

1 Introduction

What Do We Mean by “Antisocial Behavior” and “Young People”?

This book is about young people who commit criminal offenses. They may not necessarily have been prosecuted – although many of them are. We are interested in a range of things about these young people, their behavior, and the system within which they offend. We ask: who they are, what types of things they do, whether their criminal activities are accompanied by other problems, how trends have changed over time, and what can be concluded about the backgrounds to those behaviors. Can anything be done to intervene or prevent young people from offending?

The question of terminology is always a difficult one, particularly when writing for an international audience, and we need briefly to discuss our use of the terms “antisocial behavior” and “young people” in the title of this book. Our focus is on acts that involve breaking the law and on the individuals who engage in such antisocial behavior. We might have referred to either “delinquency” or “crime” and will do so in the text occasionally, but both imply conviction (or its possibility) and, as we discuss, all studies have shown both that the majority of crimes do not result in anyone appearing in court and that many people who commit acts for which they could be prosecuted never appear in the crime statistics. Moreover, children below the age of criminal responsibility engage in antisocial behavior for which they cannot be prosecuted. If we are to understand the origins of delinquency, it will be crucial to consider antisocial behavior that is outside the realm of the law and also the illegal acts that do *not* result in prosecution as well as those that do. These are encompassed by the term “antisocial behavior.”

Clinicians, both psychologists and psychiatrists, tend to write about diagnostic categories such as oppositional/defiant disorder, conduct disorder, and antisocial personality disorder, rather than crime as such. These disorders often involve engaging in delinquent behavior, but they are far from synonymous with crime. On the one hand, the criteria for their diagnosis involve many behaviors that do not involve breaking the

law. On the other hand, many individuals who receive convictions do not show the social impairment and psychological dysfunction that are required for a psychiatric diagnosis. We consider findings on those psychopathological patterns insofar as they are relevant to an understanding of antisocial behavior, but not otherwise.

Our use of the term “young people” is meant to indicate a focus on the age period preceding maturity or adulthood. In general, we have paid particular attention to those under the age of 20 years but, as other reviews have noted (see e.g. Rutter & Smith, 1995), development does not cease at 19 years and, in many respects, it is more appropriate to extend the term up to the age of about 25. Similarly, research findings are clear-cut in their indication that antisocial behavior often begins in childhood before the age at which people can be prosecuted. Our review reflects this extension upward and downward, but we have paid most attention to the age period of 10 to 19 years.

We have not defined this in terms of the adjective “juvenile” because that word tends to carry the connotation that the lower limit is set by the age of criminal responsibility and the upper limit by the age when young people can be dealt with by courts for adult offenders. These ages not only vary across countries but also have changed over time and are not the same for all offenses (Justice, 1996; Pease & Tseloni, 1996; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995).

Why a New Review?

Two of us were responsible for a somewhat similar review some 15 years ago (Rutter & Giller, 1983), and it is necessary to ask why another review is needed. Three considerations predominate: a great increase in research findings, changing approaches to theory, and an altering pattern of questions deriving from policy and practice. Since the 1983 review, there has been a substantial increase in empirically based knowledge on the nature of delinquency, its causes, factors that influence its perpetuation into adult life, and its prevention and treatment. Theories of crime based on the notion of a single unifying set of causal factors have fallen into disrepute, and there has been increasing attention to both the origins of individual differences in liability to antisocial behavior and to the major differences in rates of crime over time and among groups, whether defined in terms of gender or nationality. Rising rates of crime, legislative changes, an increased international focus on the rights and needs of young people, and general concerns over child homicide and sexual offenses by young people have all altered the pattern of questions about antisocial behavior in

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young people. In our review we have tried to reflect, and respond to, these various changes.

