Enduring Risk?

Old Criminal Records and Predictions of Future Criminal Involvement

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It is well accepted that criminal records impose collateral consequences on offenders. Such records affect access to public housing, student financial aid, welfare benefits, and voting rights. An axiom of these policies is that individuals with criminal records—even old criminal records—exhibit significantly higher risk of future criminal conduct than do individuals without criminal records. In this article, the authors use police contact data from the 1942 Racine birth cohort study to determine whether individuals whose last criminal record occurred many years ago exhibit a higher risk of acquiring future criminal records than do individuals with no criminal record at all. Findings suggest that there is little to no distinguishable difference between these groups.

Keywords: criminal records; labeling; collateral consequences; recidivism

In 2004, law enforcement officers made more than 14 million total arrests (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). For some of those arrests, the journey through the criminal justice system ended with pretrial diversion or dismissal.

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of charges. For others, the process concluded with a conviction or guilty plea and sentencing. Many of these individuals will feel the consequences of their criminal justice system involvement years and years after that involvement occurs. These so-called “collateral consequences” of criminal involvement include such varied policies as restrictions on voting rights, access to firearms, loss of eligibility for public assistance—such as housing and food stamps—and limits on educational loans. Perhaps one of the most concerning consequences, however, are restrictions placed on employment opportunities.

Legislation exists at both the federal and state levels precluding the hire of people convicted of certain crimes into a variety of occupations and prevents the attainment of a license to practice an estimated 800 additional occupations (Cromwell, Alarid, & delCarmen, 2005; Hahn, 1991). However, these formal barriers may be just the tip of the iceberg. Research shows that it is becoming ever more common for employment applications to include questions such as “Have you ever been arrested for an offense other than a traffic violation?” With improved technology, it is becoming increasingly easy for employers to follow up this initial inquiry with a formal criminal history check (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003). If prior criminal activity is discovered, employers express reluctance—or even outright refusal—to hire the individual (Grogger, 1995; Holzer et al., 2003; Pager, 2003). Moreover, individuals who falsify information about their criminal history are increasingly likely to be terminated from jobs as employers become more aggressive about verifying background information supplied by job applicants.

We believe this particular consequence to be one of the most problematic for several important reasons. First, with the increase in computerization of records, there has been a large increase in the number of employers using criminal background checks on a routine basis (Munro, 2002). Put simply, more employers are using this information today than ever before. Second, there is no legal standard for what type of information they collect. In fact, the type of criminal background check done by employers typically includes not only conviction information but arrest information as well, regardless of the case outcome (Legal Action Center, 2004). Third, once the information is obtained, the standards for how that information can be used vary widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. As noted above, there are specific circumstances in which a person must be denied employment in a given field based on a prior conviction. However, most statutory language also allows an employer to deny employment if the offense relates to the duties required of the position. This vague language allows for broad discretion in the application of criminal justice records in employment decisions and little regulation or accountability for decisions made on the part of the employer or vendors of criminal history data.
In addition, it is equally important to note that an abundance of criminological research suggests that one of the key social bonds that help past offenders lead law-abiding lives is the attainment of stable employment (Wallman & Blumstein, 2006, pp. 337-339). Indeed, evolving policies to aid offender integration and reintegration include a heavy focus on obtaining gainful employment. In fact, the current administration has dedicated significant funds to federal job training and employment programs for offenders. Yet many efforts continue to be crippled by the imposition of lasting restrictions placed on offenders that hinder the reintegration process.

This apparent paradox sets up the broad question for the current study. Specifically, we ask what practices governing the use of criminal records to deny employment make sense. In this particular study, we limit our focus to the issue of the period for which a past criminal justice contact should be considered relevant to employment decisions. That is, for a person with a prior criminal justice contact, is there a period after which, if he or she has remained crime free, that prior contact is no longer predictive of future criminality? In the following sections, we look at both the theoretical and empirical applications of this question.

**Stigmatization and Blocked Opportunity**

The social reactionist perspective of deviance seeks to define how and why some behaviors are labeled as deviant and the effects the label of deviant has on its recipient. In this discussion, we will focus on the latter. The roots of the social reactionist perspective date back to the early 1900s and the writings of George Herbert Mead. In his essay “The Psychology of Punitive Justice,” Mead (1918) discusses the ways in which the criminal justice system’s ability to label one a criminal relays the message to others that this person is to be cut off from the world of legitimate people. With this label, people are separated into groups of “acceptables” and “unacceptables” or, in the later words of Howard Becker (1963), classifications of insiders and “outsiders.”

