

Zoë Davies and Louise Hazell look at recent research and policy developments.

Can a bank crisis break your heart?

Researchers at Cambridge University have published a study looking at the health risks for people who experience bank crises such as the recent Northern Rock crisis. It says that such crises can lead to a 6.4 per cent surge in heart attacks in high-income countries such as Britain and the United States

In Britain, between 1,280 and 5,130 could die if a significant proportion of banks follow the Northern Rock case. Elderly customers, the report says, would be most at risk.

David Stuckler, who headed the research, believes even temporary problems on the financial market can lead to panic and stress, which leads to a risk of an acute heart attack.

Using data of male cardiovascular mortality rates per 100,000 of the population from the World Health Organisation's Global Mortality Database between 1960 and 2002, the researchers found that cardiac deaths surge briefly and regularly every time there is a systematic bank failure, which itself is defined as an episode where a significant proportion of banks fail or their assets are exhausted.

Overall, the report concludes that unless hysteria is contained, and panic is prevented, what was originally a momentary financial 'blip' could potentially

lead to the death of thousands of people.

Further information about the report is available at: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/dp/2008022601>

Supervision of community orders in England and Wales

The National Audit Office has published a report looking at the use of community orders, operational in the courts since April 2005 and how they are being managed by the Probation Service. The report considers how well community orders have been implemented and whether they are meeting the intended sentencing objectives.

The report quotes the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies report *The Use and Impact of the Community Order and Suspended Sentence Order* (2007), that three requirements, alcohol treatment, mental health treatment, and drugs rehabilitation, are being used far less frequently than the estimated incidence of offenders' needs in these areas.

Among the report's key findings are:

- The NHS-funded alcohol and mental health treatments are not available or rarely used in some probation areas.
- Six per cent of 302 orders sampled by the study had not been completed before the

time frame of the order expired due to process and delivery reasons in probation. The waiting lists for group programmes on domestic violence were highlighted as delaying the start, and therefore impacting on the possible completion, of such a requirement.

In conclusion, the report comments on the structural challenges placed on the probation service, stating that probation's funding structure did not match the demands placed on it and the standards expected by the courts and the public. Recommendations to the Ministry of Justice include probation areas being required to report the percentage of community orders which end before the sentence requirements have been completed and the reasons for non-completion of orders, and that the effectiveness of individual requirements should be identified.

The report is available at: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc0708/hc02/0203/0203.pdf>

'Make me a criminal: preventing youth crime'

A report by the Institute of Public Policy Research makes the case for a more 'therapeutic and family-based approach to youth offending' compared with

the current 'punitive' system, not only on humanitarian grounds, but also in terms of economics and efficacy.

The report argues that one of the main problems with our current approach to preventing offending is the level at which intervention occurs. It says that little is done to prevent crime from happening. It also argues that young people convicted of anti-social behaviour are given 'empty punishments', rather than the causes of their actions being tackled.

Methods of preventing youth crime are outlined, such as not ignoring the link between poverty and crime. Families need better childcare options, and employers should offer flexible hours. It says that physical punishment should be completely abolished, arguing that 40 years of research has found that hitting children increases the chances of aggression, anti-social behaviour, and criminal behaviour.

The report makes the case for improving extra-curricular activities in every local area for children aged 12–18. It says that the £80 million that the Ministry of Defence spends on the Combined Cadet Forces (CCF) should be diverted to funding CCF units in schools in deprived areas. Play areas should be created in disadvantaged, urban locations that are staffed and integrated with structured activity.

An extension of the Sure Start childcare initiative is proposed. 'Sure Start Plus' for children aged between 5 and 12 would be targeted at those considered to be at risk of prolific offending. Services such as cognitive behavioural therapy, parenting programmes, and education interventions should also be introduced to the most deprived of areas.

The report also highlights 'Out-reach schools', such as those found in Canada, which provide a less-structured education for excluded pupils, providing access to therapists and social workers.

The report concludes that there are three levels at which change should be addressed. On a primary level, it says social norms and behaviours, and respect for different communities must be taught universally through families, local communities, and schools. On a secondary level, it says strategies must improve the capacity of social services, health services, and specialist programmes to reach those most at risk. Finally, on a tertiary level, it says the criminal justice system must be improved to both punish and rehabilitate offenders.

Make me a criminal: preventing youth crime is available at: <http://www.>

ippr.org/members/download.asp?f=%2Fecomm%2Ffiles%2Fmake%5Fme%5Fa%5Fcriminal%2Epdf

Approaches to violent crime

The National Audit Office has conducted an analysis of government approaches to violent crime in a report entitled *Reducing the Risk of Violent Crime*. It sets out a range of actions intended to reduce violent crimes, such as gun and gang-related crime, knife crime, and sexual and domestic violence.

The report says that violent crime is very costly to Britain; for example, homicide and wounding cost society an estimated £13 billion a year. And while the report claims that violent crime overall has fallen in recent years by 9 per cent according to official figures, serious violent crimes have only fallen 5.9 per cent. The report says that men aged between 16 and 24 are nearly four times more likely to be a victim of violent crime than the general population, and it notes that 17 per cent of people in 2006-2007 reported that they were very worried about violent crime.

The report critiques communication between the Home Office and other government departments. It

says police recorded crime is the only data constantly shared. Insufficient analysis of the risks of violent crime, a lack of engagement between government departments and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, and an inconsistent delivery of funding, are all identified as barriers reducing the effectiveness of crime-prevention activities. The report also sets out there is a lack of sufficient funding for evaluation and risk assessment.

Overall, the report proposes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of violence reduction at a local level, including setting funding plans for Crime and Disorder Partnerships, ideally for schemes focusing on having a more long-term impact on crime reduction. It also recommends better data sharing and data collection, and improved sharing of good practice in reducing alcohol-related violent crime.

The report is available at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/07-08/0708241.pdf

Justice reinvestment enquiry

The Justice Committee of the House of Commons has launched an enquiry into the vast sums spent on criminal justice which it is concerned have contribut-

ed little to reducing 're-offending'. Chairman of the committee, Rt Hon Alan Beith MP, said 'Our aim is to ensure that resources are directed in the best possible way to improve public safety and reduce crime'.

The committee will undertake an examination of current policy, which will include looking at the cost-effectiveness of prisons and full implementation of the Carter report and investigating the reliability of the evidence policies are based upon. It will also examine potential alternative policies, looking specifically at what impact justice reinvestment could potentially have on penal policy. The third area the committee will be investigating is to what extent existing structures and partnerships could be used to implement alternative policies and finally what potential there is within the current climate to introduce a new penal policy.

Further information about the enquiry can be found at: http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/justice/jsc310108pn12.cfm

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