



## A study in failure?

Recent riots in Ferguson, Missouri, which began following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by authorities, have raised concerns over the militarisation of police in dealing with conflict and protest. Psychologists have developed useful theories about crowd control and implemented these in practice, but how far has the message spread? And what can be done to promote more progressive thinking in police forces worldwide?

Professor Steve Reicher (University of St Andrews) and his colleagues developed the Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowds, which, in its coverage of Ferguson, *Newsweek* described as the 'leading scientific theory on crowds' (see [tinyurl.com/k45ajyf](http://tinyurl.com/k45ajyf)). The theory, which examines how crowd police interactions produce conflict, spells out the implications for public order practices designed to limit conflict.

Professor Reicher explained: 'The four principles are: education, to understand the nature of the various social groups in the crowd, their norms and values, aims and intentions, notions of legitimacy and illegitimacy; facilitation, don't simply act to stop things that are deemed unlawful, start by facilitating lawful aims and intentions; communication, talk to crowds, explain how you are trying to facilitate them and why you are acting as you do; and differentiation, always use measures –

tactics, technologies, et cetera – which are targeted and which distinguish between those acting lawfully and unlawfully.'

These principles have been used in major football tournaments and have led to the development of 'dialogue policing' which applies to all public order policing, not just football crowds, and has been adopted in Denmark and Sweden. In recent years they have been accepted as the basis for reforming UK public order policing and are enshrined in an official report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary (see [tinyurl.com/k89ujvl](http://tinyurl.com/k89ujvl)).

Regarding the police response in Ferguson, Professor Reicher said: 'From what I can see – and most commentators seem to agree – it was pretty woeful. After the initial killing, they didn't listen to the family, they showed no respect to the community, they certainly didn't seek to facilitate lawful protest, there was little attempt to communicate, and they applied indiscriminate force against everyone present. In short, they violated every single one of our principles of non-conflictual policing. And they reaped the results.'

But perhaps the short-term errors reflected a longer-term problem. The police did not reflect the community and had little legitimacy in Ferguson. They were an outgroup who were seen as imposing themselves on the community rather than looking after the community. Any solution

must deal with the broader context as well as the specific dynamics which led to violence.'

While Professor Reicher led on developing the underlying models of crowd psychology and the general principles of policing, Dr Clifford Stott's (University of Leeds) work in developing concrete models of policing and applying them bagged him a prestigious ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize this year. Dr Stott's ideas, among other things, inspired the introduction of Police Liaison Teams who open up a dialogue between police and protestors. Promising results have been seen in their use during the Occupy protests of 2011 and in Obelisk, the South Yorkshire Police operation surrounding the 2011 Liberal Party Spring Conference in Sheffield.

Dr Stott said the evidence that has come out suggests that the disproportionate way the situation was handled in Ferguson amplifies the general feeling of police illegitimacy. 'There's a background tension which grows out of day-to-day interactions with the police.' After Michael Brown's death crowds began to gather around the area he was killed to protest, and Dr Stott said the police response to this was clamping down. He told us: 'The paramilitarised response wasn't sensitive to people's rights of assembly and free expression... it would appear the police were much more focused on trying to



AP/Press Association Images

# Treating depression in cancer

Three papers published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, *The Lancet*, and *The Lancet Oncology* have revealed that around three quarters of cancer patients who have major depression are not receiving treatment for it, and that a new integrated treatment programme is more effective at reducing depression and improving quality of life than current care.

Researchers at the University of Oxford and University of Edinburgh analysed data from more than 21,000 patients attending cancer clinics in Scotland and found that major depression is more common in cancer patients than in the general population and was most common in those with lung cancer, affecting 13 per cent of patients. Moreover, 73 per cent of depressed cancer patients were not receiving treatment.

To address the problem of inadequate treatment the SMaRT Oncology-2 randomised trial evaluated the effectiveness of a new treatment programme called 'Depression Care for People with Cancer' (DCPC). The programme is delivered by a team of specially trained cancer nurses and psychiatrists, working in collaboration with the patient's cancer team and GP, and is given as part of cancer care. It is a systematic treatment that includes

both antidepressants and psychological therapy.