The effect of being labeled a deviant has been referred to in many terms such as tagging (Tannenbaum, 1938) or stigmatization (Goffman, 1963). Whatever the terminology, the underlying concept is the same: Once a label has been effectively applied to an individual, the label affects the way that person is perceived by others and even the way a person views himself or herself. Perhaps this phenomenon is best summarized by Becker (1963), when he states that the “possession of one deviant trait may have a generalized
symbolic value, so that people automatically assume that its bearer possesses other undesirable traits allegedly associated with it” (p. 33). The label therefore infers not just that the person did something wrong but that there is something wrong with the person.

Beyond the theoretical implications of the label come the social realities it produces. Through a process known as “objectification” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), the theoretical symbolism of such a label becomes a social reality for the bearer. The labels of deviant or criminal serve as cues informing others how to respond to an individual. In our society, some of these practices of social shunning have been formalized into law so that a person possessing a criminal justice record faces civil disenfranchisement such as the loss of the right to vote, loss of the right to run for or hold a public office, restrictions on employment and disqualification for licensure for a multitude of occupations deemed to require good moral character, and reduced eligibility to receive various forms of government assistance such as public housing, food stamps, and student loans.

Moreover, even when restrictions are not formalized into law such as those noted above, an individual with a criminal record may face unspoken discrimination when searching for housing (particularly for sex offenders) and employment. In fact, research consistently shows that persons with a criminal record of any type have a difficult time securing and maintaining employment. In fact, they experience more difficulty in obtaining steady employment than any other disadvantaged group (e.g., minorities, welfare recipients, illegal aliens, etc.; Holzer et al., 2003).

In an early study of this issue, Schwartz and Skolnick (1962) prepared four sample employment folders that differed only in respect to the reported criminal record of the offender, the first having no criminal record; the second having an arrest but no conviction; the third having an arrest, no conviction, and a letter of support from the judge; and the final folder having an arrest and conviction. A sample of 100 employers was then chosen and divided into four groups, with each group viewing only one folder. Of the 25 employers who saw the folder of the candidate with no criminal record, 9 expressed interest in hiring the candidate. In comparison, the folder for the candidate with a criminal conviction received only 1 offer for employment. Interestingly, although our justice system is premised on the notion of presumptive innocence, the proposed 2 candidates with only an arrest and no conviction also had reduced employment opportunities (3 offers for the person arrested but not convicted and 6 offers for the person arrested, not convicted, and offered a letter of support from the judge).
More recently, Pager (2003) conducted a field experiment to test the effects of both race and criminal record on job prospects. Two White male and two Black male college students were assigned as testers. The participants were matched on basis of appearance and presentation style, and within each pair the treatment assignment of having a criminal record was rotated between the testers to account for unobservable differences. The White pair audited 150 employers and the Black pair a total of 200 employers, all for entry-level positions in low-skill jobs. Her analysis revealed that White male candidates with no prior conviction received 34 job offers compared to only 17 offers for their counterparts with a conviction. The Black testers fared considerably worse, with only 14 offers for the test condition of no criminal record and 5 offers for the test condition of a criminal record. Given recent estimates that about 22% of Black males between the ages of 35 and 44 are either current or former prisoners (Bonczar, 2003, p. 6), the results of this study are potentially devastating to the future employment prospects for this portion of the labor force.

These findings regarding the interpretation of criminal records become even more pertinent at a time when the increased ease of conducting criminal background checks has apparently lead to a vast increase in the overall use of such records in employment decisions. For example, in 2004, Wal-Mart, the nation’s largest corporate employer, announced that it would be conducting criminal history checks on all potential employees (Zimmerman & Stringer, 2004). Wal-Mart is not alone. According to recent research by Holzer et al. (2003), after the terrorist attacks against American targets on September 11, 2001, there was a stark increase in the use of criminal background checks, particularly by large companies. A recent employer survey suggests that more than 50% of employers in the Los Angeles area now check some type of criminal history records (Stoll, Raphael, & Holzer, 2006). Moreover, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which governs the use of consumer information such as criminal history records, was amended in 1998 to eliminate any restrictions on how far back conviction records could be reported (SEARCH Group, 2005), meaning that in terms of employment, a criminal record can truly follow a person for life.

