

British Criminological Society Annual Conference – Yorkshire Division

28th November 2018 - University of Hull

This presentation will provide findings from a PhD thesis by Dr. Darren Woodward titled:

A Critical Evaluation of the Reintegration Experiences of Child Sex Offenders in the Community

The presentation is titled:

'Just a Few Clicks': Internet Sex Offenders – Public Protection in a Technological Age

Abstract

Criminology has conventionally focussed on the onset and punishment of crime. Less attention is paid to how offenders reintegrate, exist, cope and move away from crime. However, there is a growing body of research interested in reintegration and desistance from crime. The literature on sex offender reintegration and desistance is limited but emerging, with studies exclusively involving child sex offenders remaining scarce. Therefore, this presentation has been designed to evaluate the reintegration experiences of child sex offenders in a community in England and Wales, especially those with internet offences.

Using a qualitative, semi-structured, individual interview approach, data were collected from 10 men (the participants) who had at least one current and at least one previous child sexual offence conviction. The index offences ranged from internet related charges, to rape. Data were additionally obtained from 11 professionals working with child sex offenders in the community. The professionals worked for either the National Probation Service (NPS), the police or Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA). The themes of resettlement, risk management and stigma were discussed, with the experiences of internet offenders proving to be a significant finding.

Further findings suggest that managing, policing and reintegrating internet sex offenders in the community is complex, as the men presented as vulnerable, isolated and afraid of community responses. It is also suggested that internet offenders have stricter restrictions in the community than their contact-only counterparts.

Reflection

To be invited to take part in a conference linked to the British Criminological Society was a real honour for me. Ever since I started my journey towards working in teaching/academia, I had always wanted to have an opportunity like this, so I took the chance and delivered some of the findings from my own PhD research. The biggest conference that I had previously attended and (briefly) presented in was at Queens Belfast University in 2015. Here I spoke about my PhD research, which was ongoing at the time, in what is termed the '5-minute thesis'. This was a nerve-wracking attempt to condense my methodology and literature review into the shortest time possible. I wasn't told that they wanted me to do that, it was kind of 'sprung' onto me by Professor Shadd Maruna, who later examined my thesis in my Viva. That's another story though, and a large part of my professional development.

Once I had been invited to Hull, I knew exactly what I wanted to present. The same 'paper' had previously been presented by me at the GIG Create Conference in the summer of 2018 and I had been given some very good feedback and praise for the content. I had also made sure that the presentation was available on ResearchGate, and this proved to be invaluable as I gained feedback from other scholars; many of whom gave me tips on how to improve the work and make it more understandable. Therefore, some minor amendments were made to my own speech for the presentation and I was ready. I don't remember being nervous at all in the run-up to the conference, in fact I think I was excited and looking forward to what would be a good day.

The day came and I really didn't know what to expect. The University is only a few miles from my house, so travel was not a problem, although parking always is! I met with Anna Waistnage and Lewis Simpson (who was delivering a paper also) and we waited for the event to start. It was then that it hit me: this was the first paper that I had given since gaining my PhD in the very University that I was presenting in. The nerves hit me then. Resilience teaches us to overcome our fears and to keep going through the tough times, I had to remember this, as the fear of making a mistake or forgetting my words was a little overwhelming. I have learnt over my time as programme leader for BA Criminology, that I will make mistakes, it is how I recover from them that counts – going to conferences like this really helps to build your confidence.

The experience overall was really positive. I got to hear a lot of new research from PhD students through to academics who were experts in their fields. I also got to meet some men from the police force, who were interested in collaboration and research. In fact, one of the police officers contacted me a few days later and he agreed to come and give a guest lecture on firearms and also agreed that we should work together to enable some of my students to research within the police, without all of the difficulties that this type of activity can present. It was interesting to see that out of the 15 guests

who attended, four of them were current or ex programme leaders for criminology at the University Centre Grimsby. This showed me how valued we are at this centre by the University of Hull, how keeping in touch in this way can create and maintain relationships, along with the importance of putting ourselves out there and taking the 'plunge' – especially by being out of the comfort zone.