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INTRODUCTION: CANADIAN RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES FOR YOUTH AT RISK FOR SERIOUS AND VIOLENT OFFENDING: IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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Bala, Carrington, and Roberts (2009) convincingly summarize the evidence that the Canadian Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), introduced in 2002, has been effective in reducing the number of custodial sentences for young offenders. Coincidental with this finding, youth crimes plummeted and serious violent offending remained relatively stable or in the least did not increase. In effect, this complex law has succeeded in reducing the number of youth who would have been charged with minor property offences. Along with either young offenders convicted of moderate property crimes, or violent offenders who were given alternate community sanctions and programs, they have been diverted from the system thus averting custodial sentences.

The YCJA is complex, not only reflected in its considerable length but also because it incorporates principles from all of the major youth justice models (Corrado, Bala, LeBlanc, & Linden, 1992). It explicitly directs police officers to use informal and formal warnings for minor offences. It also encourages the use of extra-judicial measures with consenting youth that includes diversion to a variety of community programs based on restorative justice designed to reduce the risk for offending. This non-judicial processing reflects corporatist model principles.

For more serious but still moderate property and violent offences, youth are afforded a full array of fair procedural or due process rights including access to defence counsel. Prior to guilty pleas or convictions, Crown Counsel or Prosecutors, along with sentencing judges, have a large number of extra-judicial sanctions, again emphasizing non-custodial options, based on victim and community involvement. These include access to community-based resource programs.

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However, for still more serious but typically not extreme violent offences such as murder with aggravating circumstances, judges, prosecution, and defence counsel can agree to reduce the length of the custodial sentence in exchange for the young offender agreeing to participate in intervention programs beginning in custody and continuing into the community. In effect, this option combines justice model principles of due process and sentencing proportionality along with the welfare model's central principle, that being rehabilitation, which is now viewed as being consistent with the goal of protection of the public. Finally, for the most extreme violent offenders, youth court judges at the request of Crown Counsel can impose an adult-length custodial sentence, again reflecting justice model proportionality principles and crime control's emphasis on public protection (Corrado, Gronsdahl, & MacAlister, 2007).

Canadian-based researchers were engaged in varying ways during the protracted and intense political debate regarding the YCJA. Two of Canada's pre-eminent researchers, Professors Nicholas Bala and Tony Doob, were seconded from their academic positions to assist officials of the federal Department of Justice and their provincial policy counterparts in developing the YCJA. The involvement of Canadian researchers in the construction of Canadian youth justice law and related provincial statutes, as well as the establishment of the specific administrative structures and processes, began in the 1970s. One key early initiative was the federal government's funding of criminology departments and research and graduate programs at the Universities of Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Alberta, Waterloo, and Simon Fraser University. These criminology departments and programs have been instrumental not only in educating undergraduate and graduate students for the past 35 years, but also in undertaking federally funded research projects on youth justice. This involvement dated from the national study in 1980 of the six provincial systems under the 1908 Juvenile Delinquents Act. This and other projects set the precedent for federally funded university-based research on important policy themes related to criminology. In addition, the federally created and funded Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and more recently the federal/provincial/private major funding of multi-university centres of excellence and endowed Canada research professorships, established a strict academic peer reviewed option to conduct basic research in Canada, which included a focus on health, psychology, and criminal justice policy.

In effect, there is a long tradition in Canada for the direct and indirect support by the federal government for research initiatives. With certain exceptions, academics whose research is based on theoretical perspectives that are inherently critical of the Canadian political or economic system, especially with respect to criminal justice matters, have been supported. This relationship is perceived as constructive and largely devoid of biased policy research. More recently, however, there are increasing concerns that this traditional relationship is being altered and may be further threatened, both in terms of

funding level reductions and project selection bias because of the current ideologically polarized federal political climate.

Minimum Age Intervention Strategies: A Legal Conundrum and the Need for Non-coercive Primary or Tertiary Prevention

