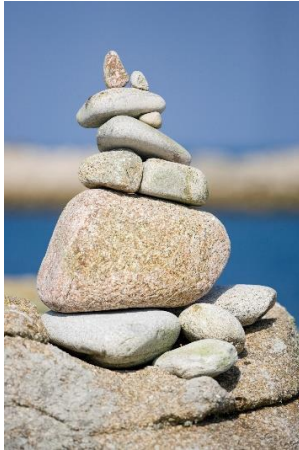


British Society of Criminology Newsletter

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Balance. A pile of rocks by the sea.

Photo: © Nousha | ID 6654319
Dreamstime.com

Inside

This Edition was an Open Call

*Contributions from Tania Loureiro,
Fernando Miró-Llinares, David Buil-Gil,
David Lydon, Kasey Alexander, Nigel
Brearley, Mike Sizer-Green.*

*Plus, various other items from the BSC
members and Exec.*

Editor

This issue was compiled
by Marian Duggan

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Editorial

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the BSC Newsletter. This open call issue explores a range of important insights into aspects of criminal and social justice with a strong theme of balance evident in several of the submissions, particularly regarding efficiency and ethical practice. I'm delighted to present a wonderful selection of articles from a range of international contributors across various career stages.

Our collection begins with Tania Loureiro's assessment of the recent mistaken releases of prisoners as grounds for an examination of the nature and purpose of prison itself. Taking a closer look at overcrowding and staff shortages in the Scottish Prison Service, Tania argues for a greater investment in community-based sentencing to encourage a move away from prison as a default punishment option. This followed by Fernando Miró-Llinares and David Buil-Gil who shed important light on contemporary threats to the integrity and credibility of scholarly publishing by demonstrating how, following a change in management, one formerly reputable criminology journal quickly turned into a 'paper mill' featuring non-existent scholars and universities. Their careful charting and evidencing of the evolution of this process provides valuable insight for the wider academic community.

Next, David Lydon uses a Baudrillard-inspired lens of hyperreality to examine the growth in digital, data and technology-driven (DDaT) police reform. His in-depth analysis demonstrates how the prioritisation of administrative efficiency and predictability is increasingly coming at the expense of complex and unpredictable realities characterising police work. Following this, in something of a counterpart, we have Detective Kasey Alexander reflect on her experiences of interviewing in the USA which have formed the basis for her current MRes Criminology studies and PhD aspirations. In this piece, Kasey explores the differences in police interview techniques and the potential for enhancements which can yield more actionable intelligence, particularly in rape investigations.

In another reflective account, Nigel Brearley takes us on an important ethical journey concerning the increasing availability of historical crime data and how researchers engage with this material. Drawing from his own archival experiences and engagements with family members of deceased victims and offenders, Nigel highlights the role to be played by researchers seeking out authentic accounts of historic true crime events. He also invites BSC members to join in the discussion by providing commentary on the issues raised in his article. A similar call to arms characterises the following piece from Mike Sizer-Green, whose doctoral research into education focuses on student engagement and attainment among learners from the Isle of Wight. He details a wealth of important and comparable data on school leavers alongside key barriers to higher education progression for this cohort. Mike is keen to hear from BSC members who can share evidence on programmes or models to improve progression, so his details are provided at the end of the article.

My huge thanks to all the contributors for their excellent submissions. As usual, the latter portion of the Newsletter contains valuable reflections on dearly departed colleagues. This time, we mark the sad passing of Professor Terry Thomas. We're incredibly grateful to Sarah

Kingston, Bill Heberton and Colin Webster for providing such a comprehensive and heartfelt tribute.

If you'll be presenting at next year's BSC conference at Nottingham Trent University, then do consider submitting your paper to the BSC Online Journal 2026. The journal comprises of papers based on conference proceedings, so is a great opportunity to showcase the wonderful work being done by our members on an annual basis. Full details can be found at the end of this Newsletter, along with information about the current BSC Executive Board.

Thanks all, see you in Nottingham!

Marian Duggan, *Reader in Criminology, University of Kent*

Themed Articles

Are the recent mistaken releases just a tip of the iceberg regarding the criminal justice system in UK?

Tania Loureiro, *University of Aberdeen*

The mistaken release of Hadush Kebatu from HMP Chelmsford prison, captured intense media attention and raised deeper concerns around the criminal justice system.

Kebatu was jailed for 12 months for sexual assaulting a woman and a 14-year-old in September 2025. He was meant to be sent to an immigration detention centre and was due to be deported, but instead was mistakenly released from HMP Chelmsford prison on 24th of October (Sky News, 2025). "Human error" was said to be the cause of this mistake, leading to an intense police search that culminated with an arrest two days later in north London (Mulligan, 2025).

This was considered a "national embarrassment" by the Deputy Prime Minister, David Lammy, prompting the government to order new measures to be in place before someone is released from prison to avoid future mistakes (Mulligan, 2025). Following this incident, on the 27th of October, the government confirmed the development of an independent investigation led by Dame Lynne Owens aiming to determine the "full facts of the incident", which is due to conclude by the end of the year (Ministry of Justice, 2025a). Immediate measures to strengthen release checks across prisons have been confirmed, including the presence of the Duty Governor for any foreign criminal that is to be released from prison to be deported, as well as clear checklists to confirm protocol has been followed prior to the release procedure (ibid).

Less than two weeks later, English prisons were again in the spotlight, this time with HMP Wandsworth confirming that two prisoners were released in error just days after each other. First, Brahim Kaddour-Cherif, who is an Algerian migrant sex offender was released in error on 29th October. However, the mistake was reported to the Met Police on 4th November, which raises questions around the reasons why it took nearly a week to be addressed (Parashar et al., 2025). On the 3rd November, William Smith (also known as 'Billy' Smith), a British national who was convicted of multiple fraud offences and sentenced to nearly four years, was also mistakenly released.

