

Translational Criminology: A United States Orientation

Subjects: **Criminology & Penology**

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Translational criminology is the process of using scientific findings to inform criminal justice policy and practice. While seemingly straightforward, the translational process can encounter barriers, including politics, ideology, resource constraints, and causal uncertainty. Despite these challenges, promising practices, including mutually beneficial partnerships and the use of champions, have allowed translational criminology to advance.

translational criminology

evidence-informed research

research-practitioner partnerships

applied research

criminal justice policy

Criminology in the United States (U.S.) began as a somewhat more applied discipline in the early 20th Century, working to understand and ameliorate the pathologies found in the urban slums of America at the time. Much of what we term “applied criminology” came from these early beginnings. In this context, criminological research was used in attempts to solve real-world social and political problems. However, for much of the 20th Century, it continued to develop into a scientific discipline concerned with developing and testing theories that explained the causes of crime rather than targeting policies and practices intended to reduce its negative consequences [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#). Since the early 2000s, there has been a renewed and growing interest in bridging the gap between the academic discipline of criminology and criminal justice policy through what has become known as translational criminology.

More specifically, translational criminology is the practice of utilizing scientific research methods to develop new knowledge and information and, importantly, using the research findings to inform criminal justice policy and practice [\[4\]](#). Significant support for this movement exists among many criminologists and practitioners [\[5\]](#)[\[6\]](#)[\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)[\[9\]](#)[\[10\]](#)[\[11\]](#)[\[12\]](#). However, this has not always been the case, and historically, there has been reluctance from some scholars concerned with the potential harm that could occur from criminological research lacking causal certainty and the supposed “gold standard” of randomized controlled trials [\[13\]](#)[\[14\]](#). In addition to resistance from those within the field, several other barriers exist that impede the success of translational criminology, such as the polarizing world of ideology and politics [\[6\]](#). Despite these obstacles, various promising practices have been developed and utilized over several decades, which have enabled translational criminology to work through some of these deterrents.

The term “public criminology” also emerged during the early 21st century but is often more associated with involving the public, the media, and advocacy groups in the discourse regarding crime, criminological research, and the criminal justice system [\[15\]](#)[\[16\]](#). Although both applied criminology and public criminology share some common attributes with translational criminology, translational criminology is more focused on translating rigorously produced research evidence into criminal justice policy and practice, and it grew out of more recent U.S. social and

political contexts. The present paper provides an overview of translational criminology, including the movement's development, promising practices, examples, and current challenges.

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