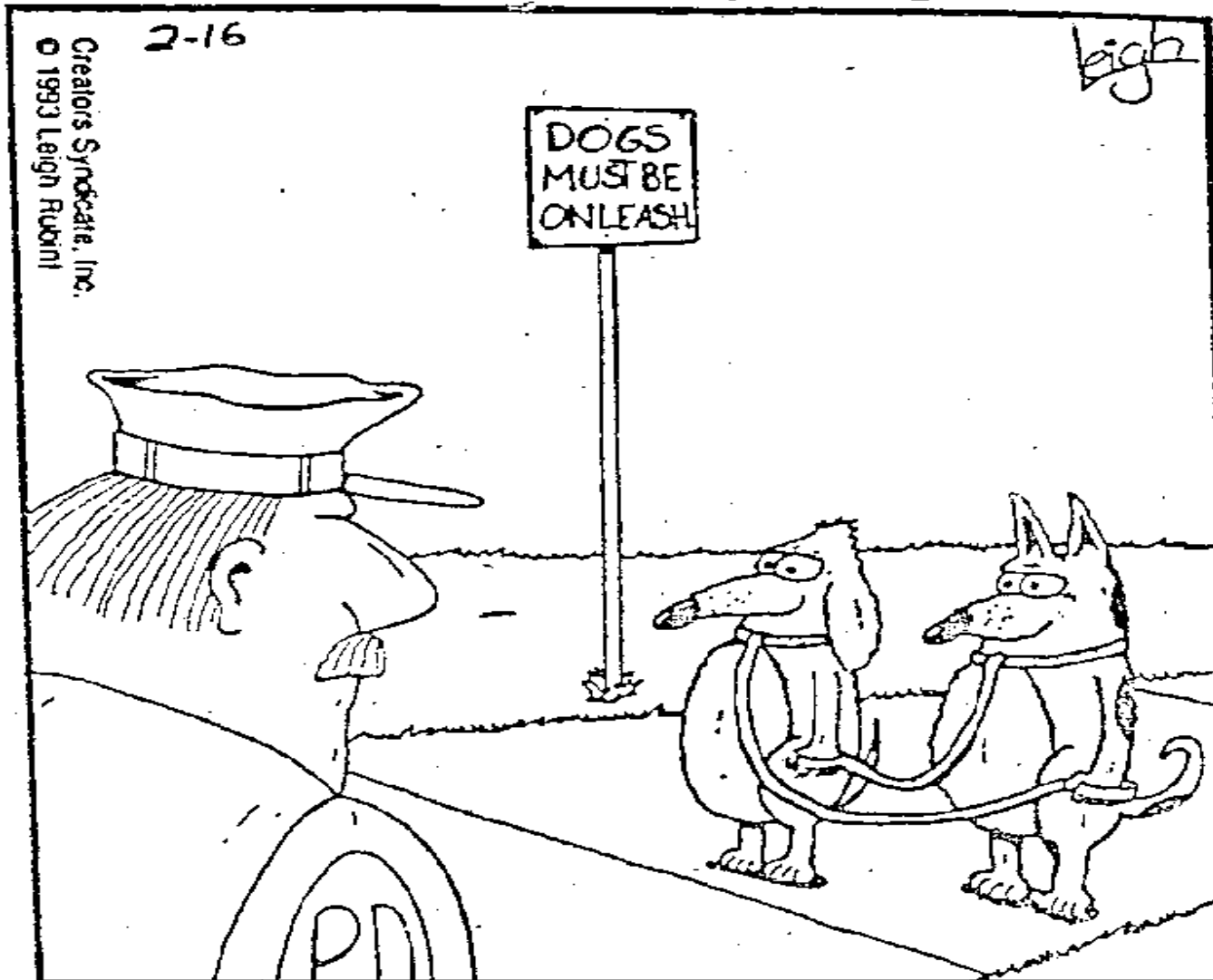
The prevention of evil

We are now a *little* more sophisticated in our assessment of cause and effect vis-à-vis crime. We now speak of evidence-based policy.

(Yet how often do we hear in popular parlance that all we have to do to prevent crime is *lock the crims up*? Not much evidence, yet the causal conclusions are rife.)

Law and ambiguity

Nevertheless I am heartened that lawyers/criminologists are becoming better at dealing with ambiguities ...



**Officer Plod runs into his first
“grey” area of the law.**

Crime prevention

Theorists have usually been classified as promoting either

- Situational crime prevention
- Social crime prevention

Most of the focus is on the latter because it tends to yield the more immediate political responses, and it is easier to measure.



Strike Force Piccadilly

- 2005: ↑ ATM ram raids Greater Sydney Area
NSW Police, ABA, Shopping Centre Council of Australia, CIT firms, ATM Industry Association formed an alliance. Created: 1. priority alarm response system
2. situational prevention (specialist bollards etc)
3. shared intelligence and risk assessment reports
- ❖ Impacts: all raids: ↓ 86% over 3 years
 - ❖ Impacts: successful raids: ↓ 98% over 3 years
(and no evidence of displacement in recorded crimes)

Prenzler, T Strike Force Piccadilly and ATM Security: A Follow Up Study.
Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice. 5(3), 236–247, 2011



We suspect, however,...

that most crime is prevented, in the long term, by factors unrelated to what happens in the justice system.

After all, the justice system cannot control the causes of crime; it can usually only respond to its consequences.

Let's look at one theorist on this ...