The trial, involving 500 adults with major depression and a cancer with a good prognosis (predicted survival more than 12 months) compared DCPC with usual care. DCPC was more effective at reducing depression. At six months, 62 per cent of the patients who received DCPC responded to treatment (at least a 50 per cent reduction in the severity of their depression) compared with only 17 per cent of those who received usual care. This benefit was sustained at 12 months. DCPC also improved anxiety, pain, fatigue, functioning and overall quality of life.

To see whether patients with a poor prognosis cancer could also benefit from this approach, the SMaRT Oncology-3 randomised trial, published in *The Lancet Oncology*, tested a version of DCPC adapted for patients with a typically poor prognosis cancer (lung cancer). The trial, involving 142 patients with lung cancer and major depression, found that those who received the lung cancer version of DCPC had a significantly greater improvement in depression than those who received usual care during 32 weeks of follow-up. The lung cancer-specific version of DCPC also improved anxiety, functioning and quality of life. **ER**

control the potential for aggression. That feeds into the sense of antagonism towards the police, and confirms a view of the police as an organisation that denies the black community their rights.

'Ferguson was interesting because we saw a period of escalation followed by de-escalation followed by further escalation. What's interesting is that this de-escalation came when a police captain came in and walked along with protestors through Ferguson. In other words the de-escalation was consistent with our theory – that policing should be oriented towards facilitation based on dialogue and communication. People want the capability to express their protest and the police should work with them to facilitate that.'

Although the media spotlight will inevitably fall upon the paramilitary side of some of America's police forces, Dr Stott said the real picture is not so well defined. He said: 'There are some very progressive forms of policing in the USA, for example in Boise, Idaho, where the police have adopted an approach very similar to the one we talk about. There's also considerable variability in Europe, and even in this country. We're in a place where, despite the progress that has been made, the assertion of this kind of progressive policing is always vulnerable to going back into the past.' **ER**

## Police morale

Psychologists working for the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) have been carrying out a large survey in which the views of over 32,000 officers have been assessed, as the way that officers' pay and conditions are set is moving from a face-to-face system of negotiation to a pay review body similar to that used for teachers and NHS workers. This will require an evidenced case to be provided demonstrating how officers' morale and retention are affected by their conditions.

The PFEW, a staff

association representing all 124,000 police officers up to the rank of Chief Inspector, has asked how the Police Service can help to retain experienced and well-motivated officers in the face of the stresses of the job. Its survey found that 94 per cent of respondents believe morale in the Police Service as a whole is low, and that there is a statistical relationship between personal experience of recent changes (such as changes to overtime pay, and access to pay for particular roles) and morale.

Although this survey was primarily designed to provide data for evidence-based policy decisions, this information will also allow PFEW researchers an insight into the interaction between factors that affect the psychological well-being of officers. The work will form a part of the case being put to the newly formed Police Remuneration Review Body in the autumn. In addition, the researchers are also looking to have their results published in a research journal in the near future. **ER**

# IoP name change

The Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London has been renamed the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) after almost 100 years with the same name. From September 2015 the Institute will also be offering a newly created BSc Psychology programme.

The Institute will comprise 300 academic staff, with an annual turnover of nearly £100 million and a research turnover of nearly £50 million and will take on a new structure comprising three academic divisions. These are the Division of Neuroscience, headed by Professor Mark Richardson, the Division of Psychology and Systems Sciences, headed by Professor Til Wykes, and the Division of Academic Psychiatry.

Professor Til Wykes, also Vice Dean of Psychology and System Sciences in the Institute, explained why the change was a significant one. She said: 'Psychology has always been an independent presence at the Institute of Psychiatry with its own department, prestigious clinical psychology course as well as centres for training in professional qualifications. We have never offered an undergraduate degree but will be adding one next year. This is a very exciting evolution as our clinical and

applied work will also have an expansion with access to psychological expertise from new areas.'

She told *The Psychologist*: 'The IoPPN has three divisions and this brings together four departments – Psychology, Health Service and Population Research, Biostatistics and the MRC Centre for Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry. The departments without psychology in the title have psychologists working within them so we will have a large contingent at the IoPPN, more than just a critical mass.'

