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## **RESEARCH STUDIES FIND THAT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT DOES NOT ACT AS A DETERRENT TO HOMICIDE.**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla— In a series of studies published in *Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP), researchers report findings contrary to the commonly held belief that capital punishment deters prospective offenders from committing homicide. Professors Tomislav Kovandzic, Lynne Vieraitis, and Denise Paquette Boots of the University of Texas at Dallas conclude that most offenders do not likely weigh the costs and benefits of crime and therefore are not likely to be deterred from committing homicide by the existence of the death penalty. Also, many homicides are committed when offenders are under extreme emotional duress and are unlikely to be thinking of the legal sanctions associated with their crime. For the death penalty to serve as a deterrent, offenders first need to consider the possibility of getting caught and sentenced to death. Second, the probability of getting caught and punished must be greater than any benefit the offender could achieve from committing the crime.

Policy essayist Paul Rubin of Emory University offers a different view of the deterrent effects of capital punishment. Rubin is not in favor of abolishing the death penalty and instead argues that the mere probability of execution is likely to deter at least some potential murderers. Rubin finds the current studies of capital punishment problematic because only convicted criminals are examined—not those who have been deterred—and because the death penalty is imposed far too infrequently and erratically to effectively measure its deterrent effects. Based on the available evidence, Rubin does not believe we can assume the death penalty has not deterred at least some potential offenders from committing murder.

Policy essayist Richard Berk of the University of Pennsylvania agrees with Rubin that the available evidence is not sound enough to know the true deterrent effects of capital punishment. However, Berk does not feel that we will ever know its actual deterrent effects. Because politicians will continue to seek research findings to their liking, Berk does not think the deterrence debate of capital punishment will ever end. Berk calls for more rigorous research studies and cautions policymakers to be careful what they are qualifying as evidence when developing opinions on capital punishment's deterrent effects.

Senior Editor for this series, Professor John Donohue of Yale University, suggests that the institution of capital punishment probably does not deter homicide. However, he contends that one study alone can never fully resolve the issue on whether or not the death penalty acts as a deterrent and agrees with Rubin

and Berk that more research is needed. As the number of innocent individuals exonerated from death row continues to grow, Donohue finds the case for the death penalty to be increasingly questionable.