Overall, this research demonstrates that a criminal record of any sort has great implications for future employment opportunities for all offenders—including one-time offenders. In the following section, we further explore why such use of criminal records may indeed be counterproductive to efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders and begin to search for some reasonable guidelines for the use of such records by employers.
Removing the Stigma: Finding Direction From Ex-Offender Recidivism Research

On one hand, individuals who have been arrested in the past are more likely than the average person to be arrested in the future (e.g., Nagin & Paternoster, 2000). Undoubtedly, this reality of behavioral continuity has influenced a good deal of contemporary interest in scrutinizing individuals’ criminal records. But a good deal of contemporary research also emphasizes the importance of behavioral change in the lives of offenders. For example, a common theme of life course criminology is the finding that a majority of one-time offenders do not go on to lead lives of crime but indeed age out of, or otherwise desist from, criminal activity. Significant predictors of desistance include not only age but also the forming of positive social bonds such as work and marriage (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 1999).

In fact, a variety of birth cohort studies in criminology have converged on a few common findings about long-term criminal careers (see review in Blumstein, Farrington, & Moitra, 1985; Blumstein & Moitra, 1980). These studies typically identify a relatively small number of individuals who are responsible for the majority of arrests, police contacts, and criminal convictions. These individuals are usually described as “chronic offenders” or “career criminals.” Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the chronic offender, there has been much less study of the remainder of the population of youths who had no police contacts or those who had only one or two early contacts and then desisted from crime. As numerous studies now show, the risk of new offenses among those who have offended in the past typically peaks within 1 or 2 years and declines thereafter (e.g., Greenberg, 1978; Harris, Kaylan, & Maltz, 1981; Harris & Moitra, 1978; Lattimore & Baker, 1992; Maltz, 1984; Schmidt & Witte, 1988; Visher, Lattimore, & Linster, 1991).

Perhaps the most prominent example of this finding comes from Schmidt and Witte’s (1988) study of two North Carolina prison release cohorts to estimate the percentage of released inmates who return to prison. Their analysis found that the percentage of inmates returning to prison peaked before 10 months of street time. By the 20-month mark, this percentage had dropped to half of the peak level, and by the 40-month mark, the percentage was again cut in half from the 20-month level. The uniformity of this decline in hazard rates as individuals survive for longer periods in a crime-free state raises an interesting question about why these declines occur. There are at least two explanations for this pattern. The first assumes that some people are higher risk than others at the beginning of the follow-up period. According to this first explanation, high-risk individuals are more likely to reoffend and
reoffend quickly than are low-risk individuals. These higher risk offenders thus quickly reoffend and drop out of the risk set, leaving only those with a lower risk of reoffending in the risk set. A second explanation implies that there is something specific about being crime free over time that increases one’s likelihood of remaining in that state. For example, the longer one is able to remain crime free, perhaps the more bonds to conventional society one builds (employment, relationships, etc.), thereby further increasing the probability of remaining in this state. The critical question for our analysis is not why one avoids recidivism. Answering such a question is important but also quite complicated. Instead, our focus is on estimating the risk of new offenses within large populations. For example, an employer looking to hire a person with a criminal record in the distant past is less concerned with why that person has been able to remain crime free than with whether that person has been able to avoid new criminal acts—and whether, at this point in time, that person poses approximately the same risk of committing a new offense as the average citizen.

Overall, these results imply that risk of recidivism for a cohort of offenders returning to the community peaks fairly quickly and then diminishes considerably with the passage of time. Based on this consistently observed empirical pattern of criminal recidivism, we suggest that there may be a point at which the risk of a new criminal event among a population with a prior record becomes similar to the risk of a criminal event among individuals who have not offended in the past. In the following section, we empirically test this assumption using a data set of 670 young males born in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1942 and followed until age 32.

Data

We assume that individuals with prior offending records are more likely to accumulate new offenses than are persons without such records. But we are considerably less certain whether individuals with old prior records are more likely to accumulate new offenses. In other words, research suggests that the risk of recidivism among individuals with prior records does not remain constant over time; our principal aim here is to see whether individuals with old prior records have a distinguishably higher risk of new offenses than those with no record at all.

To address this question, we use data from the 1942 Racine birth cohort study conducted by Shannon (1982). This data set has several qualities that make it appropriate and useful for the proposed study. First, by using a
prospective birth cohort design, it provides us with a population of both offenders and nonoffenders growing up in a similar period and physical location. Second, the data track the 1942 birth cohort through age 32, allowing a look at long-term outcomes rather than the traditional 1- to 2-year follow-up periods frequently used in recidivism studies. Third, because the data follow the same individuals over time, we have access to their entire Racine criminal history (each person’s age at the time of a contact) so we can distinguish between individuals who exhibit persistent involvement in offending and individuals who stop offending or who offend intermittently. Our analysis focuses on the 670 males followed through age 32 from the 1942 Racine birth cohort. According to the Racine data collection procedures, police contact information was coded from the Juvenile Bureau and the Record Bureau of the Racine Police Department. Each individual’s age at the time of the contact was recorded and included in the database.

