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New Study Reveals Surprising Way Violence Exposure Impacts Children

The horror of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT called attention to a number of pressing research questions, including the impact of violence exposure on children. Interest in this issue is so high that a recent study – led by CJPRI Associate Director Laura Hickman – appeared on a top journal’s list of 20 “most read” articles within just two months of release, alongside articles published years earlier.

The study, appearing in the April issue of Journal of Interpersonal Violence, is unique in that it looks at a large sample of young children with documented exposure to violence of various sorts. Dr. Hickman and colleagues from the RAND Corporation tested whether negative symptoms in young children were associated with: (1) a lifetime count of exposure to all kinds of violence lumped together, (2) the frequency of exposure to specific types of violence, or (3) exposure to more than one broad category of violence.

The study looked at 16 different types of violence that fell into four categories: experiencing physical assault, experiencing sexual assault, personally witnessing violence against someone else, and experiencing maltreatment/neglect at the hands of caregiver.

The researchers found that frequency of exposure and specific types of violence exposure did not independently impact child mental health, behavioral problems or parenting stress outcomes. The researchers were surprised at the findings around a question that initially seemed much too simple: What about exposure to more than one broad category of violence? No matter how frequently they were exposed to violence of particular kinds, Hickman said, “When the exposure pattern included more than one broad category, we found that children and families had more problems.”

Hickman notes that the next step is to see whether similar results can be found using other groups of children and families. If this pattern appears consistently, “then we need to roll up our sleeves as a field and do the hard work of figuring out why,” Hickman says.

Eventually, studies of this type might help refine the way mental health professionals think about risk factors of longer-term problems for children exposed to violence of all sorts. “Of course, it’s important to provide help and support for all children exposed to violence,” but Hickman concludes, “it may be that we need to do something extra or something different for kids whose violence exposure falls into more than one category.”

Use of force incidents involving Portland police officers declined almost 60 percent between 2007 and 2011. Most residents of Portland, however, believe the opposite. Nine out of ten residents believe that use of force by police officers declined almost 60 percent between 2007 and 2011. Most residents of Portland, however, believe the opposite. Nine out of ten residents believe that use of force incidents have either increased or stayed the same. These are the findings of a new CJPRI study, entitled “Public Perceptions Regarding the Use of Force by Police.” Data for the study were collected as part of the Portland Criminal Justice Survey. Study authors, Greg Stewart, Kris Henning and Brian Renauer, recommend that police agencies with declining use of force trends communicate those declines to the public.

According to study co-author Kris Henning, “Use of force incidents often generate significant media coverage, coverage that can impact the community’s opinion on the frequency of these events. Police departments need to do a better job identifying trends in their data and making sure the public is informed about both positive and negative changes.”

The 2012 survey, co-sponsored by CJPRI and Criminology & Criminal Justice Online, included 2,461 Portland residents representing 40 neighborhood areas. Researchers asked the residents a series of questions related to their perceptions of crime, criminal justice and crime control efforts.

The use of force study is one of series of studies related to perceptions of crime coverage in the local news media and fear of crime in the local community. CJPRI research briefs summarizing these and other study findings are available at www.pdx.edu/cjpri.
Researchers To Evaluate New “Smart Probation” Effort

Today, cost effective management of correctional populations is more important than ever. Community supervision of offenders is a dramatically cheaper option than incarceration. However, Oregon currently has only about 500 certified parole and probation officers available to supervise more than 31,000 felony offenders. With public funding increasingly tight, hiring more officers isn’t realistic to improve supervision but Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) has a plan. It has asked Dr. Jody Sundt to figure out whether the plan works.

Under a grant entitled “Building the Capacity to Deliver Smart Probation: A Research Strategy to Promote Fidelity to Correctional Best Practices,” Dr. Sundt will lead a team of PSU researchers in the evaluation of DOC’s new federally-funded training effort entitled “Smart Probation.” The training effort includes plans to build the capacity to deliver ongoing training in correctional best practices to Oregon parole and probation officers.

Dr. Sundt is a natural choice to lead the evaluation, given her expertise in correctional research and practice. The team will also include Dr. Emily Salisbury, also an expert in correctional best practices. In addition to conducting the outcome evaluation, the team will advise DOC on developing the new training efforts and putting them into place.

“We’re looking forward to getting involved in this effort,” notes Dr. Sundt. “It has the very noble goals of simultaneously improving public safety, reducing returns to prison and saving taxpayers money. Our role is to help answer questions about whether these goals are being met.”

The DOC’s Smart Probation effort, funded by the Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, kicked off this spring and the two-year evaluation effort is expected to conclude in summer 2015.

Standing Room Only For American Whistleblowers

What would you do if you discovered wrongdoing, even criminal behavior, in your workplace? This was the central question raised by the speakers participating in the May stop of the American Whistleblower Tour at PSU. The tour features prominent whistleblowers who have taken courageous steps to speak out about wasteful, dangerous and/or criminal activities in their workplace.

