

# SOURCES AND METHODS IN CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

## Guest Editorial

On Friday 20th November 2015, the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library, the British Library, the Socio-Legal Studies Association and the British Society of Criminology held a national socio-legal training day on the key library and information sources and research methodologies in the fields of criminology and criminal justice. This was the fourth successful socio-legal training day that the IALS Library, the British Library and the SLSA have organised. Themes for previous days have included “legal biography” and “law, gender and sexuality” and many of the presentations have been subsequently published in *Legal Information Management* and on the IALS website.<sup>1</sup> The audiences for these training days are mainly academics, researchers and postgraduate research students based at universities across the UK. Each training day has gained a fresh audience of researchers dedicating precious time to their particular focus of scholarship and those tempted to attend training in subject areas outside of their main research interest.

The ongoing difficulties for researchers in identifying the key library and information sources in the fields of criminology and criminal justice and the often bewildering choice of socio-legal methods that can be employed when undertaking scholarship in these fields, were the two main reasons why a national socio-legal training day was organised. Jonathan Sims, Curator for law and socio-legal studies at the British Library, Professor Rosemary Hunter, Chair of SLSA, Charlotte Harris, Executive Director of BSC, and myself wanted expert librarians and information managers to highlight and promote their often hidden collections on criminology and criminal justice research and also to provide a national forum for interested academics to discuss the merits and challenges of using quantitative, qualitative and feminist approaches in their research work. The national socio-legal training day again proved to be popular and successful with many questions and much discussion between the speakers and the audience throughout the programme. The selection of articles included in this special issue of *Legal Information Management* derive from some of the presentations during that very interesting day.

### SOURCES FOR CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

This special issue includes a number of articles by librarians, information managers and interested researchers which seek to highlight what is included in key collections and how they can be used for criminology and criminal justice research. Paul Rock from LSE

writes a brief history of record management at (what was) the Public Record Office, giving us a masterly summary of why the criminal justice collection we have today in the re-named National Archives is actually a mere shadow of what we could have had if different record management decisions had been made and far more criminal justice papers had been preserved for the nation.

Paul Dawson and Elizabeth A. Stanko write about the extensive evidence-based data collected and used by the Evidence and Insight Unit in the London Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). The aim of their paper is to make researchers aware of the largely hidden “data goldmine” that exists within UK policing and to promote its use in new research projects. Three case studies are presented that illustrate very well the huge potential, but also the difficult challenges of working with such a large quantity of data relating to UK policing. For example, their police data files include the Crime Recording Information System (CRIS); Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) – data relating to calls to the police; MERLIN – data relating to vulnerable adults and children and missing people; the Stops database – data relating to “Stop and Search”; Crimint – data on police intelligence; the Police National Computer (PNC) – data relating to offending history; NSPIS – data relating to custody; Electronic Warrant Management Systems (EWMS) – data relating to wanted offenders; and Trident Command Gang Matrix – data relating to gangs.

Later in this issue, Lizzie Seal’s article on the public response to the death penalty in Britain from 1930 to 1965 expertly explores and explains the strengths and weaknesses of a selection of qualitative sources. Rather than using opinion polls, source material such as letters sent from members of the public to successive Home Secretaries, the Mass Observation Capital Punishment Survey, contemporary newspaper articles and oral history interviews from the Millennium Memory Bank are assessed. Stuart Stone, the Librarian of the prestigious Radzinowicz Library at the Institute of Criminology in the University of Cambridge, summarises the wonders of what is the premier academic criminology collection in the UK. Finally Nigel Taylor explains how the National Archives is dealing with the sensitive legal and moral issues concerning access to records of criminals and crime held in their collections. His very helpful paper discusses the implications of UK Freedom of Information and data protection legislation and the recent EU “Right to be forgotten” ruling. It shows that the National Archives is trying its best to strike a balance between the public’s inevitable desire for general access and the need to protect the personal information of those mentioned in the records.

## DIFERENT METHODS USED IN CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

Two articles discuss in detail research projects which have used quantitative statistical methods. Allan Brimicombe's fascinating article shows us the many advantages and problems of analysing and understanding the police-recorded data in the *Crime Survey of England and Wales* concerning repeat victims of domestic abuse. Significant patterns of escalation to violence and homicide amongst repeat victims are discussed. The major article by Tseloni and Tilley, firstly overviews the wide range of statistical sources that might fruitfully be used in criminological research. Secondly it analyses papers that have recently appeared in the *British Journal of Criminology* and gives examples of what types of data are currently most commonly used in recent research projects. Thirdly it focuses on possible research uses of the *Crime Survey for England and Wales* which covers a wide range of criminological topics. Finally, it suggests that criminologists may be missing opportunities to draw on valuable data sets that, although imperfect, may be very useful for them in their research.

Finally Adrian Howe, a Visiting Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London, discusses the usefulness of feminist approaches to research in the fields of criminology and criminal justice. In an eye-opening article Howe expertly shows us that standard positivist methodologies as well as newly emergent poststructuralist approaches (e.g. Foucauldian methods) are bringing much needed new perspectives to criminological issues.

## CONCLUSIONS

I hope these special issue articles will serve to highlight some of the key research libraries and specialist data sources which can provide assistance with criminology and criminal justice research and help researchers in understanding the variety of methods than can be employed in these fields.

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## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> A selection of articles from the Legal Biography socio-legal training day were published in *Legal Information Management*, 14 (2014), pp. 15–73 and are also available in pre-print format on the IALS website: [http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/legal\\_biography.htm](http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/legal_biography.htm). A selection of articles from the Law, Gender and Sexuality socio-legal training day were published in *Legal Information Management*, 15 (2015), pp. 2–50 and are also available in pre-print format on the IALS website: [http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/law\\_gender\\_and\\_sexuality.htm](http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/law_gender_and_sexuality.htm).