In Canada and most European countries, the minimum age of legal jurisdiction for youth justice laws is either 12 or 14. Up to 1982, the minimum age in Canada under the Juvenile Delinquents Act (JDA) had been 8 years. The justification for this middle childhood minimum age for coercive interventions by the juvenile court was predicated on the welfare or "best interests" of the child and the absence of punishment. Raising the minimum age generated some controversy initially when the Young Offenders Act (YOA) was passed into law in 1982, and was raised again during the period leading up to the proclamation of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) of 2002. It no longer serves as a politically sensitive issue and is only cited in those rare cases where a child under the age of 12 is involved in a serious violent incident, such as a recent British Columbia case where a violent young offender who had just turned 12 had over 100 prior contacts with the police regarding serious delinquent incidents. The outstanding media and political issue in that instance was the question of why nothing had been done to respond to this child despite the mother's apparent repeated requests for intervention from the provincial Ministry of Children and Family Development. However, neither youth probation officers nor social workers from this ministry had the legal authority to place this youth into any intervention program without his voluntary participation. In other words, unlike the JDA, there was virtually no legal authority for any intervention by the police. The more general policy issue, therefore, relates to the potential to respond to cases where children under 12 years of age engage in serious delinquent behaviours that typically would result in criminal charges for youth 12 and older under the current YCJA.

A Growing Appreciation for Risk and Protective Factors

Cohort studies in Canada and elsewhere have clearly established that serious delinquencies begin before the age of 12 years for a small group of children who subsequently develop serious criminal trajectories into later adolescence and adulthood. Whether characterized as conduct disordered children by Lacourse (Lacourse, Nagin, Tremblay, Vitaro, & Claes, 2003), or life course persistent offenders by Moffitt (1993), these children who engage in early onset serious delinquent behaviours typically have numerous risk factors for serious and violent offending trajectories and, conversely, few protective factors to moderate this outcome.

One common policy response has been to utilize specific or focused school-based primary intervention strategies where all students, usually older children, are exposed, for example, to anti-bullying programs. In addition, there are tertiary-level school programs for students who bully that include restorative justice concepts (Morrison, 2007). This restorative justice approach is particularly relevant in Canadian contexts where there are higher concentrations of Aboriginal students. These programs provide a culturally

sensitive response to discipline incidents generally and for those who have more serious delinquent and criminal offending specifically. In addition, Aboriginally-aware school-based programs increasingly appear to be among those promising approaches that reduce the appeal of Aboriginal-based youth gangs in those provinces where such gangs have become institutionalized. These programs are now appearing in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. However, there is the concern that waiting until Aboriginal students are in middle and high schools when they have already experienced poor school performance and/or school dropout in order to provide programs to reduce their risk and increase their protective factors against joining gangs, reduces their effectiveness (Cohen & Corrado, 2011). This concern applies equally to non-Aboriginal students regarding gang involvement, especially among youth from low social capital families, and from visible immigrant minority ethnic groups in major Canadian cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary, who reside in neighbourhoods with adult or youth gangs engaged in drug trafficking.

This focus on school interventions in Canada has been part of a longer tradition of cohort studies that have identified the earliest risk factors for serious and violent offending across the life course. The most notable ongoing research is the work of Richard Tremblay, Professor of Pediatrics, Psychiatry, and Psychology at the University of Montréal and the Director of both the Research Unit on Children's Psycho-Social Maladjustment and Health Canada's Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development. Tremblay's pioneering research reported that toddlers who were aggressive could have their trajectories successfully altered when parents received appropriate intervention. This intervention resulted in dramatic reductions in all types of aggression. However, for those children whose aggression did not abate, school experiences with teachers and students were more likely to be negative since their aggression evoked withdrawal by peers, social isolation, and discipline by teachers. According to Tremblay, chronic physical aggression (CPA) was important in explaining poor school performance, accumulated learning deficits, and attraction to anti-social peer friendships that were often associated with school-related bullying.

While CPA among children from all income strata and neighbourhoods has been identified, the concentration of CPA in certain schools and neighbourhoods is also found to be associated with low social capital families portrayed as having lower education, higher levels of unemployment, and social isolation, along with additional health, mental health, and/or substance abuse problems. They were also found to reside in neighbourhoods with higher levels of social disorganization, economic disadvantage, and delinquency/criminality. Boys, particularly from young single mothers with this risk profile, were at a higher risk for CPA. These critical relationships regarding CPA in childhood are characterized by certain family structures, neighbourhoods, and schools, and have been the focus of policy research in the related disciplines of psychology, medicine, education, sociology, and criminology. One important policy rationale is based not only on a concern for the victims of CPA children, but also the likelihood that CPA is strongly associated with long-term serious and violent offending trajectories and incarceration, accompanied by higher rates of victimization and engagement in harmful

high-risk behaviours. Without effective interventions, this criminal trajectory increases the likelihood of the intergenerational transmission of risk factors. For example, having a parent involved in criminality is among the strongest predictors of children's likelihood of criminality (Farrington, 1998).

