"Busted Myths" In Criminology

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General Principles

- Research in criminology over the past two decades has exposed several "facts" as myths.
- This presentation identifies a number of those myths and discusses their significance for strategies, policies, and interventions.
- Throughout, we will discuss smart policing principles.

The Ten Busted Myths

1. Nothing works
2. "Scared straight" works
3. Prevention doesn't work
4. More criminal justice means less crime
5. Most citizens don't like the police
6. Crime is going up
7. Immigration causes increases in crime
8. Most citizens don't support community supervision
9. School-based crime prevention doesn't work
10. There is nothing the police can do about crime

1. Nothing Works

- Prevailing Wisdom of the 1970s
  - "Nothing works"
  - Prompted by Robert Martinson's (in)famous article and book
    - Reviewed 231 studies – concluded that there was little evidence that rehabilitation worked.
    - Cited in a Supreme Court decision.
    - Used as justification for federal sentencing guidelines.
    - Has carried over to other areas of the criminal justice system.
  - However…
    - Evidence was not as conclusive as Martinson made it seem
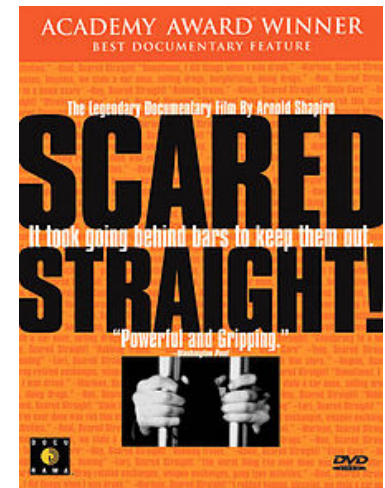   - Further reviews came to different conclusions

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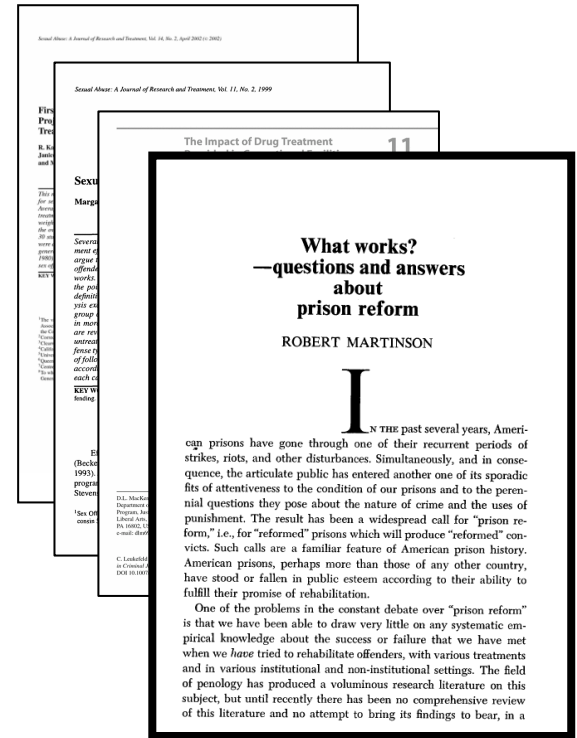
1. Nothing Works

- Today's View
  - Many things work in corrections
  - Must focus on clear outcomes, fair and consistent application, and incorporating best practices
  - Key elements
    - Assign caseloads of a reasonable size.
    - Use best practices.
    - Integrate rehabilitation efforts with other social service and family interventions.
    - Use the principles of smart supervision.

2. "Scared Straight" Works

- Premise of Scared Straight Programs
  - One of the most popular juvenile interventions
  - Expose young offenders to experiences designed to scare them away from delinquency
    - Visit security institutions
    - Interact with serious offenders
    - Visit emergency rooms

- Impact of Scared Straight
  - Appeals to common sense
  - However, evaluations suggest it has the opposite effect

A 1978 documentary detailed juvenile interactions with offenders in Rahway State Prison

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2. "Scared Straight" Works

- Possible interventions given what we know
  - Consider results from evaluation by Petrosino and Finckenauer
  - Scared Straight may actually glorify crime and prison life
  - Engage youth with balanced stimuli (positive and negative)
  - Provide alternatives to criminal lifestyles.

