

# Why Criminals Cannot Say 'No'



Criminals need to learn pro-social values, such as how to achieve their goals without hurting other people.

A study integrating theories from criminology and psychology has provided an in-depth explanation for the link between self-control and why people get into crime.

Dr. Mei Williams, who graduated at Massey's Auckland school recently with a PhD in psychology, says the relationship between self-control and criminal activity has been little understood in psychological terms. Findings from her study suggest possibilities for the treatment and prevention of criminal behavior, reported Physorg.com

"While criminologists have found low self-control to be one of the strongest risk factors for crime, its lack of explanatory power has been a major concern," she says.

In her study, she compared the level of self-control, motivation, and criminal intentions between students and prison inmates. Both groups were asked about their criminal activity over the previous 12 months, the opportunities that would encourage or prevent criminal involvement, attitudes towards crime, the expectations of important others, and the person's confidence and control over their behavior should they wish to commit a crime.

Low self-control featured more strongly as an explanation for intentions to commit crime for prison inmates than it did for students. While self-control was an important aspect, of even greater significance for both groups was the role of significant others.

This was especially related to the expectations of significant others, and the willingness of the individual to comply with those expectations. This factor appeared to be crucial as to whether a person with low self-control got involved in crime or not.

Rehabilitation programs that help inmates develop better self-control through self-management techniques and by ensuring there are "important others" who are positive role models would have a powerful way of countering not only crime but other detrimental behaviors, such as aggression and general delinquency, she says.

Dr. Williams teaches forensic psychology at Massey's School of Psychology in Auckland and has worked with the Corrections Department's psychological services in developing treatment plans for prison inmates. She believes being in prison is often a time when criminals are at a crossroads in their lives and had the opportunity to reevaluate themselves and their attitudes.

"That's when we need to focus on self-management and finding out what things they value," she said.

She says inmates are no different to law-abiding citizens in that they shared the same goal of getting money and wanting to look after their family, but they had different values and behavioral patterns when it came to achieving these goals.

"They need to learn pro-social values, such as how to achieve their goals without hurting other people."

## Wikipedia a Teaching Tool

Wikipedia, the upstart Internet encyclopedia that most universities forbid students to use, has suddenly become a teaching tool for professors.

Recently, university teachers have swapped student term papers for assignments to write entries for the free online encyclopedia.

Wikipedia is an "open-source" website, which means that entries can be started or edited by anyone in the world with an Internet connection, AFP reported. Writing for Wikipedia "seems like a much larger stage, more of a challenge," than a term paper, said professor Jon Beasley-Murray, who teaches Latin American literature at the University of British Columbia in this western Canadian city, AFP said.

"The vast majority of Wikipedia entries aren't very good," said Beasley-Murray, but said the site aims to be academically sound.

To reach its goal of academic standards, said Wikipedia's website, it set up an assessment scale on its English-language site.

The best encyclopedia entries are ranked as "Featured Articles," and run each day on the homepage at [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).

To be ranked as a "Featured Article," Wikipedia said an entry must "provide thorough, well-written coverage of their topic, supported by many references to peer-reviewed publications."

Of more than 10 million articles in 253 languages, only about 2,000 have reached "Featured Article" status, said. Typically, thousands or millions of people visit a Wikipedia entry, and each visitor is able to edit entries, or even flag an article considered unworthy to have it removed.



## News in Brief

### Afghan Northwest Hit by Locusts

Afghan authorities are examining the extent of an unprecedented locust infestation that has prompted local officials in some areas to offer wheat as a reward to residents for killing the insects.

Some 300 tons of locusts have been killed by people in the northwestern province of Badghis alone in recent weeks, Abdul Ghafar Ahmadi, a senior official from the agriculture ministry, said, citing provincial officials, Reuters reported.

Local officials in Badghis and neighboring Herat have promised residents 7 kgs (15 lbs) of wheat in return for killing 1 kg of locusts, amid a global surge in food prices that has hit Afghanistan hard, Ahmadi said.

"The infestation of locusts has been unprecedented in Afghanistan. It is pretty bad here in Badghis which is also suffering from drought," he said from Badghis.

"I have heard from local officials that residents have killed 300 metric tons of locusts."

He could not say how many hectares of cultivated land had been destroyed by the infestation, but said a mechanical campaign to kill the insects has been going in several parts of the region, which border Turkmenistan.

"This is a regional problem and not limited to Afghanistan," he said.

### Tornado Strikes Central US

A tornado that spun across the Oklahoma-Missouri border killed several people as severe storms raked the nation's heart Saturday, taking at least 11 lives, mangling buildings and trapping people in rubble in the storm-weary region.

According to AP, at least six people were killed as the tornado flattened the northeastern Oklahoma town of Picher before the funnel struck about 15 miles away near Seneca, Mo., and killed at least three, authorities said.

The death toll in Oklahoma could climb, said State Emergency Management Spokeswoman Michelann Ooten. The tornado in Picher—a depressed and pollution-scarred mining town that many residents had already fled—caused major damage in a 20-block area, she said.

At least five people died in southwestern Missouri after the storms plowed through, the National Weather Service said. Three people died after the Picher tornado hit near Seneca, about 15 miles away in Newton County, said meteorologist Bill Davis.

Other tornadoes were reported near McAlester and Haywood in Pittsburg County and in rural Poshmataha County, both in southeastern Oklahoma.

### Singapore: Weddings Boost Shark's Fin Consumption

Shark's fin consumption more than doubled in Singapore last year from 2006, with demand driven by an economic boom and an increase in wedding celebrations, a report said.

Singapore consumed more than 470 tons in 2007, up from 182 tons the previous year and reversing a four-year decline, the Straits Times reported.

Shark's fin soup is popular at Chinese wedding banquets, where it is seen as a status symbol.

"Most of the couple's parents consider this dish a premium and without it, they would lose face," Ruth Soh, communications director at the Mandarin Oriental, told the newspaper.

Michael Aw, a marine conservationist, said more than 30 sharks have to be killed to feed a wedding banquet with 300 guests, according to the report.

"We must continue to educate the younger generation and make them see that sharks are guardians of the sea that ensure a balance in the food chain," Aw said.

### Prague to Save Indian Gharial

The Prague zoo has launched a test program to save the Indian crocodile-like gharial from the brink of extinction with a million-dollar pavilion for the animals to bask, and hopefully reproduce, in.

There are only between 150 and 200 of this species, the *Gavialis gangeticus* also known as the gavial, living in the wild along India's rivers today. Another 20 or so are in captivity in India, Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka and the United States, according to figures from the Prague zoo, AFP reported.

"All of the conservation plans launched in the world have failed up until now. The gharial is one of the most threatened species on the planet," said Petr Veselsky, in charge of reptiles at the zoo. The new gharial pavilion—the first such program in Europe—contains three males and four females from a park in Madras in southern India.

They are distinguishable from crocodiles by their especially long and thin jaws, which gives a terrifying appearance despite the fact they are fish-eating and present no threat to humans.