## Results

In this section, we present several sets of analyses based on the police contact data for the 1942 Racine cohort. Our primary task is to identify several subgroups of individuals—each of which can be characterized by their juvenile or early adult criminal history. We then follow these groups prospectively into adulthood to examine how the risk of new offenses changes as they grow older. We approach this task by examining hazard rates of new offending and the estimated probability of new offenses during two time intervals: (a) ages 25 and 32 and (b) ages 28 and 32.¹

Table 1 presents several comparison groups for our hazard analysis. The first row of this table divides the 670 Racine males into two groups based on their juvenile police contact histories. The data reveal that 349 of these individuals had at least one contact before age 18, whereas the remaining 321 did not. We therefore characterize the 349 individuals with juvenile contacts as “baseline offenders,” whereas the other 321 are characterized as “baseline nonoffenders.” Because the follow-up period for this comparison proceeds from age 18 to age 32, we characterize the length of the follow-up period as 15 years.

Figure 1 presents the adult contact hazard rates for the 349 individuals with juvenile records in comparison to the 321 individuals without any juvenile record. At age 18, the hazard rate is simply the proportion of individuals in each group who had at least one police contact at that age. At
each subsequent age, the hazard rate is based on the individuals with no contacts after age 18. Among these individuals, the hazard rate measures the proportion who have at least one contact at that subsequent age. Thus, this figure conceptually captures a key quantity of interest to any employment decision maker: Given no criminal record since the individual was a juvenile, what is the likelihood that person will recidivate in the future in comparison to someone with no record of offending at all? As Figure 1 illustrates, the juvenile offenders and nonoffenders exhibit important differences in the hazard rate for new offenses early in their adult years.2 Equally prominent, however, is the convergence between the groups by age 23. In any given year after the mid-20s, there appears to be little difference in offending likelihoods between juvenile offenders who have avoided offending during early adulthood and those with no record at all.

Next, we continue to work through Table 1 by comparing the 151 individuals with a record of at least one contact at age 18 to the 519 individuals with no contacts at age 18. We follow these individuals from ages 19 to 32 to see how the risk of new offenses varies between them. Figure 2 presents the results, which reveal important differences between the age-18 offenders and nonoffenders until the mid-20s.3 After that point, however, the groups become very hard to distinguish from each other. For example, during the 9-year period from ages 24 to 32, the age-18 offenders have a higher hazard rate than the age-18 nonoffenders in 5 years, whereas the age-18 nonoffenders actually do better than the age-18 offenders in 3 years. At age 32, the two groups have identical zero hazard rates. In sum, when criminal activity is in the recent past, we expect to see an elevated hazard rate; but the more distant the last evidence of criminal activity is in the past,
the less likely there is to be a meaningful elevation in the hazard rate for new offenses.

We turn now to a comparison of the 535 age-19 nonoffenders to the 135 age-19 offenders. The follow-up period for this comparison extends from ages 20 to 32. As Figure 3 illustrates, there are apparent differences in the hazard rates for new offenses between these groups, at least through age 25 (or perhaps age 27). After age 26, however, it is clear that there is no important difference in the new offense hazard rates for these two groups. Figure 4 builds on this pattern by comparing the 550 age-20 nonoffenders to the 120 age-20 offenders. From ages 21 to 25, the age-20 offenders exhibit a visibly higher hazard rate for new contacts than the age-20 nonoffenders. But from ages 26 to 28, the differences between these groups become much smaller, and they disappear completely by age 29.

Our final hazard rate analysis is based on a comparison of a young adult offender group \( (n = 263) \) composed of individuals with at least one contact at ages 18, 19, or 20 to a larger group of 407 individuals with no police contacts...
during the 18 to 20 period. Our comparison focuses on contacts experienced by both of these groups between ages 21 and 32. Figure 5 presents the results, which show important differences in these hazard rates from ages 21 to 25.6 But as in the other analyses, when the mid-20s approach, our ability to distinguish between the behavior of these two groups diminishes considerably. Although there is some indication of an elevated risk of new offenses throughout the entire period, the differences between these groups in the late 20s are very small indeed.