Professor Wykes said the change of name was to recognise the importance of psychology to resolving issues that surround mental health – the theoretical as well as the applied. She added: 'We need psychology to help us understand the basic mental and brain mechanisms, to develop individual treatments and care, to work out the best ways to implement those treatments, to understand the social impact and discrimination that surrounds mental health disorders as well as to combat stigma. At the end of this research pathway there are always interesting issues that can only be resolved through experimental studies within psychology, and so the scientific cycle starts again.' ER

# Historic boost

The Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron, Ohio, has received a \$3.5 million donation from Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings. The Center will be renamed after the couple who have previously donated \$1.5 million. With the funds the Cummings Center is planning to expand its museum and build a dedicated research space and offices for visiting scholars and staff, and to fund an endowment to support a full-time associate director position.

Peter Dillon-Hooper, who manages the British Psychological Society's own History of Psychology Centre said: 'This is great news for historians of psychology. The University of Akron is a renowned centre for studying the history of psychology,

and this generous donation will allow it to expand its activities and cement its leading position.

'In the UK, research on history of psychology and teaching on the topic are not so well established in our universities. The BPS History of Psychology Centre does what it can with limited resources, and the Society's History & Philosophy of Psychology Section has a dedicated core membership but remains a minority interest. This is a shame. An understanding of the history of psychological ideas and their impact is surely fundamental to being a modern psychologist. Perhaps some deep-pocketed benefactor this side of the Atlantic might want to help with a donation to our Centre?' ER

# White Water Writers

A project, designed by psychologists, which gives groups of young people the chance to write and publish their own full-length novel in a week, has been given extra funding to expand. The White Water Writers project was developed at Royal Holloway, University of London by Joseph Reddington, Yvonne Skipper, Patrick Leman and Douglas Cowie.

Dr Reddington said: 'White Water Writers evolved out of a science experiment – to see if you could use software engineering approaches to create narrative. What led us into being a literacy project was watching the students develop. Over the week they developed as fast as the narrative did – and not just in terms of their creative skills.'

The young people take part in a week-long camp, at their schools, led by university students. They develop a novel, write it and eventually have it published. Dr Skipper has recently received a grant from the HEFCE to develop the project in Keele University and has worked with children with special educational needs and looked after children.

Dr Skipper said the camps also seem to help with the young people's self esteem, she added: 'Before they participate we measure their current perceptions of their skills, self-esteem and locus of control. We then repeat these measures at the end of the project. In some camps we also hold focus groups before and after to learn about how the participants feel about the project. Results suggest that participating in White Water Writers leads young people to feel more positive about their skills, themselves and more in control of their lives.' ER

For more information about the project see [tinyurl.com/lbt3o2g](http://tinyurl.com/lbt3o2g)



Professor Wykes said the change of name was to recognise the importance of psychology to resolving issues that surround mental health

# 'Responsible reporting can save lives'

In the wake of Robin Williams's death, Ella Rhodes spoke to **Professor Rory O'Connor** about the way the media report suicide

Comedian and actor Robin Williams' death attracted media coverage across the world, and many questions have been raised about the reporting of his suicide. Print and broadcast journalists have access to guidelines recommending that they do not reveal too much detail about the method used in any suicide, do not oversimplify the causes, and do not overly focus on celebrity suicide or provide sensationalist coverage.

Concerned organisations (including Samaritans – see [tinyurl.com/sammgrs](http://tinyurl.com/sammgrs)) have developed these guidelines for journalists reporting suicides, and rules also exist in the Press Complaints Commission Editors' Code of Practice and Ofcom's Code of Practice. However, there was widespread criticism that some newspapers revealed too many details about the method that Williams used to take his own life. There was also consternation over a tweet sent out by The Academy which some commentators felt could glorify the act or suggest to others that suicide is a means to end suffering.

Professor Rory O'Connor (University of Glasgow), president of the International Academy for Suicide Research and

director of the Suicidal Behaviour Research Laboratory in Glasgow, said there was clear evidence that some media reporting of suicide can have an impact on vulnerable people – making them more likely to attempt suicide. He told *The Psychologist*: 'We know talking about suicide doesn't plant the idea in people's heads, the issue is that if someone is already thinking of suicide, the reporting of suicide may increase the likelihood that they'll attempt suicide. Although we need to better understand precisely how media reporting increases the risk of suicide, there is clear evidence that sensationalist, explicit reporting of suicide is especially risky.'