Social factors and crime

Bayley argues that 90% of the variation in crime rates among population aggregations of substantial size can be predicted by factors other than police strength, such as population density, ethnic heterogeneity, unemployment levels, income levels, school leaving rates, and household structure (single parent households).

David Bayley, 'Back from Wonderland, or toward the rational use of police resources' in Anthony N Doob (ed). *Thinking About Police Resources*. Toronto: Centre of Criminology Research Report No. 26, 1-34 (1993).

The focus of this discussion

Be that as it may, let's focus for the moment on *social* crime prevention.

Let's ask ourselves,

- What can we say about the links between social disadvantage and crime?
- To what extent is criminality fostered by inequality of opportunity?
- How can this form of prevention best be measured?

Let's look at some theorists

Social factors and crime: the theory

Wilkinson and Pickett: impediments such as low wages, low social security benefits and low public spending on housing and education is criminogenic. Removal of economic impediments to citizens feeling valued would allow a flourishing of human potential which will serve to drive down crime rates.

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* Allen Lane, London (2009).

Social factors and crime

Currie argues that there is a direct link between child abuse and violent crime, and between school failure and crime.

Elliott Currie, *The Roots of Danger: Violent Crime in Global Perspective* Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ (2008).

Elliott Currie, *Crime and Punishment in America; Why the Solutions to America's Most Stubborn Social Crisis Have Not Worked - and What Will* Metropolitan Books, New York, NY (1998).



The BOCSAR study

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)

What is the effect on violent crime and property crime of changes in the probability of imprisonment, the probability of arrest, and income levels? BOCSAR reviewed the data across all Council areas in New South Wales 1996–2008.

Wai-Yin Wan, Steve Moffatt, Craig Jones and Don Weatherburn, 'The Effect of Arrest and Imprisonment on Crime' *Crime and Justice Bulletin*, No. 158, 1-20, 2012.

The BOCSAR study

Violence

A 10% increase in imprisonment risk produces a 2% reduction in violent crime

A 10% increase in arrest risk produces a 3% reduction in violent crime

A 10% increase in household income produces a 15% reduction in violent crime

The BOCSAR study

Property crime

A 10% increase in imprisonment risk produces a 1% reduction in property crime

A 10% increase in arrest risk produces a 1.5% reduction in property crime

A 10% increase in household income produces a 19% reduction in property crime

So,

We can conclude that justice practices (arrest and sentence) have more effect upon *violent crime* than *property crime* (probably because of the greater clear-up rate with regards to the former).

But social factors (in this case, income levels) have a far greater effect on crime rates than these justice practices generally.

Moreover,

Add to this literature the growing literature that explores why people *don't* commit crime ...



Why people *don't* commit crime

Tyler, 2006: People are less likely to commit crime if they believe that the justice and legal systems are seen to be procedurally fair, and not arbitrary. (Any person who asserts that only those who behave properly have rights is adopting the mantra of a totalitarian system.)

Tom Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2006.



Why people *don't* commit crime

Manning, Homel and Smith, 2010: People are less likely to commit crime if they have been the subject of well-conducted early development programs in adolescence.

Matthew Manning, Ross Homel and Christine Smith 'A meta-analysis of the effects of early developmental prevention programs in at-risk populations on non-health outcomes in adolescence,' *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, 2010, 506-519.



Why people *don't* commit crime

Weatherburn and Lind, 1998: People are less likely to commit crime if they have not been subject, as children, to neglect and child abuse. Juveniles who reside in low socio-economic neighbourhoods are more likely to become involved in crime than those (matched on age, race, social class and gender) who do not reside in such neighbourhoods.

Don Weatherburn and Bronwyn Lind, 'Poverty, Parenting, Peers and Crime-Prone Neighbourhoods', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 85, AIC, Canberra, 1998.



Why people *don't* commit crime

Seligman, 1995/2011: He argues that secure and contented juveniles do not descend into psychological difficulty (and crime?) if they have 'built in' resilience. Could we argue that young people are less likely to commit crime if they are more resilient to the troubles that they will encounter?

Martin Seligman, *The Optimistic Child: A proven program to safeguard children against depression and build lifelong resilience*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

Martin Seligman *Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2011.



Why people *don't* commit crime

“Low self-esteem is a consequence of failing in school, of being on welfare, of being arrested – not the cause ... If we, as parents and teachers, promote the doing-well side of self-esteem, the feeling-good side, which cannot be taught directly, will follow. [What we need] is not children who are taught to feel good, but children who are taught the skills of doing well – how to study, how to avoid pregnancy, drugs and gangs, and how to get off welfare.”

Martin Seligman, *The Optimistic Child*, 1995, p 34,35.



Why people *don't* commit crime

Is there a useful link? Is it possible to draw upon Seligman's work to help us determine why people don't commit crime rather than focusing on those who do? If so, how can we determine whether the strategies that encourage 'flourishing' have any value to crime reduction theory?



Why people *don't* commit crime

Dilemma: It is difficult to measure what has *not* happened

Let me suggest we move away from simply noting crime rates and explore

- Lower levels of substance abuse
- Improved educational outcomes
- Lower teen pregnancy rates
- Lower teen suicide
- Lower rates of child abuse
- Or a slowing down of any of these things

Conclusion

AND ... I would like academics to explore the possibilities for crime prevention if we were to build resilience in young people

Q: Are resilient juveniles/people less likely to be criminogenic?

Q: what shall we measure in order to make these connections?

Let's pursue this study as a way of breathing new life into social crime prevention.



Rick.sarre@unisa.edu.au