The preceding hazard rate analysis provides a useful window on the risks of new criminal behavior in a particular year, but it is less helpful for thinking about cumulative risk of failure over a period of several years. This is important because seemingly small differences in a hazard rate analysis can accumulate to larger, more important differences over the course of several years. To address this problem, we conducted two additional analyses. First, we compared groups with different criminal history backgrounds on the probability of being contacted at least once between the ages of 25

Figure 2
Contact Hazard Rates Through Age 32: Age-18 Offenders and Nonoffenders

![Graph showing contact hazard rates through age 32 for age-18 offenders and nonoffenders.](cad.sagepub.com)
Figure 3
Contact Hazard Rates Through Age 32: Age-19 Offenders and Nonoffenders

Figure 4
Contact Hazard Rates Through Age 32: Age-20 Offenders and Nonoffenders
and 32. Second, we compared criminal history groups on the probability of at least one contact between ages 28 and 32.

This type of analysis provides a useful basis for thinking about the policy implications of our findings from the Racine data. For example, suppose an employer is faced with two applicants for a position. Both applicants are 25 years old, but one of the applicants has never had a record of any arrest activity, whereas the other one was arrested at age 18 but has not been arrested since. Do these two applicants have different probabilities of experiencing an arrest in the next 7 years? In this second analysis, we build on our hazard rate studies to obtain answers to these types of questions.

The criminal history groups for the first analysis were composed of the following categories: (a) no record at all through age 24, (b) a juvenile record only, (c) last contact at age 18, (d) last contact at age 19, (e) last contact at age 20, (f) last contact at age 21, (g) last contact at age 22, (h) last contact at age 23, and (i) last contact at age 24. Within each of these groups, we calculate the proportion of individuals with at least one police contact during the 8-year period between ages 25 and 32. For the second analysis, we use these same 9 categories plus an additional 3: (a) last contact at age 25, (b) last
contact at age 26, and (c) last contact at age 27. Then, for each of these 12 groups, we calculate the proportion of individuals who have at least one police contact from age 28 to age 32. Table 2 provides a summary of the number of people in each of the groups and the follow-up period contact rates for both analyses.

The clear implication of Table 2 is that individuals with no record of police contacts have the lowest likelihood of being contacted again within the two follow-up periods. Another clear implication of this table is that individuals with juvenile or early adult records but no subsequent contacts have a somewhat higher likelihood (than those with no record) of acquiring new contacts during each follow-up period. Individuals with more recent adult records exhibit a much higher likelihood of new contacts during each follow-up period.

A limitation of the analysis in Table 2 is the relatively small sample sizes involved. To address this issue, we calculate exact 95% binomial confidence intervals around each of the estimated proportions in Table 2. For the age 25 to 32 analysis, these confidence intervals are presented in Figure 6, whereas the age 28 to 32 results are presented in Figure 7.
As Figure 6 suggests, the estimated contact probabilities in the ages 25 to 32 follow-up period are higher for those with older records (in comparison to those with no records). But the analysis reveals that the 95% confidence intervals for those with juvenile records and those whose last contact occurred at ages 18, 19, or 20 overlap with the confidence intervals for those with no record at all. Individuals whose last contact occurred at age 21 or later had substantially higher probabilities of new contact between ages 25 and 32.

The results in Figure 7 for the ages 28 to 32 follow-up period tell a similar story. Individuals with no record, with a juvenile record, or whose last contact occurred at age 21 or younger appear to have overlapping 95% confidence intervals, whereas those whose last contact occurred later in adulthood tended to have much higher contact probabilities between ages 28 and 32. Overall, the clear pattern from Figures 6 and 7 is that the amount of time since the last police contact has occurred is relevant information for making short-term predictions about future criminal activity. Simple distinctions between those who have an official offending record and those who do not appear to be quite inadequate as a basis for future criminal activity predictions.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Increasingly, individuals are being held accountable for their official criminal records. This trend has gained momentum in recent years as the technology for searching these records has become more commonplace and accessible while the expense involved in searching such records has been dropping. Accompanying this greater reliance on criminal record information is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that those with criminal records are likely to face important disadvantages in many activities and endeavors. Limited access to jobs, public housing, student loans, and other types of activities have all become more commonplace in recent years.

