Series Preface

The Wiley Series in the Psychology of Crime, Policing and Law publishes both single-author and edited reviews of emerging areas of contemporary research. The purpose of this series is not merely to present research findings in a clear and readable form, but also to bring out their implications for both practice and policy. The series will be useful not only to psychologists, but also to all those concerned with crime detection and prevention, policing and the judicial process.

How can crime be reduced in contemporary society? This is a question all of us have pondered, but answers remain elusive. As I write, a General Election is in full swing and the airwaves are choked with politicians peddling simplistic nostrums for our sometimes venal and violent society with a certainty that belies experience. If there were simple answers to deterring crime, they would surely have been discovered by now. The bleak pessimism of the 1960s and 1970s of the last century, that ‘nothing works’, has given way to a more cautiously positive view that certain interventions work with particular categories of offenders and offences: ‘What works and for whom?’ The current book summarises a systematic review of more than a hundred studies conducted in the UK, which have set out to assess the effectiveness of interventions by local authorities, the police and the courts designed to reduce and deter crime. It is based on a survey of the available literature originally commissioned by the Home Office in its search for an evidence-based policy towards offenders and offending. It uses the methodology of the Cochrane Collaboration to weed out all but the best-designed and controlled studies, so that any policy pointers are well founded. Comparisons are drawn between the findings of UK research and those of similar research conducted in North America and elsewhere in Europe.

The book has been edited by Amanda E. Perry, Cynthia McDougall and David P. Farrington. Amanda E. Perry is a research fellow at the Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and Psychology at the University of York. The centre was founded precisely to pursue the kinds of policy-driven research epitomised by the current volume. Professor Cynthia McDougall came to
York as the founding director of the centre after a distinguished career at the Home Office, where she headed psychology for the prison service and, later, the probation service for nine years. Professor David P. Farrington is a professor of psychological criminology at the University of Cambridge; he is the UK's leading forensic psychologist and one of the pioneers of the international movement to understand crime and criminality in objective and scientific terms.

The distinguished editors have attracted major researchers from forensic psychology and criminology to examine different facets of the problem of crime reduction. The principal issues examined are alcohol and drug treatment, courts and sentencing, probation and prison intervention, the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV), improved street lighting and other interventions designed to reduce burglary through such measures as the introduction of neighbourhood watch schemes or ‘hardening’ vulnerable housing through the fitting of modern security devices. The research appears to confirm that mundane but effective measures such as fitting window locks to the nation’s housing estates have as important a role in deterring crime as the costly technologies associated with CCTV surveillance. True to past form, no magic formula emerges from this distillation of the best UK-based research on crime reduction, but some promising leads emerge and gaps in our knowledge are effectively highlighted, as are the methodological lessons to be learned if better and more reliable research is to be carried out in the future.

Reducing Crime deserves to be read, not merely by politicians and policy makers, but by all those who seek to understand crime and criminal behaviour. They include, inevitably, academics and students, but also probation officers, judges and the new generation of police officers, who often have degrees in criminology or psychology. As Professor Lawrence W. Sherman notes in his Foreword to this book, this systematic review represents a milestone in British criminal justice research and deserves to be widely read and influential in policy and practice, whichever political party is in power.

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