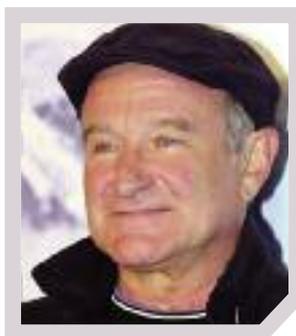
When asked why the media should keep details of the method of suicide scant, he said: 'Vulnerable people often show cognitive constriction (tunnel

thinking), so even if they have had thoughts of suicide, they may not have formed a detailed plan of how they would translate their suicidal thoughts into action. Our concern is that detailed descriptions of methods of suicide may facilitate this transition. Robin Williams' death was very badly handled; in too many instances the media reporting guidelines were ignored completely, which was irresponsible. It is important to remember that the responsible reporting of suicide can save lives. Talking in detail about the method may prime its use, making it more salient to people who are already vulnerable.'

But what can psychologists do to make the media more aware of the dangers of insensitive reports of suicides? Professor

O'Connor said: 'A few months ago, I took part in a fruitful meeting, organised by Samaritans, with journalists in Scotland. We discussed the concerns about the reporting of suicide and the implementation of the guidelines. It was a really helpful discussion – and psychologists should have a role in such discussions. In addition, we should be conducting more research into how the media reporting affects vulnerable people. We can also have a positive impact by improving how the media guidelines are communicated, disseminated and implemented. Part of the challenge is that we don't want to censor the media, it's very important that suicide is reported to minimise the stigma around discussing it; it's about promoting safe and responsible reporting. Psychologists, among others, also have an important role in destigmatising mental health.'

The media have also been criticised for presenting Williams as something of a 'sad clown' character in reports of his death. Professor O'Connor said: 'I don't find such descriptions helpful. Suicide can, and does, affect anyone, so it's not helpful to caricature individuals into these subtypes. Although I can see why the media were describing him as such as there is evidence that there's a link between suicide risk and creativity, my message is that people who die by suicide come from all walks of life.'



'People who die by suicide come from all walks of life'

## 'SUICIDE TOURISM' INCREASING

The amount of people travelling to Switzerland for assisted suicide has doubled in four years according to a study published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. The main reasons for turning to assisted suicide include paralysis, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis; and people from Germany and Britain are the main groups choosing to travel to Switzerland to die.

Including Dignitas, there are six right-to-die organisations in Switzerland, four of which allow those from other countries to use their services. The researchers analysed 611 cases of individuals from outside Switzerland who had undertaken assisted suicide, and found they came from 31 different countries. Germany had the highest number of so-called suicide tourists, at 268, followed by the UK, at 126. The researchers conclude their study by writing that the 'unique phenomenon of suicide tourism in Switzerland may indeed result in the amendment or supplementary guidelines to existing regulations in foreign countries'.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) released a report last month calling for a coordinated effort to reduce suicides worldwide. The report points out that, globally, more than 800,000 people die from suicide each year. The report, which is the first of its kind released by WHO, draws on evidence from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the United States and a number of European countries which has revealed that limiting access to the most commonly used methods for suicide can help prevent people dying from that method. The report also states that another key to reducing deaths by suicide is a commitment by governments to establish a coordinated plan of action for suicide prevention. The report can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/ose3ser> ER

I For a psychological exploration of the UK's Assisted Dying Bill, see September's issue of *The Psychologist*, and this month's 'Letters'

# Dialogue across the disciplines

Kate Johnstone, a postgraduate at University College London, reports from a Memory Network event

On 6 September University College London hosted an event organised by the Memory Network, a multidisciplinary enterprise that brings together researchers, authors, artists and organisations to fuel original thinking about memory (see <http://thememorynetwork.net>).

