



## Evaluating the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* with Perpetrator Self-Report Data

*Presented by Lihui Zhang, Assistant Professor*

*Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy*

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1:30 pm to 3:00 pm  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Theatre (101 Diefenbaker Place), Diefenbaker Building  
University of Saskatchewan Campus

This research looks at a major policy change in the Canadian youth criminal justice system, i.e. the coming into effect of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) on April 1, 2003, replacing the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) as the Federal law that governs the administration of Canadian 12-17 year old offenders. The YCJA differs from the YOA in that it greatly reduces the use of youth courts and custodial sentences for relatively minor crime and is intended to be tougher on most serious, violent young offenders. Both the “deterrence” and the “incapacitation” hypotheses predict that minor crime rates will increase due to the less punitive disposition of the YCJA towards minor crime. However, the “deterrence” and the “incapacitation” hypotheses predict opposite changes for most serious violent crime. Thus, the effect of the YCJA on serious violent crime is not clear. Using youth self-reported criminal activities data, this research finds that, consistent with the predictions of economic theory, mischief (damaging or destroying something that does not belong to the youth, i.e. damaging school furniture or writing graffiti) as the most minor form of crime increased significantly among boys after the YCJA, whereas the effect of the YCJA on other types of youth crime, such as violent crime, drug offenses or impaired driving, is less conclusive.

**Lihui Zhang** is an Assistant Professor, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Regina. She completed a BSc from Peking University, her MA from Memorial University of Newfoundland and will be completing her PhD from Dalhousie University. Lihui, who teaches *Economics for Public Policy Analysis*, is one of few economists in Canada engaged in socioeconomic research that evaluates why young people turn to violence and crime. As part of her work, Lihui is taking a close look at the revamped Youth Criminal Justice Act, and how greater leniency for minor youth has led to an increase in the percentage of young mischief offenders.

### **Registration:**

Those interested in attending are encouraged to register online at [www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca](http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca) (please select **News and Events**, then **Events Calendar** and the appropriate calendar date). For more information contact us at 306.585.5869 or [js\\_outreach@uregina.ca](mailto:js_outreach@uregina.ca).