3. Prevention is Not Effective

- Prevention was included with rehabilitation and the "nothing works" movement
- Prevention is among the most versatile and cost-effective forms of intervention
  - Especially true for juvenile interventions
- Prevention is not a panacea for all crime
  - Must be focused, well-defined, and applied to the right population

3. Prevention is Not Effective

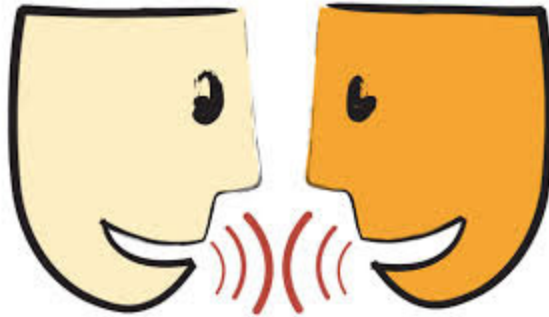| Principles for Successful Prevention Programs	Clearly define the population
	Determine the form of prevention (primary, secondary, tertiary)
	Consider early intervention models
	Combine criminal justice prevention with other social support efforts
	Look to best practices, meta-analyses, and rigorous evaluations

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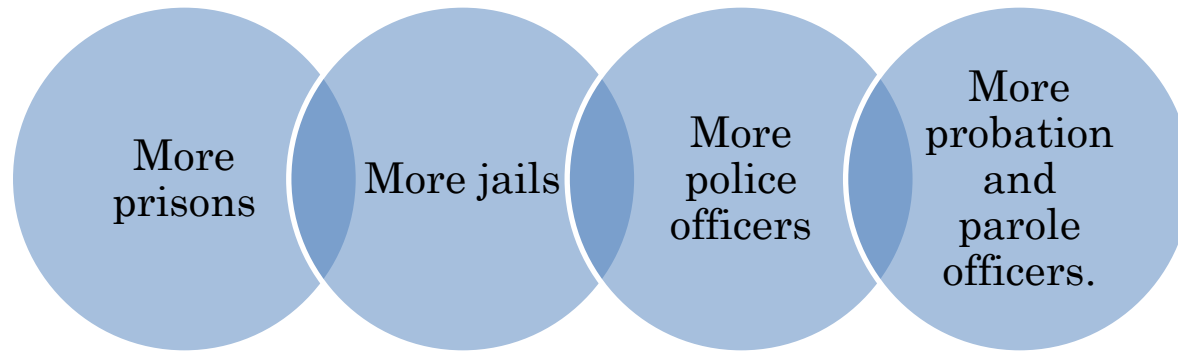Bureau of Justice Assistance
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Stop and Talk

- Audience questions?

4. More Criminal Justice Means Less Crime

- A common refrain in criminal justice is that we need **more**:

More prisons | More jails | More police officers | More probation and parole officers.

- Seems inherently reasonable
- Reality is that adding more employees and more facilities alone won't and doesn't reduce crime.

4. More Criminal Justice Means Less Crime

- Evidence of the complexity of the resource ↔ crime relationship
  - Variation in ratio between number of sworn officers and population; not clearly linked to crime rates
  - Crime rate generally declining over time even as resources become more scarce
  - State-wide policies to reduce prison population haven't been linked to increases in crime rates
  - Smart allocation and application is as important as the amount of resources

4. More Criminal Justice Means Less Crime

- What does this imply for interventions?
  - SMART principles should be observed, whether for policing, prosecution or supervision.
  - Data driven strategies and problem statements are at the key of successful responses to crime.
  - Using best practices in a data driven environment and partnering with other agencies will produce the best results.

5. Most Citizens Don't Like the Police

- General Social Survey (GSS)
  - Has asked about citizen attitudes toward police since 1974
  - Results vary from year to year
    - As expected, reflect major events related to police-citizen engagement (e.g., Rodney King)
  - In general, the surveys show positive citizen attitudes toward the police
    - Variations in attitudes by population subgroups (race, gender, age) but most subgroups (including racial subgroups) generally report positive attitudes toward the police

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5. Most Citizens Don't Like the Police

- BJS Police-Public Contact Survey (focuses on traffic and street stops)
    - Results are similar to GSS
    - Blacks, Hispanics and Whites report favorable attitudes toward the police, even when stopped and ticketed
    - Attitudes remain favorable when citizens believe they were treated fairly, even if stopped, ticketed, searched, or arrested

5. Most Citizens Don't Like the Police

- Maintaining positive police-citizen relationships is a key to maintaining favorable perceptions of the police.

- Research on procedural justice shows that:
  - Citizens who believe that the law is being fairly applied, even when they are subject to sanctions, will be: less likely to offend, and more likely to cooperate in crime control activities in their neighborhoods.

5. Most Citizens Don't Like the Police

Key elements for police-community relations	Providing training in "fair and equitable" policing for all police department employees as outlined in the 21st Century Taskforce Report on Policing.
	Emphasizing principles of procedural justice.
	Treating citizens with respect in all situations. This should include clear explanations of the reasons for actions as well as no use of the "F" word.

