

# Criminology @ Bristol: a taster

## Applicant visit day

Dr Jo Large – Programme director  
Criminology

We are on Twitter: @Bristol\_crim



# Today:

- What is crime?
- What is it like studying criminology at Bristol?

In this session we draw on many of the issues we discuss in more depth in the first year core criminology unit 'Understanding, Crime and Social Harm'. Many of these topics will be explored in much more depth later in your criminology degree in specialist option units.

*“We all know what crime is right?!”*



# ‘Pure & simple’?



“This is criminality, pure & simple, and it has to be confronted & defeated.”



*Former PM  
David  
Cameron on  
the 2011  
London Riots*

# What is crime?

Simple...

“an act or omission which a state at this time says is criminal, and to which the state attaches criminal consequences” (**Case et al., 2017:56**)

In law a crime is:

- A set of norms (rules)
- Backed up by the threat of societal sanctions



# Reflection Task

1. Write down as many crimes you can think of!
2. Pick a few of the crimes you have written down.  
Consider whether you think some crimes you have listed are more harmful, or more serious than others.  
What were your reasons for this?

# Crime as a social construct

- Crime is socially constructed – humans define the boundaries of the concept
- What is criminalised often depends on cultural values (definitions change over space)
- Activities defined as crime change over time due to shifting values
- Crime is a label used by 'society' in order to achieve certain aims. (Whose aims?)



# Case study: alcohol & crime

- The contemporary problem of “binge drinking” (?)
  - “binge drinking: Britain’s new epidemic” (Guardian in 2001)
  - “binge drinking & late night street violence out of control” (the Sun)
  - “drunken youngsters on the rampage” in city centres
- Or new label, old problem?
- Historically “demon drink” – problem for society, threat to health & morals and subversive of social order of civilised society
  - Lager louts of 1980s
- “moral panic” or legitimised concern?

# Alcohol and crime

- Primary concern = violence
  - Backed up by CSEW
- 1/3 of people intoxicated on arrest
- Drink driving leading cause of death of young people 15-24
- BMA – alcohol involved (victim or offender) in 65% murders, 75% stabbings, 70% of beatings, 50% of fights or domestic assaults
- “binge drinking”
- “the Mass Volume Vertical Drinker’ has assaulted the concept and all its good intentions, leaving it for dead in the streets splattered with blood, vomit, urine and the sodden remains of takeaways’ (Hadfield et al, 2001:300)
- Alcohol – domestic and sexual abuse



# Why are criminal law approaches problematic for criminologists?

- By accepting legal definitions of crime, criminologists use (and arguably reinforce) the values and interests that are reflected in a state's criminal laws.
- These interests are generally those of the more powerful (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity etc)
- This can lead to bias: over-criminalisation (e.g. of the poor) and under-criminalisation (of states and corporations)

Should criminologists attention be limited to acts which are punishable by criminal law?



# What if we thought about crime and harm?

“The range and type of harm people experience during their life-cycle are extremely varied. Many will suffer food-poisoning, others will die in car crashes or be killed by a car, some will fall off ladders doing DIY in the home, a large number will die or be injured either going to work or while at work, others will die or will be disabled for life from medical mistakes or other factors such as super bugs in hospitals, many will suffer considerable financial loss as a direct result of mis-selling of pensions, endowment policies and other financial products. Some of these events will be captured by the criminal law. **Most of the events, however, will not be seen as criminal....**”

- **From Hillyard et al (2004) *Beyond Criminology: Taking Harm Seriously*, pg 1**

# Case study: illegal organ transplantation

- Est. 10,000 black market operations every year (WHO)
- Biggest market = kidneys (driven by increase in diseases such as diabetes). Enabled by discovery of Cyclosporine in 1980s
- “When there are so many rich patients waiting for a kidney, when there are so many poor people desperate for case, then there is organ trafficking.” (Steiner, 2017:53)
- Organs harvested from vulnerable/poor – easy for traffickers to infiltrate
- Legal/illegal dimensions
- Transactions which involve violence & secrecy (illegal)

# What if we thought about crime and harm more broadly than just about people?

- Air pollution
- Deforestation
- Water pollution
- Resource depletion
- Climate change
- Animal abuse
- Poaching
- Trafficking



# Case Study: wildlife trafficking

- Extinction of species
- Impact on biodiversity
- Laundering
- Relationship with organised crime and crime gangs

The systematic rape of the South African environment to supply the pet trade in Europe with non-poisonous species has led to the total destruction of small ecosystems. Smugglers would target an area and literally clear it of every living animal, which could include beetles, spiders, scorpions, frogs, snakes, lizards and tortoises.