Dr Hugo Spiers (Department of Experimental Psychology, UCL) helped found the Network with Dr Sebastian Groes (Department of English and Creative Writing, University of Roehampton). Dr Spiers said: 'Many psychologists and writers share a fascination with memory. The Memory Network has done a fantastic job of bringing them together and allowing them to challenge each other's preconceptions. There will be several publications arising from the current interactions, and we hope many further events to encourage further dialogue.'

The event was a Science and Literature Festival entitled 'The Story of Memory'. It featured 10 speakers with literary or psychological backgrounds, who shared their thoughts on aspects of memory and storytelling. On the literary side, author Maud Casey talked about her new novel, *The Man Who Walked Away*. This is a fictionalised account of Jean-Albert Dadas, a French gas-fitter in the mid-19th century. Dadas was regularly

overcome with an uncontrollable urge to walk as far as he could, wherever he could, and no matter how exhausted he was. He walked in a fugue state, returning home days or weeks later with no memory of his journey. Author Anna Stothard (*The Pink Hotel*, *The Art of Leaving*) had a thoughtful discussion with academic and neuro-literary critic Jason Tougaw (Department of English, The City University of New York) on the role of physical objects in memory and storytelling. Neuro-literary criticism is a relatively new field, where academics from the arts and science explore the biological processes behind reading, creating and processing fiction.

The highlights of the event were several truly big names in psychology and literature. Suzanne Corkin (Emerita Professor of Neuroscience, MIT) gave her unique perspective on Henry Molaison, whom she studied for nearly five decades up to his death in 2008. Experiments involving 'patient HM', as we all knew him, were crucial in understanding the functioning of short-term and long-term memory. Corkin played an extract from an interview between herself and Henry from 1992 which demonstrated his memory deficiencies. For example, Henry could correctly identify the date of the Second World War and the then American President, but was unsure



Ian McEwan (left) and Professor Paul Bloom, Yale (right)

## Faith in well-being

A report by the faith organisation network FaithAction has been released which brings together evidence of the usefulness of faith in a public health setting by examining the work of faith-based organisations (FBOs). The report, among other things, recommends that faith organisations should be proactive in promoting their services and that public health bodies should work alongside them.

The report, *Faith-Based Organisations on Public Health and Social Capital*, has been reviewed by Chartered Psychologist and Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council Jim McManus. He said: 'I would say this report is important because it is an attempt to summarise scientific evidence and actual case studies in a way that enables policy makers to understand there is a good evidence base for the impact of faith on health and well-being, and the impact of faith communities on it. The report also identifies some good practice

principles for faith communities and policy makers to get benefit from working together, and also avoid any potential problems, since we know faith can be both protective of health and resilience, as well as being implicated in psychopathology and poor coping.'

The report points out that the work of FBOs in health settings is in danger of not being fully recognised by the groups themselves and by policy makers, often because there is a lack of evidence around what is taking place and its effectiveness. The authors point out several issues, first, that although FBOs do not have universal reach, they do reach communities that do not always benefit from public services. They suggest faith groups need to recognise that this access gives them a role to play in improving health and well-being. Second, there is uneven recognition in policy circles that the faith sector has the potential to be a force for change and a partner in the delivery of services. And third, that there is a lack of

evidence as to the kind of interventions that may be effective and how these could be delivered with and through FBOs.

Mr McManus writes in the report: 'The role of faith in people's health is being elucidated, with recent research suggesting that faith can be a protective factor in health behaviours and outcomes as well as a vulnerability factor. Faith communities are potentially important settings for public health interventions because cultural and faith assumptions and conventions are intimately linked with understandings of health, the behaviours and conventions around maintaining good health, and dealing with poor health. This report, while not an exhaustive summary of all this, importantly summarises key evidence, identifies key themes for action by public health agencies and faith communities respectively and together, and provides some important case studies and examples of good practice.' **ER**  
I [www.faithaction.net](http://www.faithaction.net)

about whether he had grey hair, and where or when he might have met Corkin before (who by that point had been working with him for 30 years). Corkin's book about patient HM (*Permanent Present Tense: The Man with no Memory and What He Taught the World*) has just come out in paperback, and must be essential reading for any psychologist interested in memory.