Following Tremblay's landmark research that has stretched over 35 years, several more recent research projects focused on the transition from childhood to adolescence have informed policy both in Canada and internationally. The Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD) is one such prospective longitudinal study of a representative sample of infants born in the Province of Québec in 1998 involving 2,000 families and 2,100 children (Japel, Tremblay, & Côté, 2005). The first age in this study was 5 months and waves of interviews have continued to, most recently, 2010. Early child developmental risk and protective factors such as school readiness, development of literacy, vocabulary, and school achievement have been identified as related to patterns in childhood and adolescent emotional, cognitive, behavioural, social, and school adjustment.

A related research project is Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (2010), which involved an initial sample of 22,000 children ages 0-11 years. This sample is supplemented with newborns in succeeding waves every other year. This study is designed to both construct developmental trajectories and provide immediate data of risk and protective factors covering a wide range of ages regarding developmental health, education, and other policy-relevant social problems for children.

These two major research projects have essentially confirmed that risk and protective factors are multi-level, involving individual, family, neighbourhood, regional, and multiple other domains. In addition, for policy purposes, inequalities in early development were evident by kindergarten age and developmental problems increased as family income decreased. However, while the children with the greatest number of risk factors were most evident at the bottom of the family income spectrum, these risk factors were also evident, albeit to a far lesser degree, in middle-income families. From a policy perspective, programs aimed at reducing risk and increasing protective factors need to involve at-risk children generally and not solely those from the lowest income families.

Late Childhood, Serious Delinquency, and Adolescent Criminality

Given that both the YOA and YCJA minimum age jurisdiction was and is age 12, early onset delinquency and adolescent criminality has been a major focus of other pre-eminent Canadian researchers including Marc LeBlanc and Marcel Fréchette (1989) from the University of Montréal. LeBlanc utilized a large sample of adjudicated delinquent youth from Montréal, Québec as the basis of his innovative contributions to the early developmental theories. In the 15-year follow-up of his original sample, Kazemian and LeBlanc (2004) identified two developmental pathways between adolescence and mid-adulthood. The organized pathway is characterized by individuals with utilitarian motives who resort to the serious planning of their crimes. This is in contrast to the disorganized

pathway, characterized by individuals who are hedonistic, thrill seeking, and poorly organized with a high propensity for alcohol and drug use. Somewhat surprisingly, increasing disorganization with age was evident in both pathways. Crime contexts such as situational components and criminal opportunities, rather than individual characteristics, were better predictors of patterns of criminality into adulthood. LeBlanc's pathway models contributed to the current wave of research exemplified by fellow University of Montréal researcher Eric Lacourse (Lacourse et al., 2003), who has also identified additional adolescent and adult onset pathways to criminality.

Professors John Hagan and Bill McCarthy undertook a major study of "street kids" in Vancouver and Toronto that revealed the survival basis of most of their criminality, as well as the importance of intensive programs for these youth to reduce both their criminality and high rates of victimization (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Hagan elaborated his theory of the powerlessness of high-risk youth, which was further confirmed by the more recent research of Steve Baron on street youth in Edmonton, Alberta. Baron (2004) however, utilized Agnew's strain theory to explain this high-risk lifestyle and criminality amongst vulnerable youth.

Canadian researchers Sibylle Artz (1998), Marlene Morretti, and Candice Odgers (Moretti & Odgers, 2006; Moretti, Odgers, & Reppucci, 2010) have undertaken studies of the developmental patterns of girls, including those engaged in serious violence. While profiles of risk and protective factors predicting female criminality were somewhat different from those for boys, there was considerable overlap. Female criminality still was far less violent than male criminality and treatment interventions had a greater likelihood of being effective if key gender differences were considered, irrespective of risk or protective profiles.

The Use of Broad-based Surveys to Influence Policy

More generally, Canadian researchers and government-related funding agencies have emphasized multi-method approaches including population-based surveys, longitudinal surveys, linked-data approaches, and, in certain cases, integrated information systems from individual ministry data sets to evaluate risk and protective factors. These include the key provincial ministries in such areas as Health and Education, Children and Families, and Criminal Justice. In addition, Canadian researchers have been at the forefront of the social indicators approach for the evaluation of risk factors. The Composite Learning Index (CLI) is one such example using social indicators to provide educational policy and basic research data drawn from national and regional perspectives (Canadian Council on Learning, 2010). The use of social indicators is a helpful guide for provincial policy in British Columbia based on the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The EDI (Janus & Offord, 2007) involves information on kindergarten students examining five developmental domains: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication and general knowledge. Both singularly and in combination, these methodologies have formed the basis of information for prospective developmental

trajectories in several theoretical and policy domains including the child delinquent to adolescent and adult serious and violent offending trajectories. The B.C. Ministry of Education is mobilized to adjust their policies and funding priorities according to specific school districts and neighbourhoods according to their identified patterns of risk for learning problems and needs.