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6. Crime is Going Up

- Remains one of the major misconceptions about crime
  - Both among members of the public as well as many in the field of criminal justice
- Steady movement of cases through the system must make it look like crime is going up
- In reality, crime has been in a steady decline for over 20 years
  - Longest period of decline since we began measuring crime in the 1930s
  - Supported by various data sources (UCR, NCVS)

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6. Crime is Going Up

- Declines have continued through:
  - Economic recession, high unemployment, immigration, other social and economic changes.
- Can be attributed to:
  - Smarter policing, changes in demographics, and smarter use of correctional sanctions

FIGURE 1

Total violent victimization rate and prevalence rate, 1993–2010

Rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older
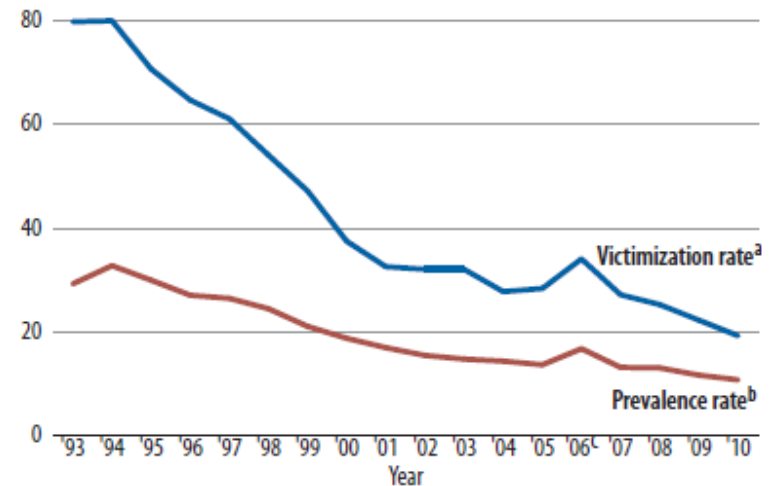
Note: See appendix table 1 for populations, estimates, and standard errors.

[a]Number of victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older that occurred during the year.

[b]Number of persons per 1,000 age 12 or older who experienced at least one victimization during the year.

[c]Due to methodological changes in the 2006 NCVS, use caution when comparing 2006 criminal victimization estimates to other years. See Criminal Victimization, 2007, www.bjs.gov, for more information.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 1993–2010.

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6. Crime is Going Up

- Can take advantage of decline by:
  - Promoting investment in neighborhoods
    - Many neighborhoods are attractive investment opportunities now that crime has declined
    - Cities and law enforcement should work to make the public (and the investment community) aware of these changes
  - Maintain efforts to keep neighborhoods safe
    - CPTED and crime prevention should be integrated with redevelopment and gentrification
  - Enlist the public in public safety efforts
  - Redouble efforts to understand the crime decline in particular neighborhoods and spread those models to other locations

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Stop and Talk

- Audience questions?
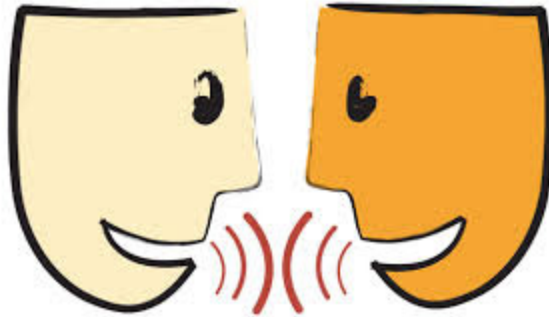
7. Immigration Causes Increases in Crime

- The prolonged crime decline in the U.S. occurs during a period of record immigration including undocumented individuals

- Border jurisdictions have experienced the highest levels of immigration and crime declines.

  – El Paso, TX is among the safest large cities in the country and has very high levels of immigrant populations both documented and undocumented

  – First generation immigrants (both documented and undocumented) tend to have lower crime rates than US residents.

    - However, by the time these individuals are second generation their crime rates resemble those of US citizens.

7. Immigration Causes Increases in Crime

- Immigration presents challenges for law enforcement, corrections, schools, and health care
  - Recent research on policing immigrants (Decker, Provine, Varsanyi and Lewis) shows that most police departments lack a policy on how to deal with undocumented immigrants and provide little or no training to their officers.
  - There is a dramatic need for bilingual officers in law enforcement, particularly in jurisdictions with high levels of immigrants.
  - With little coordination of policy between federal and local law enforcement, many local law enforcement agencies are left "on an island" to work out their own problems.
    - Both the 21st Century Task Force Report and the Major Chiefs Committee of IACP have valuable recommendations to offer in this regard.