The festival culminated in a lively discussion between Paul Bloom (Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science, Yale University) and Ian McEwan, undoubtedly one of Britain's foremost living authors. McEwan is on the advisory panel of the Memory Network, and has long been interested in the intersection between art and science. The protagonist in *Saturday*, for example, is a neurosurgeon, and in *Solar*, a Nobel prize-winning physicist. It seems that in another life, and with superior mathematical skills, McEwan would have been a physicist himself.

McEwan and Bloom's conversation ranged over a number of topics, straying from the original brief of storytelling and memory. McEwan is clearly well versed in psychological theories, and is particularly fascinated by cognitive biases and the impossibility of rationality. His latest book, *The Children Act*, centres not on a scientist but another apparent bastion of rationality, a High Court judge. McEwan was at his most animated when talking about the tragic miscarriage of justice inflicted on Sally Clark, wrongly convicted for murdering her two sons due to judicial misunderstanding of statistical probabilities. McEwan indicated that the Royal Society is planning a conference for senior judges to improve their understanding of probability, cognitive biases and how memory actually works, surely a long-overdue move. All was not serious, though, and we also learnt that bonobos don't like novels, and ants would be really bad at writing them.

Overall a fascinating and enjoyable day which demonstrated how important it is to maintain cross-disciplinary dialogues.

## New gambling research centre

Psychologist and gambling researcher Dr Amanda Roberts will lead a new research centre

at the University of Lincoln devoted to studying gambling. Dr Roberts has joined the School of Psychology from the University of East London.

The new research centre will focus on understanding the psychological causes and effects of gambling, including addictive gambling, risk-taking behaviour, treatment programmes and the impact of new technologies such as betting smartphone apps. Dr Roberts will also bring with her an ongoing research project evaluating 40 years of data



Dr Amanda Roberts

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For BPS awards and grant schemes, see [www.bps.org.uk/awards&grants](http://www.bps.org.uk/awards&grants). Funding bodies should e-mail news to Emma Smith on [emma.smith@bps.org.uk](mailto:emma.smith@bps.org.uk) for possible inclusion.

## FUNDING NEWS

The **Association of Commonwealth Universities** invites applications for the **Canada Memorial Foundation Scholarships**. Established to honour the one million Canadians who served with Great Britain during the First and Second World Wars, the scholarships are open to British students or graduates who wish to pursue a postgraduate course at a higher education institution in Canada. Candidates must be UK citizens and hold, or expect to achieve, a minimum of a second class degree by September 2015. The scholarships last for one year and allow for airfares and living expenses. Deadline: 30 November 2014.

[tinyurl.com/knyr3u2](http://tinyurl.com/knyr3u2)

The **International Social Science Council** and **Foundation Mattei Dogan** invite nominations for their **Prize for Excellence in Interdisciplinary Research**. The prize is awarded to a social scientist, or team of scholars, with advanced scientific knowledge in social sciences by crossing disciplinary boundaries. Nominations can be made by ISCC members or other professional associations, as well as by universities and academic institutions. The closing date for nominations is 14 December 2014.

[tinyurl.com/kgnnfsd](http://tinyurl.com/kgnnfsd)

The **Leverhulme Trust** also invites applications for its **Study Abroad Studentships**. The studentships support an extended period of advanced study or research at a centre of learning overseas for between 12 and 24 months. Applicants must have been resident in the UK for at least five years and hold an undergraduate degree from a UK institution, or have been registered as a student within the last eight years. Studentships are for up to £18,000 and the closing date is 12 January 2015.

[tinyurl.com/m6ts3jv](http://tinyurl.com/m6ts3jv)

The **British Academy** invites applications for its **Quantitative Skills Acquisition Awards**, to develop and enhance the quantitative skills of early-career scholars. Applicants must be within 10 years of receiving their doctorate and be in an established academic post at a UK university. The maximum award is up to £10,000 over 12 months. Around 20 awards are available. Closing date 29 October.

[tinyurl.com/cykapu3](http://tinyurl.com/cykapu3)

on treatment offered by the Gordon Moody Foundation, a UK charity that offers residential treatment programmes to addicted gamblers, which will assess how different length treatment programmes affect behaviour.

