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Reducing Crime: Implications for Criminology Present and Criminology's Futures^[1]

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Abstract

Though criminology in the UK is apparently in rude health, with active researchers, well-attended conferences and increased government funding for evaluation, it is in danger of not considering the implications of its actions. Evaluations of crime reduction initiatives, for example, are surely undertaken with the presumption that it is possible to reduce crime. However, these same initiatives are also involved in shaping and, on occasions, controlling people's lives. Criminology needs to develop an ethical debate about the implications of crime reduction, in the same way as there has developed an ethics of criminal justice. An ethics of crime reduction would need to focus on which crimes to concentrate upon, who will experience any crime reduction or crime increase, the pressures and controls which the initiative will place on individuals, firms and neighbourhoods, and the meaning of informed consent for participation in crime reduction programmes.

Introduction

The structure of plenaries at this British Criminology Conference is like Scrooge's ghosts: criminology past, criminology present, and criminology future. But the picture they indicate is no impoverished, starving mite. The number and diversity of presentations in the programme of the conference testifies to the thriving field of study which is criminology present. The growth in criminologists and criminology since the first of the revived series of British Criminology Conferences in Sheffield has been extraordinary. Moreover, having been effectively ignored by UK governments driven by ideologies for their law and order policies and practices for several years, the products of criminological research are now being sought. One of the current themes of the UK government, and of all its departments relevant to crime and justice is evidence-based policy. Literally translated, it means, quite simply, that what research has shown to be effective should find its place in policy and, more importantly, that what has been shown not to be effective should not^[2]. Moreover, new initiatives should be evaluated as to their effectiveness. This should be a cause for rejoicing for social scientists and criminologists in particular. But of course things are not quite as simple as that. The idea of 'effective' has to bear the strain of there being several goals, not all of which are always complementary. For example, in criminal justice, always a matter of balancing competing claims, reducing delay so that juveniles swiftly see reaction following offending, does not sit easily with the need to take time to create reparative outcomes (such as reparation orders from the Crime and Disorder Act 1998), which meet victim needs and are relevant to that offending and that offender.

However, the main focus of this paper is not on criminal policy, but criminology. The key aspect of evidencebased policy as regards criminology is that criminological evidence matters

and hence that criminological evaluation of policy initiatives matters. One of the major aims of all these criminal policy initiatives is to reduce crime. So, for example, Aim A of the current Strategic Plan for the criminal justice system in England and Wales is 'to reduce crime and the fear of crime and their social and economic costs' (Criminal Justice System 1999). There is an ongoing major programme of some £250 million, led by the Home Office, called simply 'The Crime Reduction Programme'^[3]. Local partnerships, mandatory under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, are forcing local authorities, police and other agencies to consider how to reduce crime in their areas. All these initiatives are dripping evaluation money^[4]. A new world is beckoning, indeed has already slid in to surround us, in which our work as criminologists is wanted, our voices may be listened to, our results perused and used. We are no longer crying in the wilderness, criticsers from afar.

But are we prepared for this new world? Can crime be reduced? Do we know how? Or is all this a gigantic sham, a confidence trick in which we don't really expect our evaluations to show positive results, our theories to have any empirical basis in the real world?

I would suggest that it isn't all a sham, indeed that we already know quite a lot of ways to reduce crime (meaning the incidence of victimisation). But I would also suggest that we are not yet prepared to be taken seriously in what we say and that we haven't thought through the implications of impacting the real world: the implications for criminology, the implications for each of us, and more importantly the implications for people in this country who will be affected by our theories, our results and our statements. Obviously I need to justify each of these statements.