8. The Public Doesn't Support Community Supervision

- Concern that the public doesn't support efforts to supervise offenders in the community
  - Sometimes this concern is directed against probation, other times at parole
  - However, when asked if they prefer offenders who are released from prison or found guilty but not imprisoned to be unsupervised, almost all citizens prefer that offenders be supervised.
- With nearly 4.2 million probationers and 850,000 parolees (BJS), community supervision provides a lot of protection for the public.

8. The Public Doesn't Support Community Supervision

Improving Effectiveness of Community Supervision	Using SMART supervision, including data-driven strategies.
	Use best practices in supervision, including risk assessment, assigning appropriate strategies to specific offender groups, and assessing danger carefully.
	Coordinating supervision with other partners in the criminal justice system, community and social services arenas.

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9. School-based Crime Prevention Doesn't Work

- Challenges in educational system writ-large raise concerns about effectiveness of school-based crime prevention programs

- However, many programs are successful
  - Average 7th grader receives or participates in 8 prevention programs in school (Gottfredson)
  - Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program has consistently demonstrated impact in reducing gang membership, and increasing prosocial attitudes and behaviors
  - Drug prevention programs based on skill building (though not DARE) show positive results

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9. School-based Crime Prevention Doesn't Work

Key elements of successful school-based crime prevention	Prevention programs in school should be coordinated.
	Prevention programs in school should be based on best and promising practices.
	Prevention programs in school should integrate principles of cultural competency.

10. There is nothing the police can do about crime

- The police can't be everywhere.
  - There aren't enough to watch every potential offender and crime location
- Recent efforts suggest that when efforts are focused and data-driven, police can overcome this challenge
  - Place-based policing
  - Targeting high-rate offenders
  - Coordinating efforts with other agencies

10. There is nothing the police can do about crime

Key elements of successful crime prevention efforts	Police work to develop diverse, comprehensive understanding of the crime problems.
	Focus on problem assessment especially as applies to community oriented policing.
	Emphasize smart policing principles and focus on places, persons, and specific types of crime.
	Constantly assess and evaluate understanding of the problem, strategies, and outcomes to create a continuous feedback loop to improve efforts.

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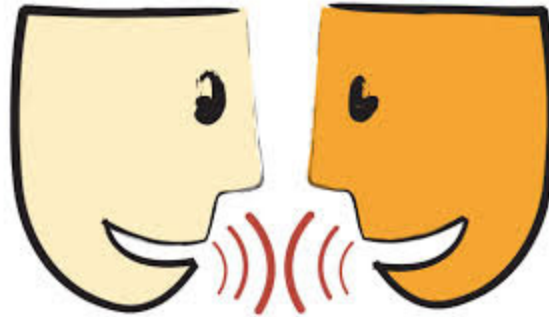# Concluding Thoughts and Keys to Continued Success

- What we need to be successful is a laser not a blunt instrument

- Look to best practices, meta-analyses, level III or IV evaluations.
  - Where possible, randomized control trials are the preferred research design.

- Maintain a strong focus through the execution of a strategy.
  - The focus should be on some combination of place, crime type, offender type or "criminogenic commodity" (guns, drugs, money movement).

Concluding Thoughts and Keys to Continued Success

- Approaches should be data-driven in their origins, implementation, modification and evaluation.

- Strategies should be well-coordinated with other criminal justice agencies, the public and governmental and non-governmental agencies.

- Training is a hallmark of successful strategies.

- Principles of procedural justice should be considered in all strategies.

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Q & A

- Audience questions?

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Resources

- Jerome Miller review of "What Works". http://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/rehab.html
- Andrew Petrosino, "Beyond Scared Straight". http://www.sagepub.com/isw6/articles/ch15petrosino.pdf
- Justice Department Discourages use of Scared Straight Programs. https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/news_at_glance/234084/topstory.html
- **Crime Prevention @ CrimeSolutions.gov. http://www.crimesolutions.gov/**
- **The impact of Incarceration. https://crimelab.uchicago.edu/page/incarceration**
- **Public attitudes toward the police. http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=70**
- **What caused the crime decline? https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/what-caused-crime-decline**
- **Immigration and crime. http://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/does_immigration_increase_crime**
- **Citizen support for community supervision. http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases/0001/01/01/one-in-31-us-adults-are-behind-bars-on-parole-or-probation**
- **School based crime prevention. https://www.ncjrs.gov/works/chapter5.htm**
- **Impact of police on crime. http://eml.berkeley.edu//~jmccrary/chalfin_mccrary2012.pdf; AND http://journalistsresource.org/studies/government/criminal-justice/the-impact-of-community-policing-meta-analysis-of-its-effects-in-u-s-cities**