

Research Strategy - *Criminology 2017*

Department of social sciences

1- Introduction

Note: The subject of criminology at Mid Sweden University is currently struggling with very scarce personnel resources for research (one PhD only), which limits to a large degree the amount of research work that can be performed. Therefore, this strategy is very much shaped by this precarious situation, which we hope will change for better in the future.

The subject of criminology at Mid Sweden University is developing a *crime prevention* orientation and profile in education and research. In nowadays, crime prevention is turning into a predominant paradigm in the criminology discipline all over the world, driven by an academic stream on translational criminology and by the raising of awareness in governments and authorities of the importance of prevention over intervention. In Sweden, a new national crime prevention programme, which urges communities to develop their own preventive plans and encourages a close collaboration between local authorities and universities, has been released recently by the ministry of justice¹. In many other countries reinventing policing has become a priority as cost-effective studies revealed that preventive science should take the lead instead of increasing resources delivery to the justice systems. In order to develop the best knowledge-based crime prevention interventions a step forward on evaluation research and problem-oriented strategies is mostly needed, along with basic research in the field. Is on an account of this necessity that the subject of criminology at MIUN established the frame of its research work and defined its research strategy. At the same time, we are strongly willing to work with a threefold aim during the next years: (1) to strength ties between research and education, (2) to establish a network with partners and institutions that are essential to produce studies in areas of crime prevention, and (3) to establish a national and international research network, on the medium/long run, that will give us the necessary support to grow as a group.

2- Academic, scientific and societal challenges.

In the field of criminology, the academic, scientific, and societal challenges are many, and these are the challenges that we, as a research group, are expecting and are prepared to experience.

¹ Available at <http://www.government.se/information-material/2017/06/combating-crime-together--a-national-crime-prevention-programme/>

2.1 Academic challenges: As an academic discipline, criminology still deals to gain emancipation and to be recognized as an independent area of knowledge instead of a branch of sociology or law. Although its foundations have ancient roots in sociology, the object of analysis is unique and there has been a theoretical development that cannot be claimed by any other discipline. Furthermore, the research methods are those shared by many other scientific fields rather than specific of sociology or law. Within the Academia, criminology used to be, in the past postgraduate education, which required that students have finished a bachelor in other sciences. Today, in many countries, criminology has its own undergraduate programs and criminologists started to be regarded as professionals with knowledge, skills, and competencies that no other professional have. However, there is still a long way to go; crime causation and the explanation of criminological phenomena have dominated academic programs, but the application of such knowledge to real problems is almost never taught. We, at Mid Sweden University will work to make stronger the discipline establishing a connection between our research and the undergraduate and graduate programs, anchoring education and research in an evidence-based paradigm, on the specific field of crime prevention, and provide opportunities to develop students' skills in the real world.

2.2. Scientific challenges: As a scientific discipline, criminology is well recognized worldwide. There are many national and international scientific societies and associations as well as many universities actively working on criminology research. About thirty scientific journals with impact factor specialized in the field are indexed in the most widely used rankings - e.g. the *Criminology* journal², in general regarded as a leading journal in the field with an impact factor of 5,019 in 2016, has been published since 1963. However, and once more, the underlying feeling is that there is still much work to do. The concept of based-evidence criminology has become stronger since the beginning of the century when Campbell Collaboration published its first meta-analyses. The concept of translational criminology highlighted new priorities in research to fit the necessities of institutions and agencies. Crime prevention has come to be an obliged issue to debate in every scientific meeting. We, at Mid Sweden University, are compromise to strengthen the based-evidence approach, to evaluate the needs of our community (e.g. evaluation of crime prevention programs, the study of the impact of crime policies, etc.) and apply the scientific knowledge to such needs in order to develop tools and strategies to prevent the consequences of crime on victims and society.

2.3. Societal challenges: The societal challenges in the criminological area are many because crime and violence surround us all time in almost every place. Everyday new technological advances represent new hazards (i.e. cybercrime, cyberbullying/cyberstalking, cyberterrorism), challenging the security and wellbeing of people and states. Violence and violent crime is a reality that many have to face in their private life, in their work places, and in the streets. Old social problems are not only phenomena from the past. Unemployment, immigration, crowded cities with impoverished surrounding areas are a reality in many countries including Sweden. Old problems with new faces that need to be re-understood if we want to fight against them and successfully prevent crime and violence. In Mid Sweden University, our group will work with the commitment of making useful to the society the scientific results we produce enhancing knowledge transference.

² [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1745-9125](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1745-9125)

In sum, criminology is an alive discipline, which currently confronts many challenges, and our group at Mid Sweden University is committed to put efforts in overcoming such challenges.

3- Analysis of the research front

There are many “schools of thought” and theories in criminology. The richness in the thinking within the criminology discipline is a manifestation of the complexity of its subject matter (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2014). Like other types of social behavior, crime is multifaceted and potentially shaped by a range of factors that operate inside and outside individuals, that exist on the micro and on the macro level, and that have direct and indirect effects on societies and on individuals through the lifespan.