The conclusions from the 1983 review were many and wide-reaching, including an implicit program for future research. Our general approach in this update of the field has been to take the earlier review as the starting point and then evaluate the extent to which recent research has built on or modified the earlier literature, met the identified research needs, or addressed issues not covered in the earlier review. We have not re-reviewed the research prior to 1983, but we have summarized the findings up to that point, fitting new evidence into the general framework provided by the earlier volume. This has involved a reassessment of the original conclusions, so the resulting review is an integrated update with a broader coverage and somewhat different set of concepts, and not just a revision.

A key strength of the previous review was its multidisciplinary approach; bringing together clinical, social, and criminological perspectives. The current review follows the same pattern. However, the field of antisocial behavior was already immense by the late 1970s and has grown greatly since then, so limits have had to be set on our coverage of the literature. As well as focusing on recent research, we have concentrated on empirical findings and on research published in English.

Of course, bald “facts” are of little use on their own. In order for them to have meaning and to be of value in planning policies or modifying practice, they need to be placed in a social context and to be integrated with respect to the light shed on the merits and demerits of competing explanatory hypotheses and theories. This we have tried to do, and have thus referred to approaches such as feminist sociology or sociology of deviance, or to social practices and institutions, where they provide useful context. However, our focus on empirical findings has meant that we have not sought to provide a comprehensive coverage of theoretical perspectives otherwise, or a very detailed description of cultural context, except in cases where there is empirical research or at least testable hypotheses. Similarly, we have not drawn on descriptive, ethnographic, or naturalistic data except where they have implications for testing postulates or mechanisms. The way in which research was judged for inclusion in the book is described in the next chapter, where it will become clear that the approach we have taken affects the balance of the research content of the book, because the studies most often meeting these criteria have tended to focus on individual and psychosocial aspects of antisocial behavior rather than on broader, societywide influences, although we consider these in some detail in Chapter 8, as well as returning to them in

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Chapters 11 and 12. The more limited data on societal factors reflect, in part, the difficulties inherent in researching the broader questions; as we shall see, there is still a great need for more empirical data in a number of critical sociological areas.

Growth in the extent and quality of information on offending by young people in the late 1980s and early 1990s has occurred via three main routes: official statistics, research findings, and the development of international comparisons. First, there have been significant developments in the official criminal statistics. These are becoming more extensive and involve reports from a range of sources. The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics has conducted a National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) since 1973, based on interviews with approximately 49,000 households (Perkins et al., 1996). In 1982, the England and Wales Home Office followed suit and initiated the British Crime Survey (BCS) to complement the annually published *Criminal Statistics* (see e.g. Home Office, 1996). In England and Wales, the victim survey consisted of interviews with over 10,000 members of the general population. The BCS was repeated in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994, and 1996 (see Mayhew, Aye Maung, & Mirrlees-Black, 1993; Mirrlees-Black, Mayhew, & Percy, 1996). In addition, the first International Crime Survey (ICS) took place in 1989 – followed by subsequent sweeps in 1992, 1994, and 1996 – and covered twenty European and other countries, including Japan (Mayhew, 1993; Van Dijk, Mayhew, & Killias, 1990).

These victim surveys contribute much information to knowledge about which crimes have been experienced and to what extent they were reported; they also provide a source of comparison for police-generated statistics (Bottomley & Pease, 1993). Moreover, crime surveys provide a useful corrective to simplistic “political” interpretations of rises (or falls) in recorded crime. The patterns emerging often differ from those evident in the police statistics and from country to country. Not infrequently, the trends shown in the victim surveys are less dramatic than those in the official statistics, with less change evident over time. Within the United Kingdom, for example, the rates of vandalism doubled in Home Office statistics in the 1980s but remained constant in the BCS. Conversely, the most recent crime survey (Mirrlees-Black et al., 1996) showed a recent rise in crime not reflected in official statistics. Analyses of these types of comparisons have meant that general understanding about the strengths and weaknesses of official statistics has developed considerably, including an unraveling of the biases to which they are subject and their relationship to the real world of crime (see e.g. Coleman & Moynihan, 1996; Walker, 1995).

