

DD215 Social Research: Crime, Justice and Society – 15 June 2021

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. This session is all about DD215 *Social research: crime, justice and society*. I'm joined by Keir Irwin-Rogers, who is a lecturer in criminology, and is the chair of this exciting new module. Keir's primary interests are on understanding and reducing violence in children and young people's lives.

And I'm also joined by Louise Westmarland, who is a professor of criminology, and is the deputy chair of DD215. Louise is interested in policing and understanding police culture, and ethics in police practice. So a really exciting session.

You'll see we've refreshed our widgets here. Some of them will make sense when we talk about them further. But we'd love you to fill them in, in particular that question about thinking about if you could research anything, what might it be. So, let's have a start then, Keir, what's this module, crime, justice and society, all about, and can you give us a flavour?

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: Yeah, sure. It's a, it's a second-level module designed primarily for criminology and sociology students, and for students who are studying criminology and sociology. I guess fundamentally, it's underpinned by this idea that, as human beings, we are driven and curious to find out about the world around us. Obviously, that, that counts in terms of the natural world, and we've got lots of subjects to study that - so biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy. But we're looking at the relationships between people, how we think and behave, how societies are structured.

And that's what this module's about. It's about social research, how we understand about the world around us. And this module takes us all the way from the very start of that process, where people are thinking about what is it that we want to understand about the world. There's many, many subjects out there that we could look into.

Choosing a topic, and then going off and thinking how is it that we understand about it? How do we collect data? How do we build up an evidence base? And then after that, what do we do with all this data and evidence in order to make societies better, improve people's lives and make a difference?

And I think one of the things on this module that's quite special is that everyone who's contributed to making it, we've all got active research interests in something about the social world that we're passionate about. And we've tried to ensure that everyone who's contributed to the making of the module have, kind of, infused their own passions and expertise, so that hopefully, students will appreciate that as they study the module content. We're really excited for it to go live later this year.

KAREN FOLEY: It'll be brilliant, Keir. And today, we are joined by mostly Level 1 students, which I found out a bit earlier on. So as a Level 2 module that's part of the brand-new criminology undergraduate and sociology degree pathway, this is really super exciting. And we've just seen a video about that pathway beforehand as well. Louise, I wonder if you can tell

us about what, what makes this module special in terms of the different research methods from other modules maybe that are studied that could also include research methods at the University.

LOUISE WESTMARLAND: OK, I mean, Keir's done a really great outline there of why it's going to be so good and why it's going to be so interesting, mainly because, as he said, the best bit about it is going to be that all the people who are contributing, writing, teaching on the course, are experts in their field. And that's not true at all universities, you know. So you don't necessarily have people who are working in a particular area contributing specifically to a research methods module.

I think the other thing that we're doing, which is, which is different and interesting, and, you know which will make the course really zing, is that we're not - it's not a research methods course for social research that says, you know, this is an interview, this is a, this is an ethnography, this is how other people have done it. What we're doing is we've got people who are actually experts in that method, and we've asked them to either talk about their own research or some really interesting case study. So for instance, we're using gender, race and social class as a vehicle to express some of these ideas about social research methods. So it's much, much less of a, sort of a dry, you know, here's one method, here's another method. It's really about things that around, as I said, gender, race and social class.

So for instance, you know, we bring in things about how might your race or gender make a difference as to how the police might treat you. We've got quite a big section on how health, how health, care has changed for maternity services over the last forty years, for instance. So how has, how has research - particularly in this case, in the case of maternity services, how has, how has feminist research and different methods led into a much better experience for them, their partners, their babies and so on, and how things have really changed.

And that's been the result of researchers who've, who've carried out research, written about it, and then said, look, there's a much better way of running the world than this. This is, this is how we should be doing it. So, so social research is about the real world, and it's about things that people can do to make the world better. And, we've got it packed - DD215 is packed with examples of that, you know, rather than, sort of, just trying to teach the subject in a very dry way.

KAREN FOLEY: And, and as you and Keir both really demonstrate, you're both very actively involved in some of those things. As you say Louise, you know, it's those changing policies, those changing debates, and what we can do about them, that, that means that you can actually have an impact on the rest of the world around them. And Keir, this is something that I know that you're very interested in, in particular how those changing policies can be used to, sort of, create undergraduates with better, you know, knowledge and understanding about the world, so that they can look at things through, through a really critical lens and understand some of the key issues that, that like we've been talking about earlier, may not be as simple as they initially seem.