Since the United Nations resolution (1996/16 of 23rd July 1996), in which it requested the Secretary-General to promote the use and application of United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and justice matters, that innovative strategies for preventing crime and controlling costs are being engaged in many countries (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Guyeal, Spoth, & Crowley, 2011; Welsh & Farrington, 2010). There is a social and institutional growing interest in making strategic investments in childhood and youth in order to prevent the development of lifetime offenders, instead of continuing to institute harsher punishments that lead to costly juvenile mass incarceration (Heckman, 2006; Homel, 2013; O’Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). At the forefront are developmental prevention programs that intervene early in life to reduce risk factors for delinquent and criminal behaviors (e.g. Eckenrode et al., 2010; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011). When implemented appropriately, these developmental prevention efforts not only effectively avert crime but also are cost-effective solutions that save public resources (Crowley, Hill, Kuklinski, & Jones, 2014; Crowley, Jones, Greenberg, Feinberg, & Spoth, 2012; Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavitz, 2010; Kuklinski, Briney, Hawkins, & Catalano, 2012). Early intervention with victims have also demonstrated its efficiency in preventing crime and violence later in life (e.g. Berman, Bayard, Lynch, & DeVoe, 2007; Jouriles et al., 2009), beyond its positive effects on the well-being and health. Jointly with programs that focus persons at-risk, intervention with victims has been considered as a second level of crime prevention. Research on treatment during incarceration as a way to avert reoffending (i.e. with an objective of reinsertion) rather than a deterrent measure (i.e. punishment) has also proved the efficacy of preventive (e.g. Grietens & Hellinck, 2004; Harper & Chitty, 2004; Nee & Ellis, 2005; Patrick & Marsh, 2005) measures in what has been called tertiary crime prevention.

On the other hand, situational crime prevention, which focus on limiting the opportunities for crime to occur (Clarke, 1980), is still on the spotlight of research and academia in relation to different types of crime (e.g. Hayes, Downs, & Blackwood, 2012; Leclerc, Feakes, & Cale, 2015; Shane, Piza, & Mandala, 2015; Von Lamp, 2011), although theory and practice were developed during the 80s. Situational crime prevention is meant to be part of problem-oriented strategies that shifts the focus from the police to other public authorities and private enterprises as the first responsible to solve community crime problems and ensure community safety.

4- Priority research areas.

Our priority research areas are framed on the *translational criminology* and the *evaluation research* paradigms. That means that future projects will aim at analyzing different criminology problems, applying research methodology to different crime prevention needs identified in our community. The main objective will be always to provide the best knowledge to develop tailored interventions.

Within Mid Sweden University, we are keen to develop new approaches and perform studies at four levels of crime prevention:

- (1) *Primary crime prevention*: We will target children and youth as well as the general community as objects of research prioritizing the prevention of different types of crime such as drug-use, peer pressure, unsuccessful parenting, violence in intimate relationships, etc. and other issues such as fear of crime.
- (2) *Secondary crime prevention*: We will focus on groups at-risk for crime perpetration (e.g. individuals with mental health and drug abuse problems, children victims of abuse, etc.), and on victims as well (e.g. women, immigrant youth, etc.) which can provide important knowledge on how to prevent specific types of crime (e.g. hate crime, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, etc.)
- (3) *Tertiary crime prevention*: We will target juvenile and young adult offenders mainly with the objective to find out mechanisms, tools and intervention actions that would help to decrease the likelihood of reoffending.
- (4) *Quaternary crime prevention*: We will focus on ex-convicts groups at different ages to have an insight on different criminal careers and desistance processes, to understand better the supporting and deterring mechanisms for crime.

5- Strengths and competencies of the research group

The research group in criminology at Mid Sweden University lacks of human resources, an established network and the required external funding support to develop a research front. Therefore, our first commitment is to mitigate these disadvantages, in trying to hire other researchers for the unit, find research collaborators and apply for external funding.

The strengths of the group is that the group leader has a research background of almost 10 years and has experience in publishing and get funding, although in an area of knowledge more closed to psychology than to criminology. She worked for almost four years within two leading research groups in some of the most important labs of developmental research in Canada and in Sweden. During that time, she had the opportunity to publish her work in high impact factor journals. The knowledge that she has in areas of juvenile delinquency, developmental criminology and violent offenders will provide the basis to start the research work in criminology at Mid Sweden University.

The group leader have researched in the past in two main factors for delinquency (parental competence and personality traits), and has participated in the debate on how this factors should be taken into account in the development of preventive strategies (e.g. Silva, Larm,

Vitaro, Tremblay, & Hodgins, 2012; Silva & Stattin, 2016). This past work can be seen as an experience in secondary crime prevention since it focused on at-risk groups.