Reducing Crime: Implications for Peoples' Lives

First, can we reduce crime? If we consider reducing crime as being the reduction of reported incidents of crime within a particular geographical area, rather than reducing the potential for criminality, then it is clear that we could take, for example, one car park and minimise its rate of car crime (theft of and theft from cars). We can flood it with eyes (human eyes of attendants or police, mechanical eyes of CCTV), surround it with barriers, sticker and leaflet - essentially shame - the car drivers if they ever leave anything remotely interesting to thieves in the car and car crime will decrease in that one car park (see, for example, Webb et al. 1992; Johnston et al. 1993). We can do the same with a small geographical area - flood it with police and CCTV, target suspected offenders, use physical preventive devices, lock up all miscreants. It's called zero tolerance, saturation policing, or 'living in a crime free environment', as the gated cities of America would advertise their protective life style for their residents. But it doesn't need to be done through liberal application of visible gates, uniformed security guards, barriers, bolts and bars, or through policing by the public police. In a prescient article, Shearing and Stenning (1987) analysed the security design style of Disneyworld, showing how the architecture and management of leisure places is aimed at controlling and guiding customers, and at removing trouble or potential troublemakers as quickly as possible to the back regions - and potentially out of the park. The same use of exclusion is clear in work on the management and security of shopping centres (Shapland, 1999).

My point is that, with well-targeted situational crime prevention, working on potential victims and on the built environment, it is certainly possible to reduce crime - but this reduction in crime comes with a price and with implications. The implications are well-known - the income and resource disparities which make middle class areas more able and more organised to cocoon themselves against crime; increased concern about personal safety; the potential for ghettoisation; the drivers towards a fortress society; the encouragement of suspicion towards potential offenders seen as not looking 'like one of us'; the likelihood of confrontational, sometimes ill-targeted, policing or private security; barring access to key parts of modern living (such as supermarkets, pubs, leisure centres) to people, usually young people, who have at one point offended against the rules of conduct. It is essentially, a system of controlling living which is mostly parallel to and independent of criminal justice and the values of criminal justice, and which, in the UK, is controlled largely by private bodies.

The major thrust of the new crime reduction programmes, however, here as in the rest of the world (especially places like Canada and New Zealand) is not situational prevention, though that will continue, but reducing criminality. The move is to institute early intervention

programmes that will intervene in the lives of those young people and their parents who have a cluster of harmful factors in their backgrounds and personal circumstances. It is being driven by the results of meta-evaluations of previous programmes, many of which stem from North America (for example, Sherman et al, nd).

One obvious counter-argument to the use of these early intervention programmes from the United States, Canada and New Zealand is that such programmes may not cross the water well. The programmes may not produce the same results here: crime is a social act, constrained but also enticed by its social context. This argument is clearly correct - and the authors of all the meta-evaluations would agree. However, if governments are keen to reduce crime by reducing criminality, the UK's past history of lack of evaluation of home-grown programmes means that they must necessarily turn abroad if what matters is evidence of success for the programme. This is not a criticism of criminologists. The UK's lack of domestic evidence for reducing criminality initiatives is the result of its bad record of funding such evaluations (and indeed funding relevant programmes). However, the result is that the spread of criminological and criminal policy fashion over the Atlantic is being given another driver. Evidence-driven, in this context, means following in the steps of North American theorising and policy for their particular social context (and I'm not sure that following the US is a good idea, given their volume of violent crime and their prison population!).

There is, however, a more important reason why I am concerned at the spread of early intervention programmes. This is that these programmes also provide straightjackets of social control. They are interventions into people's lives, ones which can support and enrich, but ones which can also stigmatise and control, and which, because they will tend to be offered or compelled by the majority on the minority, in my view are far more likely to confine than empower. They go far further than the previously fashionable situational crime prevention interventions which are largely confined to public and semi-public spaces, or the physical outside of our homes. These early intervention programmes reach into schools, homes and neighbourhoods. They are to do with parenting, friendships, relationships. In a similar way to situational initiatives, however, they are also parallel to and independent of, criminal justice and all its values and aims.

