Who Cares about a Delinquency Prevention Experiment of Boston Boys Born in the 1920s and 1930s?

Begun in 1939, the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study is a delinquency prevention experiment (embedded in a prospective longitudinal survey) of 506 boys (median age = 10.5 years) from the Boston area. Boys in the treatment group received special counseling for a period of 5 years on average. The study was last followed-up by Joan McCord when participants were in their forties. On the occasion of the age-80 follow-up, this paper examines core issues of long-term assessments of longitudinal-experimental studies organized around epidemiology, prevention, and mechanism. Long-term follow-ups allow for a more complete understanding of the patterns in offending over the life-course as well as of the etiology of changes and stability in offending over time (epidemiology). In terms of prevention, the age-45 follow-up found iatrogenic effects of the program. It seems crucial to understand if these effects persist, wane, or cease over time, in addition to investigating the intergenerational transmission of these effects. Also important is to understand the mechanisms responsible for the effects and the validity of the preventive approach over time. Longitudinal-experimental studies play an important role by reaffirming our commitment to engage the past and contributing to an improved understanding of human behavior over the life-course.

Brandon C. Welsh

Brandon C. Welsh, Ph.D., is Professor of Criminology at Northeastern University and Director of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study. He is also the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences Visiting Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) in Amsterdam. Dr. Welsh’s research focuses on the prevention of delinquency and crime and evidence-based social policy. His latest book is Experimental Criminology: Prospects for Advancing Science and Public Policy (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Friday, April 15, 12:15 pm
Husted Hall, Room 214
UAlbany Downtown Campus, 135 Western Avenue

This event is free and open to the public.

Event hosted by the School of Criminal Justice.