Second, concurrent with these developments in official recording, the psychiatric, psychological, sociological, and criminological literatures

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have contributed substantially to the untangling of trends and perspectives on offending behavior by adolescents. Criminology itself has developed substantially over the last decade, as has child psychiatry, both of which were relatively new disciplines a few decades ago. They converge in their growing emphasis on the importance of longitudinal research for understanding patterns in development and for studying causal questions. Tonry, Ohlin, and Farrington (1991) argued a strong case for longitudinal research in criminology, as did Rutter (1988) for child psychiatry. This has been accompanied by advances in the clarification of the ways in which longitudinal data may be used to test causal hypotheses (Loeber & Farrington 1994; Rutter, 1994a). Major longitudinal studies begun in the sixties, seventies, and eighties have contributed a considerable amount of data to the investigation of antisocial behavior as cohort members develop into adolescence and early adulthood and continuities and discontinuities in behavior are better documented. Findings relate to the origins of antisocial behavior in preschool behavior (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; White et al., 1990), oppositional/defiant disorder (Lahey & Loeber, 1994) and hyperactivity (Rutter et al., 1997b), as well as to its desistance or persistence into adult life (Farrington, 1995a,b; Kerner, Weitekamp, & Stelly, 1995; Kratzer & Hodgins, 1996a; Quinton et al., 1993; Rutter et al., 1994; Tracy, Wolfgang, & Figlio, 1990). Reanalysis of older data sets has also contributed in a major way (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

As well as general developments in the literature, the last dozen or so years have witnessed specific advances in particular issues relating directly to antisocial behavior. These include recognition of its heterogeneity and advances in understanding causal processes. Recent research has suggested ways in which varieties of delinquency could be differentiated – for example, those associated with early-onset hyperactivity or those with early rather than adolescent onset (e.g. Hinshaw et al., 1993; Moffitt, 1993a,b; Patterson & Yoerger, 1997). In addition, there has come to be a better appreciation of the need to distinguish among the somewhat varied causal processes involved in *individual differences* in the liability to engage in antisocial behavior, changes over time in the overall *level* of crime, *situational* variations in delinquent activities, and *persistence/nonpersistence* of antisocial behavior as individuals grow older (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Loeber & Hay, 1994; Quinton et al., 1993; Rutter & Smith, 1995; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

A better understanding of the issues underlying comorbidity (i.e., the co-occurrence of two supposedly separate disorders) has also resulted in data relevant for unraveling the nature and origins of antisocial behavior. More is known on the associations between crime and substance

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abuse (alcohol and illicit drugs), between crime and reading difficulties, between crime and suicide, and between conduct disorder and depression (Harrington et al., 1991; Hinshaw, 1992; Ito, Miller, & Pollock, 1996; Liebling, 1992; Maughan et al., 1996; Moffitt, 1993b; Robins & Rutter, 1990; Sumner & Parker, 1995).

Third, the increasing emphasis on the importance of the international perspective (arising from significant worldwide developments such as changes in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, the growth of the European Union, etc.) has both complicated the picture and helped to put national developments in context. Comparative studies are becoming more ambitious and are extending their gaze beyond the United Kingdom and North America, as shown, for example, by the first International Crime Survey (Van Dijk et al., 1990) and the first truly international self-report study (Junger-Tas, 1994a). Complications arise from the difficulties of trying to compare the underlying trends in antisocial behavior in different jurisdictions and cultures. For these reasons, one of the participants in the international self-report study has expressed doubt on the validity of drawing global conclusions from data from the individual countries (Graham, 1994). Putting national statistics into the international context helps, however, by highlighting particular outstanding findings in certain countries, such as the very low rate of delinquency in Japan and the striking growth of homicide by young people in the United States (Kelley et al., 1997).