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: Yeah, absolutely, so I mean one of the things we want to make sure that students have - where we want to get students by the end of the module is where they can watch a newspaper story, listen to a politician making a statement or a claim about the world, and be really able to unpack what it is that is supporting those claims and arguments about the

world. A good example would be COVID. For the last year, we've been bombarded by statistics and by claims about COVID, and why we need to respond in certain ways. And I think it's really easy for, for people to, kind of, just go along with what's being told to us without really looking underneath, that the evidence underpinning those claims and assumptions and guidelines and rules.

And this module wants to teach students to be able to think critically about what it is that those arguments have been based on. So, I mean, last, last week, the BBC was saying there's seven thousand cases of COVID being reported a day. And you can take that number and think of it what you will. Some people might think that's very low. Some people think it's very high.

And we're trying to teach students how to think about those numbers in context. So what do they mean? What does it mean the response to that - this pandemic ought to be? Is the government getting it right?. You know, we want this module to help students think critically about all those arguments that are being made, and that we hear day in, day out from different places.

KAREN FOLEY: And in addition to the policies, and these, these, sort of, key areas of concern, Louise, one of the things that I know you're interested in is looking at some of the sort of fundamentals that may underpin things. We've been talking about inequality in the session beforehand. But there are other issues like gender, race and class that can all cast a different light on some of these issues.

LOUISE WESTMARLAND: Yeah, we talk about the way that certain methods can investigate different, sort of, different things. You know, so, if you're wanting to look at social class, there might be different ways that you might consider that. So, one of my specialist subjects is police corruption, and, you know, we are encouraging students on this module to think about how they might do some research. So the, the course culminates - that's a difficult thing to say - the course culminates in a, sort of, an end-of-module exercise, where we ask students to create their own research proposal. And one of the things that we ask them is, well, how would you do this?

So I'm interested in police corruption. I've been watching *Line of Duty*, as I'm sure all of you have been. You know, how would you find out about bent coppers?. You know, would you go up to someone and say, are you a bent copper, then? you know.

So we need to talk to them about how would you actually carry out that particular research? you know. How would - how are difficult things researched? I mean, the maternity case that I was talking about earlier, you know - how do you walk into a maternity ward and see how things are carried out, and then decide that you're going to change things?

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely, absolutely. I mean, things like *Line of Duty*, I know, have, you know, really sparked interest into this whole area of police corruption. And I was just recently watching *Time*, which I just thought was incredible, and, and really, really moving in terms of some of the things that, again, are not quite all as they seem. So many factors to look at here.

And these skills are really important, because they're not only skills that we would use, for example, in a criminology degree. They're skills for everyday life. And Keir, I wonder if you

could, sort of, talk about some of the things that students may learn that they can then take away from this module.

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: Yeah, there's a whole range of skills that students are going to pick up from a research methods module. It's - that's one of its key strengths, I think, the number of skills that will pick up. I think one of the things that's really important is a, is a grasp of statistics. We absolutely don't assume that students will have any prior knowledge with numbers. We know that it's something that daunts a lot of students.

So we start from a very basic level. But we do, kind of, acknowledge how important it is that we understand numbers and the way they work in the world around us, because so many of the claims and the arguments and the evidence that we see is given to us in numeric form. And that's often to do with crime and criminal justice. There are lots of really good examples where, sort of, common perceptions of how many people are in prison or what re-offending rates are, or sentence lengths or whatever else, people's perceptions of them are just way out of line with the actual reality. And I guess one of the things the module's trying to do is help students feel really confident to understand what those numbers are saying, so that they can be critical about how it is that our societies are organised.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, here are some numbers, Keir, because we've asked everyone at home, according to the Metropolitan Police what percentage of knife crime offences are gang-related. Now, we've got thirty-one per cent of them saying fifty-two per cent, twenty-five per cent saying two per cent, and forty-four per cent saying twenty-two per cent - very, very different numbers here as well. We've also got the results from another widget, which asked about should the police be involved in enforcing police COVID guidance, which most people say are unsure, we're a bit hung on the fence with the yes or no. But tell us, then, about that statistic, Keir, with police crime. I mean, what is the correct answer, and what might we infer from a statistic like that?

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: This is one that I love to give in any lectures that I deliver on violence, because it shows just how massively disparate the gap is between public knowledge of something and what the actual reality is according to statistics. So the answer is two per cent, which absolutely shocks most people, because our common perception is that knife crime is all about gangs and gang violence, because that's primarily what we see in newspaper headlines, it's what we see when politicians make statements, it's what we see in even fictional dramas. But it turns out that police statistics show that gang crime is very, very tiny percentage of knife crime overall. And I think that's - this is just one small example, just to show how different perceptions can be from actual reality. It's quite stark and shocking, isn't it?