Furthermore, the group leader currently works on the analysis of a crime hotspot with the objective of producing the best evidence to develop tailored-interventions from a crime prevention perspective in the local community (Sundsvall). This current study entails research on the four levels of crime prevention.

6- Vision for the research environment in the long term.

If our immediately goal is “to start the engine” our medium-term goal is to grow as a group with a crime prevention profile and find our own place in the national and international research community. We foresee that at a national level we can fit, cooperate and complement the work that other groups have already started in some areas. Furthermore, we can bring innovation to areas such as situational crime prevention, fear of crime, and tertiary crime prevention in juveniles. Our long-term goal is the excellence. We will work to be a referent in Sweden in the research lines we will develop. If we are now on the “tail of the train” we want to be the forefront that can represent Sweden in the international research community and work together with international prestigious groups to find solutions to prevent a world of crime and violence.

In our vision, there is also a place to the education of a next generation of researchers. We will work to be able to have criminology PhD students and that our research students feel themselves committed in producing high quality research. We can offer them an open door to entering in the international research community when they finish their thesis. That would be a legacy, which we would be proud of.

Finally, a close collaboration with the community, practitioners, developers, local authorities and people responsible for crime prevention in the municipalities will necessarily make part of the research environment in the long term since they will be essential partners to the analyzes of crime prevention necessities and the development of innovative and cost-effective tailored programs based on the best scientific knowledge.

7- Short- and long-term objectives

By *short-term* we mean the next three years (i.e. 2016-2018) and the results that we are able to aim for this period are:

- Start the collaborations that we need to put our projects into practice with the police, with schools, with the agencies and the community and with other partners at Mid Sweden University.
- Compete for funding at the local level (i.e. faculty) and external funding from Swedish agencies and authorities. To be funded is essential since that would provide the necessary amount of time for researchers develop their work.
- We expect to be able to collect data and at the end of the period to have analyzed it and offer preliminary results.

- We expect to be able to spread the results among the scientific community in meetings, conferences and through publication.

By *long-term* we mean the period after the initial three years. In this case the results that we aim for are:

- External funding from Sweden agencies and authorities and from foreign agencies such as Horizon 2020 and others.
- Collaborate with international groups producing studies in areas related with our lines of research
- Participate in the international scientific community and debates with high impact factor publications and through the participation in international conferences and forums.
- Educate in excellence the new researchers and encourage them to enter the scientific community through application to postdoctoral positions within prestigious groups.
- Be innovative and open new discussions in the scientific community in areas of crime prevention, delinquency and violence.

8- Indicators of achievement

Aligned with our short- and long-term goals stated in the previous headline, the best achievement indicators to evaluate our work are:

- (1) Number of research projects submitted for external funding and number of research projects that have received funding.
- (2) Total amount of external funding.
- (3) Collaborations, agreements and partnerships with authorities and agencies required to put projects into practice
- (4) Actively network with other research groups within and outside Mid Sweden University
- (5) Contributions for national and international scientific conferences in the field.
- (6) Number of publications
- (7) Impact factor of the journals in which we publish
- (8) Number of research students working actively in our projects.

9- What is required to achieve the goals

The first and more basic requirement to be able to achieve the goals is to have more personnel in our research group. The free resources budget will be used, in great part, to provide researchers time to dedicate to their projects. Researchers shall apply for external funding in order to have more research time.

In this moment, our subject at Mid Sweden University cannot define a clear plan of funding or publication, since we are now starting the whole work. This plan will be developed in next revisions of the strategy.

10- Partners and partnerships:

We will actively work to establish functional collaborations – and agreements where it is required – mainly at a local level with municipalities (Kommuns), police, Länsstyrelsen, Landstinget, and other local authorities.

We will search for active research partners among other departments at Mid Sweden University, and to establish partnerships with researchers from other universities in Sweden and outside Sweden.

11- Work process and management.

We will organize the work and efforts in six steps.

(1) – In base of internal funding, we start with preliminary small research projects with the aim of establish the network in the field that we will need for the future (e.g. gymnasium schools, local government, local police, social services, etc.)

(2) – At the same time we will make contact and develop research proposals together with other research groups for external funding. Part of that funding will be for PhD education and part for researchers' dedication to the projects.

(3) – Put into practice research projects, collect and analyze data and prepare it to offer findings to the scientific community.

(4) – Dissemination of the results in national and international forums and through publication which can be judge of high quality.

(5) – We participate in national and international scientific forums and contact external groups to work within an international net specialized in the areas of our lines of research.

(6) – Actively work together with national and international groups producing high quality research work.

12- Good research practice:

We are compromised with good research practices always searching for legal advice when needed. We will submit to the regional ethical committee board at Umeå all the research that imply data collection of human subjects and will accomplish with the directives of the board.

We will ensure that new researchers in our group and new students are knowledgeable of the law and of the good research practice directives from *Vetenskapsrådet*.

We will accomplish with agreements of secrecy with the police and other partners when required.

We welcome blind peer-review, external evaluations, and any external audit of our research practice.

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