Produced by the Government Accountability Project, the PSU stop of the American Whistleblower Tour featured Walt Tamassitis, former Deputy Chief Process Engineer and Research & Technology Manager for the Waste Treatment Plant at the Hanford Nuclear Site. In front of a standing-room only crowd, Dr. Tamassitis explained that he had been removed from his position in retaliation for raising safety concerns at Hanford, the largest and most contaminated nuclear site in the U.S. The accompanying panel -- Dana Gold, Senior Fellow with the Government Accountability Project and Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge -- discussed the critical role of whistleblowers in safeguarding the public against unethical and criminal behavior by corporate and government agencies.

The tour was brought to PSU through the efforts of Dr. Danielle McGurrin, because of the role whistleblowers play in the study of corporate crime and regulatory oversight. Dr. McGurrin explains, “Corporate crime and malfeasance are often quite complex and can be very difficult to detect, police, and prosecute. Whistleblowers play an important role in reporting illegal and harmful behavior in the workplace that might otherwise remain undiscovered or further delay necessary remedial action.”

Sponsorship for the event was provided by the Hanford School of Government, the Division of Criminology & Criminal Justice, the Alpha Phi Sigma/Pi Sigma Upsilon Criminal Justice Honor Society, and the PSU Speakers Board.

CJPRI’s Covelli Named New PPB Training Analyst

Emma Covelli has always stood out. As a graduate student, she gained the notice of the CCJ faculty with her exceptional statistical skills and outstanding work ethic. It didn’t take long before she was appointed as a research assistant and even took on an instructor role within the Division. Upon graduation with her master’s degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice, Ms. Covelli was hired on as a research analyst within the CJPRI.

In that capacity, Emma Covelli excelled. Her key focus has been on supporting and building the CJPRI’s law enforcement training program. Through her tireless efforts, the program has continued to grow, gaining sponsors and acclaim along the way. It was these activities that brought her to the attention of the Portland Police Bureau, which tapped her for a temporary position supporting its diversity efforts.

In June, the Portland Police Bureau offered Ms. Covelli a position, which is in many ways, her dream job. She will work as an Analyst focusing on the development and assessment around the Bureau’s officer training efforts on the use of force. The new position was created based upon a federal recommendation made to the Bureau.

“I can’t think of anyone more suited for this critical job,” remarks CJPRI director Brian Renauer. “We will miss having Emma’s day-to-day involvement in our work here but she is going to be a huge asset to PPB in this new role.”

For her part, Ms. Covelli remains characteristically humble about all the attention. “It felt very strange to have something so non-faculty rank in the top 50 most cited articles appearing in the International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology. The City of Portland awarded a grant to the CJPRI team of Brian Renauer, Kris Hennings and Kimberly Kahn, in partnership with the Portland Police Bureau, to study the perceptions of crime and police services in the city.

Emma Covelli’s resourceful outreach to Dr. Joseph Graves—famed scholar of race and ethnicity—about CJPRI’s racial profiling work motivated him to make a rare visit. Dr. Graves came to Portland as the featured speaker at a CJPRI-sponsored forum on race, ethnicity and the criminal justice system.

Yet again, the National Institute of Corrections called upon Emily Salisbury to deliver technical assistance to a state department of corrections on the topic of improving supervision and treatment policies for female populations.

Kudos Corner

Danielle McGurrin was recently invited to serve as guest co-editor of Western Criminology Review’s special white-collar crime issue, which featured her work and those of other noted scholars in the area.

Brian Renauer was invited to join the Multnomah County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council’s Executive Committee, a very influential group of local criminal justice leaders and policymakers.

In March, PSU and the Oregonian hosted an interactive town hall meeting on the future of criminal justice and public safety in Oregon. Among the featured speakers was Jody Sundt, invited to share her expertise on the current state of criminal justice.

Congratulations to both Danielle McGurrin and Emily Salisbury on their tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor, beginning Fall 2013.

Due to his extensive work in the area, Bill Feyerherm was invited to deliver the plenary presentation in November at the Governor’s Summit on Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact in Juvenile Justice.

In the spring, Mark Harmon Leymon was awarded a Harfield Public Service Grant to study special shifts in Oregon crime patterns over the last 10 years.

Laura Hickman’s article on teen dating violence currently ranks in the top 10 “most cited” articles in the journal Trauma Violence & Abuse, and her article on adult sex offender treatment ranks in the top 50 “most cited” articles appearing in the International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology.
Welcoming Our Newest Faculty Member

CJPRI is pleased to welcome Dr. Mark Harmon Leymon to the Criminology and Criminal Justice faculty this year. Dr. Leymon joined CJPRI from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and specializes in sentencing policy research. He is particularly interested in the social and political influences on the formation of sentencing policy. Dr. Leymon did not take long to settle in. Not long after arriving at PSU, he was offering a well-received presentation at the Illinois Bar Association conference on the state’s mandatory minimum and determining sentencing practices. He also completed a study on the effects of fixed sentencing policies on imprisonment rates over time. The latter study is forthcoming in the Journal of Quantitative Criminology, a highly competitive publication that only accepts studies with the most rigorous analyses.

