ISSUES AND EFFORTS IN REDUCING REOFFENDING: THE LATEST GLOBAL TRENDS

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Issues and Efforts in Reducing Re-offending

• preliminary question of definition: what is ‘re-offending’ (recidivism)?
  – reconviction, re-arrest, committing a similar offence, committing any new offence?
  – do we consider the seriousness of the new offence, or the time period in which the new offence is committed?

• working definition: ‘re-offending’ means that, after an intervention on the basis of an offence, a person again comes to the attention of the criminal justice system as an offender
  – ‘desistance’ from crime
making sense of global trends is challenging ... 
• huge variety in forms of intervention
• today, no single rationale for punishment dominates
• the rationale varies from time to time, place to place, case to case, judge to judge

• this is because how we prioritize the various functions of punishment also seems to shift from time to time:
  • general prevention (deter, educate the public)
  • special prevention (deter, rehabilitate, incapacitate)
  • ‘just deserts’
  • restorative justice
  • (other functions?)
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• Imprisonment is the mainstay of criminal justice around the world
  
• overall global imprisonment rates are stable, but
  • increase in some countries, decrease in others

• rates vary considerably from one country to the next
  ... even despite similar legal systems and development

• clear regional and subregional patterns

• swings in political rhetoric from ‘getting tough’ to ‘decarceration’ (and for different reasons: costs, votes...)
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Prison population rates in 2014 (per 100,000)

Colour code: dark red: over 300; red: 150 – 299; yellow: 100 – 149; dark green: 70 – 99; light green: under 70
(1) imprisonment – the mainstay of criminal justice systems - by and of itself *does not* reduce reoffending
- overcrowding (prisoners are often “warehoused”)
- overstretched resources
- prisons themselves serve as “schools of crime”

(2) non-custodial sanctions can be (and often are) more effective than imprisonment in preventing re-offending
Issues and Efforts in Reducing Reoffending

(3) we have gained extensive information on what works – and on what does not work
- David Farabee (2005), “Rethinking Rehabilitation: Why Can’t We Reform Our Criminals?”

(4) high-quality, well-targeted, well-resourced and well-supported interventions do have an impact

(5) good practices (“what works”) have been identified (as have “what doesn’t work”)
(6) growing interest (here and there) in non-custodial sanctions: new sanctions (new forms of probation, community service, electronic monitoring, different treatment programmes, restorative justice) and new investment

(7) focus should be on interventions designed to reduce recidivism in a specific group (certain types of offences, certain types of offenders, certain cultural context...)

(8) good practices can be replicated and expanded, perhaps also adapted to other systems and contexts
(9) What we can do is remain open to learning from research and good practice (also in other countries), and learn from our mistakes – by rejecting interventions that have been shown not to work, or indeed to make the problem worse. (And among the biggest problems in this regard is custodial treatment)

(10) “prevention is better than cure”: it is better to prevent crime: focus on development-led crime prevention and criminal justice
Thank you!

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