Dr Roberts said: 'My move to the University of Lincoln is an exciting one. The launch of the research centre will give us the opportunity to better explore the reasons why

people gamble. There is no consensus on the most effective way to treat gambling, largely because treatment research is so scarce. Additionally, treatment facilities which primarily rehabilitate problem gamblers are very limited; in the UK the NHS does not provide treatment facilities, unless the individual has other disorders they might need treatment for.' ER



## Child protection and the Rotherham abuse scandal

August saw the horrific revelation that at least 1400 children had been the victims of sexual exploitation in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013. A scathing report by Professor Alexis Jay (see [tinyurl.com/m6enadz](http://tinyurl.com/m6enadz)) revealed failings by police and council officers over the years when confronted with these reports.

But what makes these historical cases of sexual abuse so difficult to uncover? Is it likely similar large-scale cases of sexual exploitation by gangs will have taken place? Is there a danger that the psychological community's focus on false memory could act as a barrier in investigating or prosecuting such cases? We spoke to experts in child abuse, gender, sexual violence and memory for their views.

### Reporting exploitation and abuse

Debbie Allnock, NSPCC Research Consultant and lecturer in child and adolescent studies (University of Bedfordshire), said that the emergence of widespread sexual exploitation in Rotherham, and previously in Rochdale, suggested that child sexual exploitation was likely to be occurring elsewhere. She added that it was important to recognise that the specific patterns and dynamics of

abuse, and the profile of perpetrators, may vary. 'It is difficult to know with great certainty, however, because of a number of systemic barriers.

According to Allnock, the recent inquiry into child sexual exploitation carried out by the Office of the Children's Commissioner identified nine specific failings or barriers in the system.

'Included in this is significant variability in recording and monitoring practices, which means that many local authorities do not know how many victims had been identified in the year of the inquiry. Other barriers include a lack of leadership and strategic planning, and low levels of awareness among professionals about sexual exploitation and how to engage with children and young people at risk. The inquiry identified a culture in some areas which blames victims, evidenced in the use of phrases to describe these children and young people such as "promiscuous" and "putting themselves at risk". Thus, children and young people are seen as "troublesome" rather than as victims in need of safeguarding.'

When asked what makes it particularly difficult for victims of sexual abuse or exploitation to report these crimes, Allnock said: 'There are intertwining and complex factors which

act as barriers to disclosure of child sexual abuse more broadly and sexual exploitation more specifically. Children and young people are often groomed by their perpetrator or perpetrators, in order to carry out the abuse and gain children's silence. Young people who have participated in my own, and in others', research say that perpetrators threatened them verbally or physically, or threatened that they would harm others close to them. Child sexual exploitation is also often tied up with some form of gain, for example access to drugs and/or alcohol. Children and young people may not tell because they feel guilty or complicit in the abuse. Research has also found that young people who are being sexually exploited may not realise it for a number of reasons. This may be because they think they are making a choice, because of confusion around sexual activity and the issue of consent or because of a normalisation of sexual violence.'

Outside observers may sometimes be surprised that historic cases of sexual abuse have taken so long to come to light, but Allnock explained that coming forward may be easier for some people if the perpetrator is no longer alive or no longer in their lives. She added: 'Disclosure in these cases usually refers to

sharing their experiences in confidence with friends, partners, family members or in a therapeutic setting rather than formal sources of disclosure such as the police. While some people may wish to seek justice for what happened to them as children or to protect other children who may be in contact with the perpetrator, others may lack confidence in the police or social services, they may worry that too much time has passed, that there is no evidence of their abuse or they may have ongoing anxieties about the impact of their disclosure on others.'

What sort of culture leads to the widespread, underreported, exploitation of children? Allnock said the question must be examined ecologically. 'Societal acceptance of sexual violence results in a "normalisation" of violence and abuse. In this sort of context, children and young people may not realise there is anything to report. A societal acceptance of violence also facilitates a culture of victim-blaming, which prevents adequate response. At the community level, weak community and/or institutional sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence mean that victims find it hard or impossible to report what is happening. More and better educational and preventive work in communities is needed, not only with young people but with professionals working with them and members of the wider community.'