Besides these three main types of development in the basic data, other reasons for an updated review of the delinquency literature include legislative and social changes. As this is a review of antisocial behavior, rather than of conduct disorder generally, legislative changes have potentially widespread effects on the overall picture. This is the case in terms of the definitions and recording of antisocial behavior and also in terms of the legal requirements relating to the treatment of children and young people. The 1980s saw significant European and international advances in the protection of children (e.g., the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), but these have sometimes clashed with other areas of national policy relating to disposals for young offenders. In the United Kingdom, calls for a more integrated youth policy have become increasingly urgent, and critics have suggested that segmented approaches to offending and child care are based on service delivery and political expediency rather than on social or economic need or on research findings.

Changes in social trends that indicated the need for an updated review of antisocial behavior include transformations in family patterns, changes in education and the youth labor market, changes in the normative

experiences of young people, and international social changes such as the growth of the information society and the explosion of multimedia. The most obvious changes in family patterns include a dramatic increase in divorce: between 1977 and 1992, both the number of divorces and the number of children aged under 16 of divorced couples increased drastically in the United Kingdom. The number of children aged under 5 affected by divorce in 1992 was 57,000, almost two thirds higher than in 1977 (Central Statistical Office, 1994). Relatedly, the proportion of lone parents has also risen. In the United States, the proportion of children living in two-parent families over a comparable time period declined from 85% to 73% (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). As we shall see, the relevance of these changes for antisocial behavior has been the subject of much discussion in both the academic literature and the general media.

Successive sweeps of various national surveys have shown that, over this period, the proportion of young people staying on in education has increased dramatically and, in the United Kingdom and the United States, economic recession has had implications for the youth labor market. Young people are more likely now than they have ever been in the past to come into contact with, and experiment with, illegal drugs during the years of their compulsory education (Parker, Measham, & Aldridge, 1995). They also live in a society where new technologies play increasingly important roles, and where the commercialization of information and communication are resulting in a global cultural market (Featherstone, 1991; Wartella, 1995).

Another major social trend that has received much attention is the continued rise in crime rates, as evidenced in official statistics. There is no doubt that, in a number of countries including the United Kingdom, offenses recorded by the police have risen since the 1980s, although explanations for the rise – and its relationship to underlying behavioral trends – remain elusive. It is clear that the rise applies not just to crime but also to depression, suicide, and drug abuse (Rutter & Smith, 1995).

Coverage and Structure of This Review

Despite the fact that this review is loosely based on the structure of the 1983 book, we have made several critical changes in terms of the topics included, reflecting some of the major social changes just outlined. Thus, we have concentrated to a greater extent than previously on the significance of ethnic group membership. There are several reasons for this, although they vary nationally. In the United Kingdom, the primary concern in the 1960s and 1970s was on ethnicity in relation to immigration, but there

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are now well-established second and third generations of ethnic minority British nationals for whom the issues may be different. In addition, U.K. criminal statistics now record some data on ethnicity, and ethnic minority adolescents are increasingly the focus of high-profile programs of police action. In Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, migration remains a central issue, whereas the focus in the United States has generally been on black–white differences that have nothing to do with immigration. Moreover, in the United States, a striking recent feature has been the growth of the Hispanic population and the increasingly disproportionate representation of young black men in the murder (perpetrator and victim) statistics. Overall, on the basis of a number of surveys and studies of the experiences of ethnic minorities, it is becoming accepted that it is not sufficient to consider ethnicity as a unitary variable, and the importance of acknowledging the diversity of experience between different groups and in different places is now emphasized (see e.g. Modood, Beishon, & Virdee, 1994). We need to assess the importance of this emphasis for antisocial behavior.