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely, absolutely. Louise, did you want to add to that?

LOUISE WESTMARLAND: Yeah, I was just going to say, probably shouldn't give the impression that DD215 is all about statistics, because Keir loves statistics, OK. So we've got, like, kind of, a couple of chapters on statistics. I mean, you know, the whole module covers lots of different - I can't count it all, and wouldn't ever imagine doing it.

I wouldn't know the answer to that question that you've just asked. I mean, I spend all my time in and around the back of police cars, and in the back of the police car and talking to people and getting to know them. And that's how I do my research. And obviously, you know, on the module, we cover the full range of the qualitative - so, you know, things about why and how, as well as the how manies.

So it's just Keir. He's just number crazy. That's why he's been talking about it.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. No, all methods are good, and we need a variety, actually, to understand these. Otherwise, statistics can just be very, well, singular. So we asked people at home, if they could research anything in the world, what would it be?

So let's see what people said at home. Key on everyone's mind is biscuits right now, which is unsurprising because this is a very popular topic of conversation here at Student Hub Live. But there are other, more serious things here around poverty, mental health, digital citizenship, clean water, plenty of resources, communication, detainment, social justice, child poverty and crime, human behaviour, injustice, police, love, drugs.

So there are lots of really exciting things here. Why is social research, then, such an important topic of study in its own right? Louise, maybe you can go first.

LOUISE WESTMARLAND: OK, well, as Keir said at the beginning, it's because we need to know about the world. I mean, I need to know which of the best biscuits, basically. I mean that's a great topic. I mean, why didn't we have - Keir, why didn't we have biscuits on the module? That's what I want to know.

But seriously, if anybody is making any choices, any selection of any food or life choices, you know, it's good to know what the research is behind that. And although we might have our own opinions, as Keir said at the beginning, you know, research that actually looks into these things does help us. So domestic abuse is something we talk about quite a lot on the module.

And that's something that is what we might call a hidden crime. And it's, it's difficult to know how much there is and where to target resources, and that you know, who are the victims and how we could help them. Social research helps us to understand those issues, and then to help people who have the power to change things to put things into place. That's just one example.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, and Keir, I'm going to end with you. But before we do, I just want to take a quick check to Damon, because everyone is talking so much at home. And I just don't want to, to neglect our audience. Damon, how is everyone?

DAMON MILLER: Yeah they're really interested in this, actually. The chat box is, is really busy. I mean, Eleanor and Peter have flagged that thinking critically and critical research methods are really important. And they're, sort of saying that qualitative and quantitative research methods are complementary, both equally important.

Then some of the things that people are interested in, there was a mention earlier about big pharma and the harm that big pharma are doing to people. So there's a real sense that these things are all connected. And there's a real passion for digging in and finding more out.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, absolutely. Wonderful. Well, thank you for that, Damon. Keir, so I wonder if we can give you the last word as the module chair, then, in terms of some of these important things? What would you like to end today's session with?

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: I'd just like to say that, obviously, the module's been in production for over two years now. So there's been a huge amount of work put into it. [AUDIO OUT] different topics, many of which actually came up in part of the word cloud. So that was really delightful to see that many of the topics students are interested in are actually covered on the module. That's fantastic.

And yeah, we hope that students, by the time they reach the end of the module, will just feel really empowered to think critically about the social world, to be able to make sense of it, however they think is best, whether that's through numbers or text or sounds or images, or whatever else, you know, it's all, kind of, covered on this module. I think it'll be a fantastic experience, and it's been really lovely speaking to you today.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, absolutely. If you haven't already, do. Keir and Louise, thank you so much. I know, Louise, you're in the thick of exams right now. So I should leave you to that slightly less interesting part of your day.

And Keir, I know you've got some big work on a project, and you're doing some work with Met Police and politicians, but of course, having to do a lot of that online in this COVID environment at the moment. So enjoy the rest of your day, both. Thank you so much for coming along to talk to us. That's been really, really exciting.

KEIR IRWIN-ROGERS: Thanks so much, everyone.

KAREN FOLEY: No. Thank you. We're going to have a short break now. And we're going to hear from Professor Jo Phoenix, who's one of our Who's Who videos in the faculty.

And then we're going to talk to you a little bit about the BA (Honours) in Geography, because our next session is going to focus on changing geographies of the United Kingdom. Stay tuned. We'll see you in just a moment.

[MUSIC PLAYING]