Public Unaware of Declines in Police Use of Force

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 of all sorts, or parenting stress outcomes. The researchers found that frequency of exposure to specific types of violence, or (3) exposure to 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 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 a series of analyses undertaken by the CJPRI research team of Kris Henning, Brian Renauer and Greg Stewart. Other studies have focused on 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 Tamsonsaitis, 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. Tamsonsaitis 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.

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 spatial 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.

The City of Portland awarded a grant to the CJPRI team of Brian Renauer, Kris Henning 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.

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 pointed on myself in the Oregonian,” she says before quickly transitioning to thanking the faculty and staff for the many educational and training opportunities she has had within the CCJ Division at PSU. “All of this has made the position a really good fit for me,” she adds.


Feyerherm, W. (2012) Taking Advantage of What We Know about Disproportionality to Improve Multi-System Responses and Outcomes for Youth of Color. Oregon Governor’s Summit on Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact in Juvenile Justice, Grand Ronde, OR.


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 efforts to change a law enforcement agency’s media communications. Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Dallas, TX.


By all accounts, law enforcement interaction with members of minority communities is a high profile issue. Although survey results indicate some improvement in general feelings towards Oregon police officers, approximately half of the White population and the majority of the African American and Hispanic populations express concerns that racial profiling is still occurring in Oregon.

Since 2007, CJPRI has been an active partner in working to improve the relationship between Oregon law enforcement agencies and minority communities. Key among these efforts is a partnership with the Law Enforcement Contacts Policy and Data Review Committee (LECC) that provides training on the issues of biased-based policing, racial tensions, and tactical ethics.

To date, more than 2,000 Oregon law enforcement officers have participated in the racial profiling training and agencies continue to request more training opportunities. Despite the growing demand, logistical barriers can restrict the number of law enforcement trainees able to participate. For example, officer availability can be limited by their shift schedule and other work obligations, such as court appearances. Also, travel time to reach the training location can be considerable, depending upon the geographic location of the officers’ agency.

But CJPRI Director Brian Renauer came up with an innovative solution. “In CCJ, we have lots of experience reaching students all over the country through our fully online program,” Dr. Renauer notes. “We realized we could overcome most logistical problems by leveraging the online education tools we’ve already spent years developing.”

Since PSU’s CCJ Division was among the first in the nation to offer a fully online undergraduate degree in criminology and criminal justice, an online training innovation seemed natural. With sponsorship and technical support from the Criminology and Criminal Justice Online (CCJO) program, the CJPRI training team began working to adapt the in-person training for online delivery.

First phase testing of the online training modules will take place this summer, with sessions for officers expected to open in fall. While the current training has been customized for the Oregon context, the online delivery format opens up the possibility of training officers throughout the country. “We know there is a huge national demand for racial profiling trainings,” says Dr. Renauer, “but we don’t want to get ahead of ourselves. The focus right now is on making the highest quality online training we can. Expansion considerations will come later.”

To learn more about the law enforcement training and the LECC partnership, visit www.pdx.edu/cjpri/lecc.