Whatever you call it - community safety, crime prevention, crime reduction, reducing criminality, selling safety - we are creating new influences on people's lives. We need to remember that this is a criminological enterprise, one formed and shaped by the results of evaluations and of criminological research. The results will, of course, not be entirely due to criminologists - there is a veritable feast of partnerships involved in the creation and implementation of such initiatives (local authorities, police, statutory and voluntary agencies, Youth Offending Teams, as well as central government). However, criminologists are integrally involved, and I expect to see, as has happened in Belgium, the evolution of a whole new profession of young criminologist facilitators and evaluators of crime reduction projects.

This means that criminologists are again, as they were in the times of the predominance of the reform philosophy^[5] at the turn of the century and between the 1940s and 1970s, involved in changing and impacting significantly on people's lives and on the shape of UK society for the New Millennium. My concern is that we have not woken up to what we are doing - or even, that we are trying not to think of the implications, but to hide behind a mask of being scientific or 'understanding and explaining'. I'm trying here to tread delicately through the minefield of the disagreements between evaluators as to whether we are looking at outcomes or mechanisms^[6]. Rather I want to draw both their fires by saying that either or both, alone, are insufficient. The evaluator as scientific technician presumes the effects of using a scientific model on real families and neighbourhoods, of treating people as experiments. The evaluator as explainer is also a distant relationship, where the criminologists see themselves as reflecting on society, rather than being part of it and directly affecting people's lives.

Criminology, in my view, has always been linked indissolubly to societal views of crime and of social relations - and hence has always been political. The ideological criminal policy debates of the 1980s and early 1990s brought us face to face again with that fact in the sphere of criminal justice (Garland 1996, Jefferson and Shapland 1994). Crime reduction brings a greater challenge. If society is going to change as a result of our evidence, we need to think through what our models, our theories and our methods will do to people and to society.

Ethics of Criminology

I think that criminologists and criminology need to start to create an ethics of criminology. I'm not referring here to an ethical code for criminologists and doing criminological research, which the British Society of Criminology has developed (and is available at the BSC website: www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/BSC). I obviously support that development. What I am suggesting is that we need to take our consideration of the ethics of criminology further, to expand it from the realm of professional conduct and discipline, towards an idea of ethics in the wider sense of debating the likely impact of criminological research on society.

There has of course always been a discussion, often a heated discussion, about criminal *justice* and its effects, including consideration of the crime control model, the due process model, the impact of imprisonment, the impact of the process of criminal justice on different groups in society and the need for equity monitoring, the impact of treatment, and the welfare v punishment debate in juvenile justice. I think we now need an equivalent discussion about reducing crime and about other aspects of criminological research.

Some aspects of the ethical implications of particular techniques for reducing crime have already been raised. For example, Barr and Pease (1990), Felson and Clarke (1997) and von Hirsch and Wakefield (forthcoming) discuss the ethics of situational crime prevention and in particular the redistributive effect of displacement and the use of exclusionary techniques. Bottoms and Wiles (1995) have considered at length the ghettoisation potential of the modern city and the effects of the housing market in creating and sustaining higher crime areas and area crime reputations. Norris and Armstrong (1999) have looked at the privacy and social control implications of CCTV. However, these are primarily discussions of the effects of the adoption of particular crime reduction policies. They are messages to national and local government. They are messages which criminologists need to take on board when they are considering what to suggest or recommend. But they have not been primarily concerned with the act of research and evaluation, the decision of the researcher to participate in that initiative, the role which the researcher is taking and the influence of the researcher on people in the area and on the initiative's owners and funders.

Ethical discussion cannot of course be confined to criminologists - the impact of criminological evidence on society is a discussion for society as well (even for politicians). But it must be a discussion which includes criminologists. So I think we have to come out from behind our barricades and out of our foxholes, into which we were chased by the very ideological politics of the 1980s, and deliberately start to open up these questions publically, as well as privately. It's quite a scary thing to do. It's not an accident that one rarely sees anything from criminologists nowadays in the newspapers, despite the continued focus of the media on crime. Going public means being visible, being necessarily controversial, possibly risking research grants, moving away from the safe position of being a technocrat and plunging into the fray. But the words of Sir Leon Radzinowicz to the British Criminology Conference dinner in Cardiff in 1993 still ring in my ears:

I would like to see criminologists taking a public stand on controversial and important issues of the moment more often than they do at present, particularly when views are expressed which rest upon an erroneous or distorted impression of what criminology has to say about them. (Radzinowicz 1994:101).