In addition to his relevant policy research, Dr. Leymon is quickly becoming known among the CCJ students as a great teacher. He has taught research methods, both on campus and in CJPRI’s fully online program, Dr. Leymon is using a real homicide case file to help students through scientifically-based methods of investigation. When asked about the transition to PSU, Dr. Leymon says, “I am really enjoying being here in CCJ. The faculty here are committed to excellence and wonderful people interested in making a difference in the real world with their work.” Dr. Leymon is continuing his work in the area of sentencing policy, with several more studies in the works over the next year.

Research RoundUp

Women’s pathways to serious and habitual crime: A person centered analysis incorporating gender responsive factors. Criminal Justice and Behavior, 39, 1481-1508.

CJPRI is pleased to welcome Dr. Mark Harmon Leymon to the Criminology and Criminal Justice faculty this year. Dr. Leymon came to PSU from Illinois State and only accepts studies with the most rigorous analyses. This summer, Dr. Leymon has also continued his work in the area of sentencing policy, with several more studies in the works over the next year.

Harmon, M. G. (in press)
Fixed Sentence: The Effect on Imprisonment Rates Over Time. Accepted for publication in Journal of Quantitative Criminology.

Harmon, M. G. (2012)

Harmon, M. G. (2012)
Policy Distraction: Sentencing Reform Adoption as a Diversion from Rising Social Inequality. American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL.

Using Homicide Case Files in Teach Applied Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, New York, NY.

Henning, K., & Shaver, L. (2013)
Analysis of and efforts to change a law enforcement agency’s media communications. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Dallas, TX.

Henning, K., Shaver, L., & King, R. (2013)
Eat your vegetables: Analysis of and efforts to change law enforcement agency’s media communications. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Dallas, TX.


Exposure to local news media and perceived safety in Portland, Oregon. Criminal Justice Policy and Research Institute, Portland State University.

Assessing the Impact of Programs Designed to Improve Outcomes for Children Exposed to Violence: Results from Nine Randomized Controlled Trials. Accepted for publication in Journal of Experimental Criminology.


Police Receptiveness to Reliance on Academia for Research Data in Informing Policy at the Task Force and Street Levels. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, New York, NY.

White Collar and Corporate Crime Representations in the Criminological Literature, Revisited. Accepted for publication in Western Criminology Review.

Salisbury, E. J. (2012)
Building Healthy Relationships for Girls. Strengthening the Impact of Our Work with Girls Training, Portland, OR.

Salisbury, E. J. (2012)

Stewart, G., Henning, K., & Renaud (2012)
Public Perceptions Regarding Use of Force by Police in Portland, Oregon. Criminal Justice Policy and Research Institute, Portland State University.

Sundt, J. (2012)
Choosing the Future of Public Safety: Building a Sustainable Correctional System. The Future of Criminal Justice and Public Safety in Oregon, Portland State University, Portland, OR.


Oreganians Nearly Unanimous in Support of Reentry Services for Former Prisoners. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Dallas, TX.

Foreign Born Inmates Released from the Los Angeles County Jail: A Preliminary Look at Reenlist Nine Years Later. American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL.
Criminal Justice and Behavior Comes to CCJ

In January, the Executive Board of the International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology unanimously voted to name Dr. Emily Salisbury Editor-in-Chief of Criminal Justice and Behavior, its flagship publication. The Portland State affiliation began appearing on the journal’s homepage this spring and word has spread quickly across the field about the leadership transition. How prestigious is this journal? On objective measures of research quality and impact, it currently ranks 9 out of 50 journals in Criminology and Penology and 45 out of 109 publications in Clinical Psychology. This monthly international publication receives over 300 manuscripts a year and turns away around 85% for failing to meet its rigorous quality standards. CJPRI Director Brian Renauer notes, “Criminal Justice and Behavior is a very well-respected publication. [Dr. Salisbury’s] selection as editor is a clear signal about how much the field respects her and the quality of her work. It’s pretty impressive.” In discussing this latest undertaking, Dr. Salisbury says, “It’s really an honor to be offered this editorship. It is a lot of work but I am learning a lot.” Housing the journal is not just a mark of prestige. It also provides opportunities for faculty and students to access latest trends in research and promotes research collaboration across institutions.

Joining Dr. Salisbury on the editorial team as Associate Editor is Dr. Jody Sundt, who has served on the editorial board of several other well-respected publications. Dr. Margaret Freeland Braun, Research Analyst with Oregon Department of Corrections, serves as Managing Editor.