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CRIMINOLOGY, CAUSALITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

TALLAHASSEE, FLA—For centuries, researchers have been searching for answers to the question of why some people commit crime while others do not. Specifically, criminologists have long been seeking to discover the root causes of crime. After many years of investigation, we are still without conclusive answers. However, a substantial body of evidence exists about risk factors and how best to confront criminality. This Special Issue of *Criminology & Public Policy* (CPP) [Volume 12, Issue 4] provides guidance to researchers for how to apply scientific evidence to criminal justice policy.

In a series of studies published in this issue of CPP, researchers addressed how to advance criminal justice policy in the absence of causal certainty while employing rigorous standards of scientific methodology and best available knowledge. Recommendations were validated with examples from three criminal justice policy initiatives, namely, delinquency prevention, policing and supermax prisons.

Professor Thomas Blomberg, Julie Mestre and Karen Mann of Florida State University argued that criminal justice policy can benefit significantly from the utilization of best available research knowledge even in the absence of causal certainty. The authors caution that while it is imperative researchers are transparent about what is known and what is not, research evidence is the best basis for effective public policy.

Professors Robert J. Sampson and Christopher Winship along with graduate student Carly Knight of Harvard University provide strategies and recommendations for researchers to better inform public policies without causal certainty. The authors believe that criminological findings need to be “translated” into policy recommendations to have the most direct impact.

Professor Abigail Fagan of the University of Florida provided a review of the impact that family influences have on delinquency. Clear and credible evidence was found that parenting practices influence children’s involvement in problem behaviors. She advocates for the implementation of policies and practices that focus on altering the family environment to reduce delinquency.

Through their review of existing research evidence, Professor Daniel Nagin of Carnegie Mellon University and Professor David Weisburd of George Mason University and Hebrew University found that a targeted form of policing known as “hot spots policing” is an effective police practice that has reduced crime rates in problem areas.

Professor Daniel Mears of Florida State University examined the available evidence about

supermax prisons. Supermax prison facilities symbolize the “get tough” criminal justice movement that arose over the past three decades. However, based on the empirical evidence, Mears argued that supermax prisons are not achieving their intended goals and therefore, cannot be classified as an effective criminal justice policy.

CPP, the American Society of Criminology (ASC), and the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) will hold a Congressional luncheon in March 2014 in Washington, DC to present the findings from this issue to members of Congress.