It is not possible to construct a complete ethical debate on reducing crime in one short presentation. It may, however, be helpful to set out some of the questions which I think need to form part of such a debate:

Are we serious about thinking we can reduce crime? If not, why are we taking part in the evaluations connected with current initiatives to reduce crime?

If we think we can reduce crime, then what is the overall impact of our current efforts? What crimes are we concentrating on? Are these the crimes to concentrate on? The old debates which contrasted the considerable effort and research on crime in the streets with the paucity of effort and research on crime in the suites (white collar crime, crimes by businesses, regulatory offences, environmental crime) are still valid.

If we reduce crime, who primarily is going to benefit? It may well affect fear of crime amongst the general population, which could be seen as an overall benefit. If, however, we examine more closely who would have been likely to have been the victims of the crime which was prevented, we may well find that it is the middle class or the affluent who are now less prone to be victims. Equally, to the extent to which displacement occurs, onto whom are we shifting this crime we are reducing in one place, but displacing to another? Are we shifting crime from

the rich to the poor, since the poor are generally less able to demand and to organise the kinds of intervention by public bodies which prevent crime? Hopefully, we are aware of the tendency of the middle classes to pull in resources and are specifically targeting high crime areas, with, if necessary, greater efforts being made in poorer areas. However, we still seem to be unaware of victimisation of businesses, as opposed to victimisation of residential property. So are we shifting crime from poor households to poor businesses and so removing local employment?

Moreover, what kinds of pressures, controls and strains are we putting on people and neighbourhoods whose crime we are reducing, to create that extent of reduction? Are we putting on additional constraints by our methods of evaluation or (inadvertant) stigmatisation through our sampling techniques? What constraints and patterns of living are we creating? Should everywhere be like Disneyworld? How far are we prepared to intervene in people's lives? Just a bit in adults, and only if they commit offences, because adults are likely to challenge our right to intervene or to compel people to live the same kind of lives? But greater intervention in children's lives, because they are less able to speak out - and after all they need educating into the 'correct' way of living? Perhaps we will be putting greater controls on deprived areas?

As criminologists, have we developed and do we practice a suitable idea of informed consent, before we intervene? What would that informed consent look like, for planning towns, for work in schools, or for individual families and parents?

These are questions that medicine, psychology and the other health sciences have had to tackle more and more in the last few years. Should criminology not grow up as a profession and tackle them too?

Notes

1 This paper is based on the text of Professor Shapland's invited keynote address in which she was asked to reflect on the present state of criminology.

2 There are many examples of this new emphasis on evidence-based policy throughout the social science areas. In the criminological field, perhaps the most obvious are the Home Office volume summarising evidence in relation to dealing with offending (Nuttall et al. 1998), the instructions to local authorities, police and others in relation to doing crime audits and creating action plans under the Crime and Disorder Act (Home Office 1998) and the Strategic Plan for the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Criminal Justice System 1999).

3 Home Office News Release 282/98 of 21 July 1998, '£250 million to develop an effective crime reduction strategy of the future'. See also Home Office (1999)

4 Though it remains the case that only certain areas of Home Office policy are liberally funded for evaluation. For example, there is no central government financial provision for local evaluations conducted in the wake of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. There is also only a small pool of Home Office funding for research and evaluation which is not tied to particular major initiatives.

5 I am including here both the philosophy of sentencing and criminal justice that offenders can be reformed by criminal justice initiatives or by punishment, and also the slightly later philosophy that offenders can be rehabilitated by being trained to do work (though their attitudes to crime may not have changed).

6 See the debate between Farrington (1997; 1998) and Pawson and Tilley (1998), for example.

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