### Gender and media reports

Dr Jemma Tosh, researcher and author of *Perverse Psychology: The Pathologization of Sexual Violence and Transgenderism*, said it was a sad reality that reports of the failure to investigate, convict or take seriously crimes related to sexual violence are a common occurrence. She said: 'It is extremely disappointing that, as a researcher of the psychology of sexual violence, I am not surprised when I see such reports. When I come across a headline of this kind, it is amongst a wealth of similar headlines, tweets, blogs, articles, books and conversations. They create an overwhelming noise of victim blaming, slut shaming, and disbelief in the experiences of rape victims – what has been described as a "rape culture".'

Dr Tosh said that it was this context that contributed to the interpretation of victims' behaviours and statements in ways that were more likely to result in them not being taken seriously, or not being reported at all. She told us: 'The media's terrible treatment of rape survivors and victims, in addition to negative reporting of female bodies and sexuality more generally, can make it very

difficult for people to come forward. This is through a fear of attracting negative attention, such as not being believed or being blamed for their victimisation. Gender plays an important role – women's sexuality and victimisation are reported differently both in media contexts as well as within academia. There has been much research into how female adolescent victims are framed as 'seductive' and judged as sexually active, which contrasts with the stereotype of a rape victim. This can make it very difficult for young women to seek justice for their abuse.'

Dr Tosh said there was a way to change this pessimistic situation. 'We need to reconsider the stereotype of an innocent victim to one that is more inclusive of a range of social categories, such as class. We also need to change the way we view and report female sexuality so that it no longer becomes a way to humiliate or discredit a woman, much like we see with images and videos being released without people's consent – like the recent Jennifer Lawrence hacking reports. The non-consensual distribution of sexual images is gaining further consideration by legal perspectives, such as the UK Ministry of Justice's consultation on "revenge porn".'

### Memory – not fundamentally unreliable?

Professor Chris Brewin (University College London) told us that he was concerned the explosion of research into false memories over the past 20 years may be leading to a cultural shift, causing the public and juries to believe that memory is largely unreliable. He said: 'It's almost as if we've lost sight of the idea that memory, most of the time, is accurate, even though in some circumstances it can mislead people. Of course people can have the experience of remembering things inaccurately, and they are vulnerable to misinformation. But the rather one-sided focus on false memories in the research literature has led to media articles implying that memory is fundamentally unreliable. In the past some of the Rotherham victims experienced great difficulties in being believed, while others were believed but ignored. I am concerned that in similar cases, particularly where there is less corroborative evidence, jurors might bring these assumptions into court, perpetuating the culture of disbelief.'

Professor Brewin said psychologists needed to make people more aware that the community may use a shorthand when talking about memory. 'There's

a more balanced context to the research which scientists might not always spell out... We have collected most autobiographical memory data in laboratory settings or under controlled conditions and almost all of what we know is about single events, we know very little about memory for something which occurred more than once – a situation relevant to many crimes involving physical and sexual violence. We must be very cautious and make sure that both the data and the conditions in which they have been collected are relevant to cases we have been asked to comment on.'

**I The Society's Child Protection Working Party has produced a position paper, *Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children*, which is available to download from [tinyurl.com/bpssafeg](http://tinyurl.com/bpssafeg)**

## CONSULTING ON DOMESTIC ABUSE LAW

**Home Secretary Theresa May has opened a consultation on strengthening domestic abuse law to create a specific offence for controlling and coercive behaviour in intimate relationships. Currently stalking and harassment legislation covers coercive and controlling behaviour but it does not explicitly apply to intimate relationships.**

**The consultation documents point out that 30 per cent of women and 16.3 per cent of men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes, and the government has called on the public and other interested parties to have their say on the proposals until Wednesday 15 October.**

**Mrs May said, on opening the consultation: 'There is now a widespread understanding that domestic abuse is not just about violence. Coercive and controlling behaviour can be harder to recognise but can have an equally devastating impact on its victims. In recognition of this, in March 2013 we expanded the government definition of domestic abuse to capture non-violent behaviour. This consultation now asks for views on whether the law needs to be strengthened to keep pace with these developments. I know that there is a wide range of strongly held views on this issue. This consultation does not prejudice the outcome or next steps. We want to hear the views of victims and those who work in this field to understand how we can offer the best possible protection against domestic abuse.'** ER