ESRC Festival of Social Science: Challenging Perceptions of Law and Criminal Justice

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ESRC FESTIVAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE:
CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS OF LAW AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
5 November 2014 - in partnership with Plymouth Central Library

Patricia Gray and Kim Stevenson

This event was one of over two dozen held in the South West and Wales region as part of the annual week long series of free events organized and sponsored by the Economic and Social Science Research Council to celebrate and promote social science research. This year’s theme was ‘Talking Social Science’ and the Law School’s proposal, Challenging Perceptions of Law and Criminal Justice was approved through the competitive process. The event was run by Law and Criminal Justice lecturers and students from Plymouth Law School and was opened by Dr. Dan Gilling, Head of Plymouth University Law School. In partnership with Plymouth Central Library, the event provided the opportunity for the public, particularly young people, to learn about how academic research can improve community life and contribute to promoting fairness and justice. Twenty posters (all listed in the Appendix) were on display in the exhibition which illustrated current criminological and legal issues of core concern to the community, particularly challenging public misconceptions of crime and punishment, difficulties in accessing the law and legal advice for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, homelessness, the rights and interests of victims, challenging hate crime, rehabilitating offenders, restorative justice and immigration.
The exhibition was designed to facilitate active public engagement, with all the researchers and student groups present and available to answer questions and talk in more detail about their posters and the research and issues which underlay them. Participants were encouraged to read and engage with the posters by entering a quiz competition with answers embedded in the posters and prizes distributed at the end of the afternoon’s activities. Some of the posters also had embedded Virtual Reality links which viewers could scan to find out more information about the subject, access associated web pages or watch short video clips.

Five of the posters are included here by way of illustration beginning with this generic poster advertising the event which was specially created by Criminology and Criminal Justice graduate Mike Ives for the event to link together all the various law and criminal justice themes from the exhibition.

[Editor’s Note: Mike’s final year dissertation is also published as an article in this issue].
The next two posters were created by the event organisers Professor Kim Stevenson and Dr. Patricia Gray, entitled respectively ‘Using Digitised Newspapers to Recover Crimes from the Past’ and ‘Restorative Youth Justice in Action’.
Two posters which reflect the work of student volunteer groups and societies within the Law School demonstrate how both law and criminology and criminal justice students engage with the real life problems and experiences of individuals who become subjects within the criminal justice process. One from the Plymouth University Howard League Student Society entitled “Banged Up”: Young Offenders’ Experiences of Imprisonment’ and the other by law students from the Innocence Project entitled ‘Miscarriages of Justice’.

**Banged Up**: Young offenders’ experiences of imprisonment

- Average population of young offenders under 18 years is 2,714 (2011/12).  
- Average length of time in custody is 77 days (2011/12).  
- England and Wales has the highest rate of youth custody in Europe.  
- Critics argue not justified by the volume or seriousness of youth crime. 45% of children (10-17 years) in prison are there for non-violent crimes (2012).

**Resettlement on Release from Prison**:  
- 72% of young people released with one year of licence from prison. Critics argue that imprisonment provides them with a university degree in crime.  
- Young people in custody have experienced high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. 10% of young people in custody live in deprived households, nearly 40% had experienced abuse or neglect, 50% had difficulties with literacy and numeracy, and nearly 60% had been excluded from school. 17% had an addiction/alcohol problem, 11% had an eating disorder, 47% attempted suicide and 30% had self-harmed (Jameson et al., 2010).

- Resettlement policies have had only limited success in reducing reoffending or resolving the complex social difficulties of young people leaving custody.

**Miscarriages of Justice and Plymouth Law students**

Imagine spending 25 years in jail for a crime you didn’t commit. . .

The story of Paul Blackburn

Paul was jailed for life in 1983 when he was only 15 years old. He was convicted of the attempted murder and sexual assault of a younger boy. He did not match the description of the attacker and there was no forensic evidence to connect him to the crime.