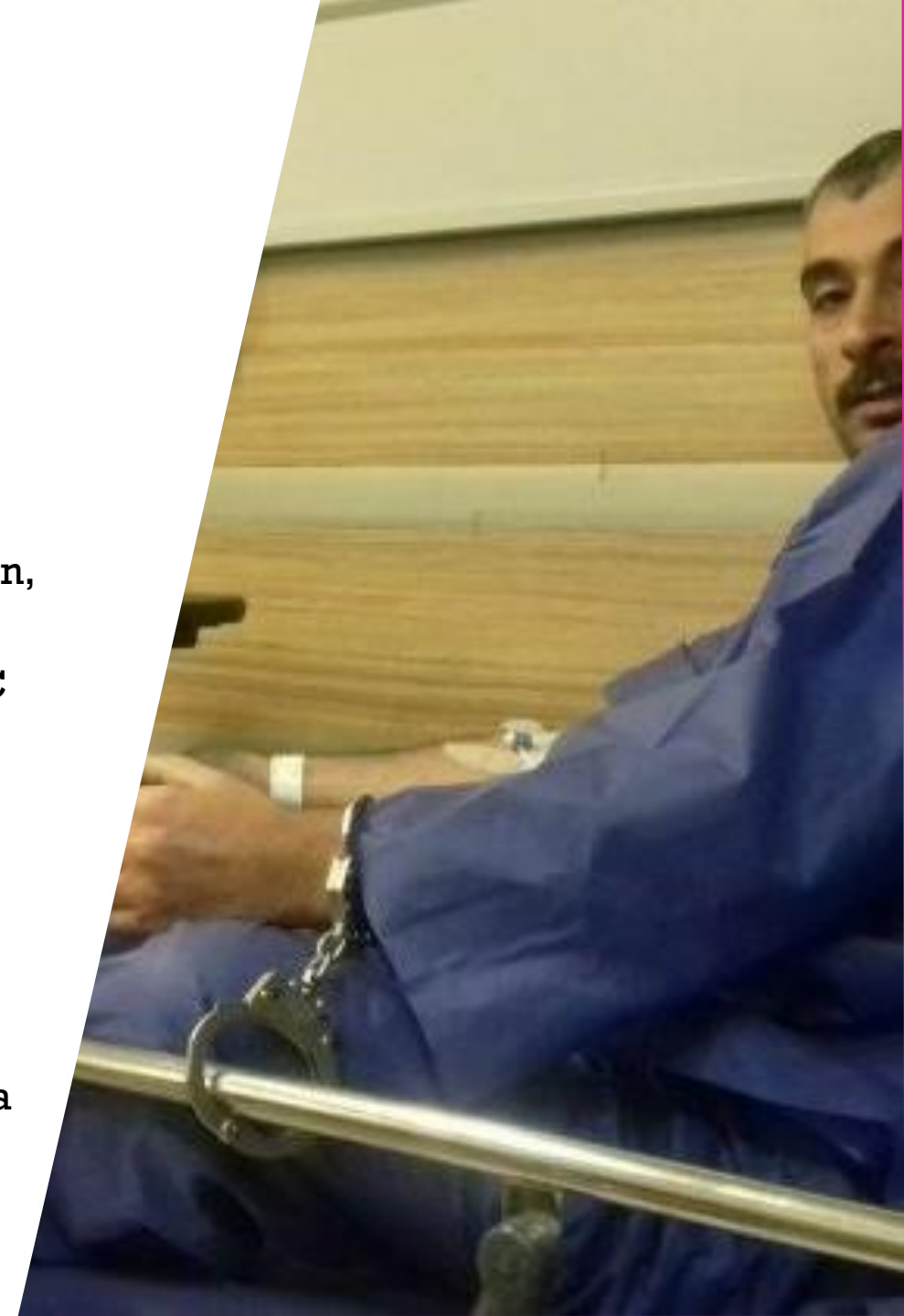
# What if we thought about how and why we punish people?

- Aims of sentencing
- Aims of punishment
- Do we treat everyone who commits a crime in the same way?
- How do we hold those who are in powerful positions accountable for their actions if they harm others?
- If someone commits a crime does this mean we should treat them less well than others?
- Does prison work?



# Case study: prisons and keeping people in prisons

- Prisons as 'holiday camps' (?)
- Murdered child sex offender at HM Prison Grendon 2010 (Guardian, 2011a).
- The disembowelment of an inmate in HMP Frankland in 2011 (BBC News, 2012).
- HMP Pentonville (opened 1842) overcrowded; understaffed; some cells infested by rats and cockroaches (PRT, 2014).
- Oakwood 'super-sized' prison: disturbances, protests, assaults, violence: average cost of prison place £12,000 (Guardian, 2014).
- Dying prisoners handcuffed to hospital beds (Guardian, 2013).
- Deaths, assaults and self-injury in prisons reach highest levels for a decade – 267 deaths 2014-15 (PRT, 2015).



# Reflection Task

- List as many topics, issues or questions which you think criminologists might be interested in.
- What question/topic/issue (doesn't have to be on the list you have just made!) are **you** most interested in learning more about?

# Contemporary context: Criminology without borders

- The increasing global focus of contemporary criminology.
- Technology, travel, finances (credit), consumer culture.
- Migration, asylum, consequences of wars & famines, rise of 'big data', internet, impact of climate change.



# Contemporary Context: Criminology within borders

- “Brexit”
- Nationalism
- Xenophobia in politics
- Increases in hate crime
- Challenges in transnational policing & security
- Abolishment of Human Rights Act
- Severing ties with Europe
- Not just issues in UK – broader trend in rise of the ‘right’



*English nationalism and  
the transformation of  
working-class politics*

Simon Winlow  
Steve Hall  
James Treadwell

# Criminology @ Bristol

- Addresses the criticism of criminology as a discipline which doesn't pay enough attention to **harm**.
- Long history and close relationship with **social policy**.
- Recognises the role of **power**.
- Thinks **globally**.
- Specific concern with **social justice**.
- Interested in **contemporary debates** about crime, harm and justice.

**From local to global**  
**From crime to harm**  
**From criminal justice to social justice**