

Pathways and Crime Prevention

Theory, policy and practice

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EDITED BY
**ALAN FRANCE
AND ROSS HOMEL**

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Introduction

Pathways and crime prevention: a difficult marriage?

Alan France and Ross Homel

For at least a quarter of a century the study of the developmental origins of crime and delinquency has been, in the words of Nagin and Tremblay (2005: 873), 'both an important and contentious topic in criminology'. Indeed, as these researchers note, the contemporary international wave of research within this genre is 'testimony to the central position of what has come to be called developmental criminology' (2005: 874). We estimate that since 1990 the journal *Criminology* has devoted at least one third of its articles to some aspect of developmental criminology. Many other journals, broader perhaps in their theoretical and methodological orientations than *Criminology*, are also now devoting considerable space to themes such as the effects of child abuse and family violence on children and young people's personal development, or the influence of poverty and social exclusion on pathways towards adulthood and perhaps towards crime.

Our aim with this book is to add to this growing body of knowledge, particularly from an Australian and United Kingdom perspective, and to highlight some important theoretical, methodological and policy debates. Drafts of all the chapters were delivered at an international symposium we organised in Brisbane in September 2005. The symposium had the title *Pathways and Prevention*, and had as a primary aim the creation of a dialogue between prevention researchers and developmental and life-course criminologists and others who do research relevant to the understanding of pathways into and out of crime. We wanted to know how prevention research informs pathways research, and to explore the implications of pathways research for prevention policies and planning.

Woven throughout the book are six core themes that emerged from the symposium papers and the discussions about them:

- improving the *conceptual foundations of pathways research*;
- deepening and widening our thinking about the *methods* that are used in pathways and prevention research;
- exploring new *empirical research into pathways and social contexts*;
- applying the insights of pathways thinking to the *design and implementation of preventive interventions*;
- exploring new *evidence from evaluations of preventive interventions*;
- reflecting on the *intersections between research, practice and policy*.

Reflecting these themes, the book is divided into two parts. Part 1 concentrates mainly on the first four themes, drawing on seven symposium papers first published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* (2006: Volume 39 No. 3), and two other symposium papers that explore continuities in specific problems (sexual victimisation and bullying) across the life course. Part 2 of the book consists of seven symposium papers that focus on the last three themes that are all related to the theory, policy and practice of prevention from a life-course or developmental perspective. The authors of these chapters are united by an interest in improving prevention strategies by drawing upon a contextualised understanding of pathways and of the institutional and political forces that determine the sustainability of initiatives and that shape the policies that inform practice.

An interdisciplinary emphasis: the Brisbane international symposium

The symposium brought together approximately 60 scholars from a number of countries and from many disciplines, ranging through anthropology, criminology, early childhood studies, education, paediatrics, psychology, political science, public health, social work and social policy, sociology, and statistics. This interdisciplinary mix was quite deliberate, since, as we note in Chapter 1, pathways research draws broadly on 'theoretical and empirical work in the field of life-course studies and the developmental sciences, including developmental psychology, life-span sociology and psychology, life-history research, and studies of the life cycle' (see p. 12).

Criminology in the past two decades has made important contributions to these fields, and indeed is perhaps coming to be viewed as a model for how some of these disciplines could implement important innovations in life-course theory and methods of inquiry. For example, it is argued that literacy scholars should be looking to longitudinal research in criminology and the health sciences in order to expand the breadth of topics engaged within reading research (Vanderstaay 2006). Nevertheless the criminological corpus overall is small in comparison with that of other disciplines, reflecting criminology's specialised focus. We wanted to explore what light might be thrown by cognate research on problems that currently preoccupy criminologists, such as the role of life events in influencing the life course, the theorisation of social context and of human agency, the extent of and predictability of continuity or discontinuity in antisocial behaviour from childhood to adulthood, and the origins and consequences of crime and violence and other problem behaviours (Farrington 2005; Sampson and Laub 2005).

Some of the funding for the symposium came from the interdisciplinary UK research network Pathways Into and Out of Crime that is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (<http://www.pccrd.group.shef.ac.uk>) and a number of speakers spoke about their research through this network. Other speakers were members of the Australian Developmental Crime Prevention Consortium, an interdisciplinary group that wrote the 1999 federal government report *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia*. Some speakers were not members of either of these groups and presented papers from the perspectives of their own or in some cases other disciplines. This interdisciplinarity has been expressed throughout this book in discussions on both pathways and on prevention.

