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Crime Prevention for Social Impact and Social Justice

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Crime prevention interventions that take place outside of the formal justice system or in partnership with proactive policing—like child social skills training, school-based mentoring, after-school programs, and improved street lighting in urban neighborhoods—are important to lowering crime rates in American cities, towns, and neighborhoods. They can also contribute to broader social impact and social justice. Crime prevention that prioritizes social impact harnesses what we know from evidence-based interventions to foster systems change that is both meaningful and lasting. And crime prevention efforts that improve social justice equitably deliver resources and promote perceptions of fairness and legitimacy among individuals and the community at large. This volume of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* examines the ideals, challenges, and progress of a new wave of crime prevention programs and policies focused on attaining social impact and social justice.

This is the first major work of research and scholarship to focus on social impact and social justice as part of the growing demand for evidence-based and cost-efficient interventions to prevent crime. Contributors to the volume include leading U.S. and international scholars in criminology, sociology, economics, psychology, medicine, public health, and the law, along with top U.S. policymakers.

The volume makes clear that neither social impact nor social justice is a natural by-product of crime prevention interventions. As the editors describe, “They are not achieved through good intentions alone. Both require deliberate and sustained effort on the part of communities and other stakeholders.”

Contributions to the volume include:

- An article by John J. Donohue and Peter Siegelman that updates their influential prior study on allocating resources among prisons and preschools, with the new findings being even stronger today—that preschools carry fewer social costs than prisons and are more effective at preventing crime;

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- A synthesis from Allison Ann Payne of research on school-based crime and delinquency prevention that highlights a wide range of evidence-based school interventions that can produce substantial impacts on crime and delinquency and the vital need to ensure that the benefits reach children with the greatest educational and social needs; and
- A report on an evaluation of a school–community crime prevention partnership in Seattle, in which Charlotte Gill, David Weisburd, and colleagues demonstrate how the program led to significant reductions in crime incidents and calls for police service and, further, empowered community members to take on leadership roles.

These success stories and others profiled in the volume draw attention to crime prevention as a public good—like health care and education. The volume argues that it is crucial for the success of crime prevention efforts to be measured by declines in crime as well as by the degree to which a given program improves social equity, fairness, and legitimacy. As the editors note, “The stakes are high. It is time that we make the shift from the older model that simply asks ‘What works?’ to this new model that asks, ‘For whom does it work and how justly?’”