A decision was also made to provide a short discussion of drug offending and of the role of drugs in crime. The original argument for not including these was that they were not common in the United Kingdom at that time, although increases in drug use had already taken place in America by the early 1980s. As we have already indicated, at least some low-level experimentation with drugs is now far more common in Europe than it was 15 years ago, and drug offenses are on the increase. There is also some limited evidence that rates have recently begun to increase in the United States again (Robertson & Skinner, 1996; Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata, 1996). Similarly, sexual abuse both of and by young people was originally excluded because it was thought to be uncommon. It is considered briefly this time, not because it has become common but because it has a higher public profile than it did, and public awareness of childhood sexual abuse and its role in development is greater than it was. This relates in part to a greater understanding of the overlap between victim and offender (Boswell, 1995) and to better data on perpetrators of child and adolescent abuse (Vizard, Monck, & Misch, 1995). In addition, because of the overall increase in psychosocial disorders in young people (Rutter & Smith, 1995), we have included mention of some research on the relationship between crime and emotional disorder or suicide.

It has long been apparent that the crime rate for males is several times higher than that for females. Despite this, there has been a paucity of research into male–female differences in antisocial behavior. Increasingly, however, it has become recognized that elucidation of the causes of this

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gender difference might throw important light on the origins of antisocial behavior more generally. Accordingly, although firm conclusions are thin on the ground, we have a separate chapter on the topic.

In many ways, the major growth area in studies of crime has been the focus on developmental patterns over the life-span, with analysis of criminal careers and with a study of the factors that seem to affect desistance from (or persistence in) antisocial behavior in adult life. Again, we have a separate chapter on this topic.

We start, in Chapter 2, by outlining some conceptual and methodological considerations that have guided our approach to this review. Chapter 3 sets the scene with a discussion of age, blame, and the age of criminal responsibility, and then looks at the picture of adolescent crime derived from criminal statistics, victim surveys, and self-report data. A number of factors that affect the coding and processing of information lead to some variation between sources of information, so we discuss these before looking at the differences thrown up by these sources of data between non-offenders versus offenders and infrequent versus persistent offenders.

Chapter 4 focuses on the major rise in crime that has taken place in most countries over the last half century, and Chapter 5 on what is known about heterogeneity in antisocial behavior. Chapters 6–8 bring together what is known about various sorts of causal factors; Chapter 9 discusses gender differences, and Chapter 10 considers life-span developmental issues. Chapters 11 and 12 review what is known about prevention and intervention, pulling together the conceptual and theoretical perspectives in order to look at policy and practice implications. The final Chapter 13 highlights a series of significant findings from the review as a whole and discusses the relationship of research to policy and practice.

We have intended that the book should have a broad and varied readership, although it has been a challenge to present such a range of different topics in a way that is accessible to everyone. No doubt we have not succeeded entirely, but we would hope that the book is treated as a whole, as we have considered its parts to be complementary, from the biological to the sociological.

2 Identifying the Most Useful Research

As our Introduction indicates, in some respects this volume uses as a starting point the 1983 review written by two of us (Rutter & Giller, 1983). Nevertheless, the considerable expansion in empirical research over the last 15 years, together with the improved clarification of concepts, has meant that we have been able to tackle the task of reviewing the field with a rather tighter focus, and with somewhat higher standards with respect to the quality of the evidence on which we rely. In this introductory chapter we outline some of the main features of our approach.

First, we note the breadth of antisocial behavior and the need to take into account its various facets. Second, we consider the generally low agreement among informants and hence the need for multiple data sources. Third, the value of representative general population samples, especially when followed over time, is discussed. Fourth, we draw attention to the two-way interplay between psyche and soma. Fifth, we emphasize the variety of concepts of causation, moving on to the need for examining causal chains of both direct and indirect links, finishing with the steps needed to test causal hypotheses. We will refer to (or develop) many of these points later in the book, so they provide an important starting point for considering the studies described in later chapters.

Breadth of Antisocial Behavior

Numerous studies have now shown that individuals who engage in frequent delinquent or criminal activities tend to differ from other members of the general population in a host of ways that extend well beyond acts that break the law (see e.g. Farrington, 1995a,b; Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Smith, 1995; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995).

Some of the findings are reviewed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. In brief, they may be summarized as follows.

- When *very young*, people who subsequently engage in repeated antisocial activities tend to be overactive, disruptive in their behavior, oppositional, and have difficulties getting along with other children.