Linking Research to Policy in Canada

There is a tradition in Canada linking multi-disciplinary basic research on children under 12 to both theory development and policy research on delinquency and subsequent serious criminal trajectories into adolescence and adulthood. However, despite this tradition there are few provincial programs regarding serious delinquency explicitly focused on reducing child risk and increasing protective factors. Instead, as discussed above, most programs respond indirectly to this outcome by responding to the health needs of families and children, poverty-related risk factors, domestic violence and child maltreatment, early childhood learning problems, and school performance.

Canadian Crime Prevention Centre

The Canadian Crime Prevention Centre (CPC) within the federal Ministry of Justice has a mandate to support research concerning youth criminal trajectories and the related reduction of risk, along with the enhancement of protective factors to either prevent the onset of long-term criminality or moderate it once it has taken place. As a result, CPC has initiated several studies with prominent researchers across Canada representing a variety of disciplines to review key theoretical and policy themes involving youth criminality in Canada. A major emphasis is on Canadian programs that have been effective or, in the least, promising. In 2008, a conference was held in Ottawa during which researchers shared their work with policy officials from many of the federal ministries and non-governmental agencies that are involved with youth at risk for serious criminality. These projects will either have been, or are about to be, published in CPC reports. In addition, the CPC encouraged the selection of certain reports for revision to journal publication in Canada to reach the widest possible national and international professional audiences. The co-editors of this special edition approached Professor Sibylle Artz, co-editor of the *International Journal of Children, Youth and Family Studies*, who enthusiastically supported this special edition. The co-editors based the choice of articles according to their contribution to understanding the Canadian context of key policy themes and, more generally, to their representation of several major Canadian themes of theory, policy, and research that have gained international recognition.

The Current Special Edition

This supplemental edition of the *International Journal of Children, Youth and Family Studies* represents recent work by some of Canada's outstanding researchers in the area of youth at risk. It focuses on the further refinement of our knowledge with respect to the trajectory of youth crime, the specific correlates of youth violence,

calculating the costs of crime in the context of certain trajectories, assessment strategies, and the development of an effective intervention for youth under the age of 12 years.

Longitudinal Studies. The study by MacRae, Bertrand, Paetsch, and Hornick on non-criminally involved youth, and with youth beyond their entry level point for a range of services within the youth justice system is far-ranging. They share a common purpose in advancing an appreciation for the diversity in the pathways that can lead to a certain offending profile and/or persistence in offending, along with an understanding of the nature of the offences that are incurred.

Corrado and Freedman provide youth risk prediction and profiling in relation to policy development. Consistent within the historical context summarized above, these two authors conclude, "the literature is now sufficiently developed and specified within a developmental framework to provide a degree of specificity as to what prevention strategies at which developmental points will best target appropriate risk in the context of evidence-based strategies."

Youth Violence. Leschied summarizes the correlates of youth violence in drawing on relevant literature that ranges from maternal health and pregnancy to health, developmental, social, educational, and sex determinants. A summary is provided of the correlates as they relate to intervention strategies that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful.

Cost of Crime. Craig, Schumann, Petrunka, Khan, and Peters address the complex area of attaching costs to youth crime. They draw on a sample from the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* research within a framework that identifies different trajectories of youth offending. Reporting on children ranging from 8 through 14 years of age, Craig and her colleagues at Queen's University factor differential costs associated with youth offending by accounting for six separate trajectories of offending and the costs associated with each trajectory reflected in service utilization and justice processing, health care, and social assistance.

Assessing Risk. The *Cracow instrument for multi-problem violent youth*, reported by Lussier, Corrado, Healey, Tzoumakis, and Deslauriers-Varin, moves beyond the assessment of general criminogenic risk and focuses on the risk and need factors associated with very young children with respect to their potential for later aggression. These test developers view the Cracow as holding potential for differentiating particularly highly physically aggressive children within the family environment and parenting domains, and further view its future development as filling a void for instruments that can be used in helping to screen for the needs of very young, highly physically aggressive children.

Secondary Prevention Strategy. Augimeri, Walsh, and Slater provide a summary of the components of a community-based treatment strategy that integrates research and evaluation within service delivery to check for the integrity of findings, and ultimately,

addresses the question of what it takes to support the portability of a successful intervention.

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