In this study, we are particularly interested in the use of old criminal records in employment decisions. As previously noted, a criminal record of any type can be deemed a character flaw on the part of the owner, thus portraying to others the potential of the individual to commit other criminal and/or dishonest acts (Becker, 1963; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This stigma works to limit employment opportunities for offenders both formally—through legislation prohibiting the hire of ex-offenders into certain occupations—and informally—by communicating to the potential employer that this individual is a higher-than-average employment risk (Holzer et al., 2003; Pager, 2003). The imposition of these disadvantages has some basis in
Figure 6
Failure Rates Between Ages 25 and 32

Note: NR = no record; JR = juvenile record only. Age denotes age at last police contact.

Figure 7
Failure Rates Between Ages 28 and 32

Note: NR = no record; JR = juvenile record only. Age denotes age at last police contact.
empirical research on criminal careers: Individuals who have offended in the past are more likely, on average, to offend in the future. However, this empirical fact can only be pushed so far for policy purposes. The problem is that a recent criminal record seems to be far more predictive of short-term future behavior than older criminal records from many years ago.

Taken with our recent analysis of the 1958 Philadelphia birth cohort data (Kurlychek, Brame, & Bushway, 2006), we are skeptical that blanket decision rules based exclusively on whether someone has a criminal record will provide useful information for behavioral predictions. Instead, our analyses suggest that decision makers should place information about criminal records into a context that pays close attention to the recency of the criminal record as well as the existence of a criminal record. That is, if a person with a criminal record remains crime free for a period of about 7 years, his or her risk of a new offense is similar to that of a person without any criminal record.

Our analyses of the Philadelphia and Racine data sets lead us to a number of other conclusions about research and policy as well. First, research that documents exactly how criminal record databases are being used to make decisions about employment and access to other opportunities is badly needed. We simply do not know enough about the quality of the data on which such decisions are based or the extent to which decision makers already discount older criminal records or criminal records for certain types of offenses. Second, our survey of the literature indicates that the criminal record industry is thriving and growing in an environment of limited regulation. This lack of regulation is troubling in light of the extensive regulation governing access to, and use of, personal information in the credit-reporting and insurance industries.

On the other hand, the way these other industries use personal information can provide a useful road map for researchers and policy makers as they contemplate the optimal use of personal criminal history information. For example, the nation’s three largest credit-reporting agencies (Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian) and the nation’s largest credit score calculator (Fair Isaac) all explain on their Web sites that derogatory credit information carries less and less weight in the calculation of credit risk scores as the time since the triggering behavior increases. In other words, the credit-reporting industry places more weight on recent behavior and less weight on older behavior. This is precisely the implication of our analyses of the Philadelphia and Racine data sets. The search for useful policy analogies to the problem of optimal criminal history use is a worthwhile objective.
Finally, researchers and policy makers should think carefully about whether criminal records for some types of offenses should be treated differently than records for other types of offenses. Developing useful policy guidance in this area represents a daunting challenge because so little is currently known about how criminal records are already used, and the quality of the information contained in those records is poorly understood. Nevertheless, involvement in some offenses may predict future behavior better than involvement in other types of offenses. In the near term, basic research about behavioral outcomes for different types of offenses is a critical need.

In information-intensive Western societies, it is perhaps surprising that knowledge about the proper use of criminal history information could lag so far behind the actual practice of using that information to make decisions about opportunities for ex-offenders. This is a research area where the expertise of criminology and criminal justice researchers can directly contribute to the optimal use of this type of information. We hope this research will encourage others to use their own research skills to produce better practical usage of criminal history information.

Notes

1. We define the hazard rate as the proportion of individuals who experience a police contact at a given age among those who have had no police contacts between the beginning of the follow-up period and that age. Thus, a hazard rate can be calculated for a particular population at any given age.

2. To check on the statistical significance of these comparisons, we calculated exact 95% binomial confidence intervals for each of the proportions in Figure 1. The results indicated that the confidence intervals for the juvenile offenders and nonoffenders did not overlap at all at ages 18 and 19. By age 20, however, they do begin to overlap and continue to do so throughout the remainder of the follow-up period to age 32.

3. The exact 95% confidence intervals on the proportions in Figure 2 actually overlap for the age-18 offenders and nonoffenders beginning at age 22. Though not statistically different from that point on, the curves do not visibly approach each other until the mid-20s.

4. But we note that by age 23, the 95% confidence intervals begin to overlap for the age-19 nonoffenders and the offenders.

5. Exact binomial 95% confidence intervals around these proportions indicate that the age-20 offenders and nonoffenders overlap beginning at age 24.

6. The 95% confidence intervals overlap for the two groups beginning at age 24.

References


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