Paul served 25 years in prison. 10 years longer than the usual tariff because he maintained his innocence throughout. He was regularly released on licence because the defendants the protection community given to sexual offenders.

He left prison on licence in March 2003. He was 34 years old.

May 2003, the Court of Criminal Appeal gave judgment that his conviction was unsafe. The Court decided his confession was unreliable (he had no solicitor and the police had been oppressive) and that the police had not acted in accordance with the requirements of what it was ordered. After his release he says he was offered very little support on how to return to a complex, baffling world that he had last experienced as a teenager. Scan here.

Scan here for video outside the court after appeal

**Innocence Plymouth**

Innocence Plymouth is based at Plymouth University. We work on cases like Paul Blackburn’s for people who have been convicted of crimes they say they did not commit. Students work in groups of 4 or 5, researching the case files and questioning everything that happened in the hope of finding grounds for a successfully appeal to the Court of Appeal. We are supported by local solicitors and barristers specializing in criminal litigation. We are currently working on 3 matters and 1 appeal. Contact pia@innocenceplymouth.co.uk

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In addition three mixed-media interactive activities were also programmed during the afternoon to further stimulate interest in the issues raised by the posters and awareness of library resources and facilities. At 2.30 pm the Plymouth University Howard League Student Society showed a film which they had designed and which explored young offenders’ experiences in prison via cartoons and video clips and linked to their “Banged Up” poster.

Detective Chief Inspector Brookshaw of Devon and Cornwall Police gave a fascinating presentation at 3pm on the use of forensic evidence entitled ‘Every Contact Leaves a Trace’, followed at 3.30 pm by a talk about the issue of police corruption with the controversial title ‘Bent Cops’. Throughout the afternoon a ‘dead body’ lay outside the main exhibition room to create a ‘murder scene’ and provide the start point for a ‘Whodunnit’ murder mystery game. This game, which was designed by the staff from Plymouth Central Library, involved teams of three following up clues and forensic evidence spread throughout the library on shelves and in books in order to try to discover and identify ‘the murderer’.
The event was hailed a great success by all participants and the convivial atmosphere (despite the 'murder') was enhanced by laying on refreshments and snacks thought the afternoon.

Appendix

List of Posters

Gareth Addidle: The “New Location” of Community Safety- Policing, Community Planning and Community Safety: a local case study

Jill Annison, Dan Gilling, Giselle Hanley-Santos and Tim Auburn: Problem-solving in Plymouth Community Justice Court

Philip Bates: Children’s Medical Treatment: Who Decides?

Sharon Beckett: Women’s Experiences of Workplace Violence

Iain Channing: Legal Responses to the British Far-Right’

Hugo de Rijke: Bailiff Law

Lisa Deblasio: Adoption and Justice for Families – finding a balance through research

Patricia Gray and Professor Roger Smith: Restorative Youth Justice in Action: Rediscovering its roots in progressive and socially just practice through the lived experiences of key stakeholders

Jason Lowther: Regulating the Marine Environment

Craig Newbery-Jones: Is the Doctor a Lawyer?

Chris Pac-Soo and Oliver Smith: Foreign National Workers in the Night Time Economy: An examination of vulnerability, violence and identity

Alex Passman and Law Clinic students: South West Employment Rights Centre

Plymouth University Howard League Student Society: “Banged Up”: Young Offenders’ Experiences of Imprisonment’

Peter Shears: Enforcing the consumer’s right to be stupid

Lesley Simmonds: What will be the Effects of Local Commissioning for Victims’ Services in the UK?

Kim Stevenson: Using digitised newspapers to recover crimes from the past

Pippa Trimble and Innocence Project students: Miscarriages of Justice

Dean Wilson: In-County Immigration Policing in the UK: Enforcement, Networks and the Practice of “Crimmigration”

Dean Wilson and Oliver Smith: Eviction: Policy, Experience and Change