For example, criminology has always been strongly influenced by psychology (Garland 2002), but the influence has tended to come from a kind of psychology that accords a central place to individual development at the expense of external influences. In their chapters Jacqueline Goodnow and Jeanette Lawrence, both developmental psychologists, contest this view of development, raising important questions about the social contexts that help shape individual biographies and the nature of person-environment interactions across the life course. In our own paper we approach the question of pathways by drawing more upon the sociological literature, especially the works of writers such as Bourdieu (1991), arguing that much debate in this area could benefit from theories that offer explanations of the

cultural practices of young people in disadvantaged communities. From a different angle Don Weatherburn, trained as an experimental psychologist, questions our ability to explain juvenile crime rates at the aggregate level using sociological constructs of informal social control such as collective efficacy. He and Bronwyn Lind argue that the overwhelming weight of evidence supports an individual-level explanation, with the key process being the corrosive effects of poverty on the capacities of families and parents to provide loving, nurturing environments for their children.

New insights at the symposium did not only arise from debates between psychologists and sociologists. Linda Caldwell and Ed Smith come from a leisure studies background and draw not only upon recent debates within their own discipline but also on their own data to show how leisure and its theorisation is critical to the developmental perspective on youth crime. A major emphasis in the papers from the ESRC Network is the relevance of social anthropology and cultural studies to enhancing our understanding of pathways into and out of crime. Hazel Kemshall and her colleagues, for example, draw upon the work of Lupton (1999) while Kaye Haw uses the work of Douglas (1966) and Barthes (2000) to show how understanding cultural practice can add significant knowledge to our understanding of social processes. As a final example, Marie Leech, a social worker by training, draws with her colleagues on such diverse fields or 'lenses' as organisational learning, knowledge management and integration and implementation sciences to analyse how the learnings from a community-based developmental project can be captured and translated into routine practices.

Creating dialogue between pathways and prevention research

As we have already stated, we very much wanted at the Brisbane symposium to create a dialogue between those researching pathways and those researching prevention. However, it is striking how little attention pathways researchers (including developmental criminologists) seem to pay to prevention. In the voluminous literature on longitudinal studies in criminology the implications for prevention are often reduced (at best) to a listing of risk factors that may be 'both causal and modifiable' (Farrington 2003: 175). As one example of many, only in the very last sentence of their chapter on the development of male offending in the Pittsburgh Youth Study do

Loeber and his colleagues (2003: 131) observe that 'One of the greatest challenges for us in the future is to translate research findings into practice ... challenges include the generation of information relevant for preventive interventions'.

Similarly, in the larger life-course literature little attention is paid, at least explicitly, to prevention or early intervention. For example, the 728-page *Handbook of the Life Course* (Mortimer and Shanahan 2004) has no references to these terms in its index, and none of the 34 chapters appears to mention them. In fact there is plenty of material in the book that provides food for prevention thinking, particularly the discussions of desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub 2004; Uggen and Massoglia 2004), and the discussion of social capital as a unifying concept for understanding the links between socio-economic status and health over the life course (Frytak *et al.* 2004). However, the lessons must be drawn out by the assiduous reader.

While we did our best to get pathways authors presenting at the symposium to write about the implications of their work for prevention, few realistically managed to 'cross the divide'. Most papers in Part 1 of this book focus to a large extent on theoretical or empirical issues to do with pathways into and out of crime. This being said, all the papers give us valuable insights into issues that we might need to consider when constructing future prevention programmes. By way of illustration, the ideas that Jacqueline Goodnow proposes for describing social contexts have important preventive implications, for example by drawing our attention to *when* in the life course we might intervene. Limiting the focus to the early years leads to a limited view of contextual influences across the life-span, a theme amplified within an historical and policy context by Alan Hayes in Part 2. Similarly, Jacqueline's discussion of context as routes or opportunities is critically important because it points to such preventive strategies as making routes available for disadvantaged young people and keeping them open, a point we explore at some length in our own chapter.

The difficulties in bridging the gap between pathways and prevention research are not all one-way. If pathways researchers tend to treat prevention problems as an afterthought, prevention researchers have not generally been very energetic in absorbing the pathways literature and theorising the prevention process in the light of new findings about life-course development. Much prevention work is very 'mission-oriented' and focused on technical processes that take a set of problems to be tackled as unproblematic. When prevention has been informed by evidence what tends to emerge

is simple models that link social problems to 'risk and protection', giving limited attention to the complex processes that underlie these apparently straightforward statistical relationships (Hemel 2005).

Conclusion

Developmental criminology and life-course themes, including developmental prevention, have not been as prominent in the writings of criminologists from Australia and New Zealand in the past two decades as they have been in work in North America. In the UK 'pathways research' is more entrenched and certainly there seems to be no end to government funded prevention initiatives, but the dominant risk-prevention paradigm has created deep divisions. We offer this book as a contribution to the field that draws especially (but not solely) on work being done in Australia and the UK. Our hope is that the theoretical, methodological and policy issues raised will heighten interest in pathways and prevention research and lead to fruitful interdisciplinary collaborations that help to create better models for theory and practice.

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