The news of these, additional, mistaken releases broke after Conservatives' James Cartledge pressed Deputy Prime Minister, David Lammy, on whether there have been other release

errors since the mistaken release of Hadush Kebatu, which Lammy did not answer directly (Thompson, 2025). Clearly the immediate measures ordered by David Lammy are either not working or were not put in place in all establishments.

How big is the problem?

This raises questions about deeper problems in prison and the criminal justice system, but how big is the problem? According to a publication from the Ministry of Justice (2025b), in a twelve-month period to March 2025, 262 prisoners were released in error, with a 128% increase from last year. Of these 262 prisoners mistakenly released, 233 occurred from prison establishments (ibid). More concerning is the fact that some of these mistakes are only recognised when the prisoners return to custody in a later date (ibid).

Comparing to England and Wales the figures in Scotland are significantly lower. In Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) reported a total of 27 “liberations in error” over the last four years; these included eight in 2022/23, seven in 2023/24, nine in 2024/25, and three so far in the current year up to the 22nd of October (Gilmour, 2025). The SPS also confirmed that all individuals involved have since been accounted for, with none remaining unlawfully at large (ibid).

The issue of high numbers among the prison population is well known and long discussed. Continued reliance on incarceration as a primary form of punishment has played a large role in the rising prison population, particularly for those serious and repeat offenders.

The [World Prison Brief](#) provides the most comprehensive source of information about prison populations around the world. In comparison with other countries with a similar size, Scotland has one of the highest imprisonment rates in Western Europe (150 per 100,000 population in October 2025), which is higher than England and Wales (139), and other countries such as France (124), and Portugal (120). While these rates have fluctuated, Scotland's has been consistently higher than England and Wales in recent years.

Country	Prison Population Rate
Iceland	35
Finland	54
Norway	54
Netherlands	64
Denmark	69
Switzerland	77
Portugal	120
France	124
England and Wales	139
Scotland	150
Lithuania	156
Latavia	175

Source: World Prison Brief

Figures from the SPS show that the average daily prison population in Scotland was 8,394 at the end of October 2025 ([Scottish Prison Service, 2025a](#)); against an official capacity of 7,905, this results in an occupancy level of 100.3% ([World Prison Brief](#)). This number surpasses the previous record of 8,420 set in 2012.

Overcrowding has reached such high levels that the Scottish Government passed an Emergency Bill in November 2024, and became an Act on 22nd of January 2025 with [The Prisoners \(Early Release\) \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#). The 2025 Act changes the release point for those serving prison sentences of less than four years (short-term sentences) (The Scottish Government, 2025a). Which means prisoners will be released at the 40% point of their sentence instead of at the 50% point. Those serving sentences for domestic abuse or sexual offences will still need to serve 50% of their sentence before they can be released (ibid).

As a result of the first phase of the emergency release process under the 2025 Act, between February and March this year, 312 individuals have been released already (Scottish Prison Service, 2025b). A second emergency release process has been proposed and approved by the Scottish Parliament to release some short-term prisoners early due to high prison numbers. Around 440 prisoners are expected to be released across three tranches between November and December 2025. A further 550 individuals are estimated to be released during the four monthly tranches from January to April 2026, with January likely to account for the largest single release (The Scottish Government, 2025b).

Prison overcrowding, stretched and inexperienced staff - how these factors combined can be problematic?

Prisons exceeding their occupancy level combined with reduced funding, stretched and inexperienced staff creates a dangerous mix: it increases violence, leads to deterioration in living conditions, undermines rehabilitation, and increases the risk of serious mistakes such as wrongful releases.

A report commissioned by the Prison Officers' Association (POA Scotland, 2025) entitled [Crisis Point](#), found that 73.7% of those members interviewed believed that overcrowding contributed to “fewer opportunities for staff to work positively on prisoner rehabilitation” (p.12). Nearly 80% indicated that prisoner numbers are placing added strain on prison officers, and 91% reported that rising prisoner populations are contributing to heightened tension within prisons (ibid). A frequent concern is the recruitment of staff, with improvements needed ensure officers embody key traits such as character, communication, resilience, and problem-solving under stress. Concerns have also been raised regarding recruitment processes, with idealised images of police officer roles being presented rather than the realities of working in a prison environment where there will be “confrontation and there will be violence” thus requires people with exceptional resilience and character to manage the job (ibid p.15).

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland has emphasised the issues around having a high prison population and the pressures associated which undermine the SPS’s commitment to providing “person-centred, inclusive, trauma-informed, and rights-based services that promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of all those in custody” (HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, 2025).

What can be done to reduce these problems?

One of the main key actions to reduce the number of prison population include more frequent use with more investment on community-based sentences, the Community Payback Orders (CPOs) in Scotland, as a diversion for lower-risk offenders while reserving imprisonment for dangerous individuals.

The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced a single community disposal, the CPO as a sustainable option that guarantees that individuals repay the public and community their crimes in two different ways: by requesting the offender to payback, usually by undertaking unpaid work; and by requesting them to address and adjust their behaviour by offering opportunities for their rehabilitation in the community.

CPOs play an important role in reducing the pressure of the prison system while also providing offenders with an opportunity for reparation (in a payback form), helping individuals to rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community (Loureiro, 2021). In other words, providing opportunities through work placements or other activities for individuals that are flexible and tailored according to their needs, while also maintaining family relationships (ibid).

Maybe the argument here is not whether Scotland needs to build more prisons but rather changing the notion of community sentences as an alternative. The idea of custody as the last resort only reinforces the prevailing notion of custody as the default option (Tata, 2016). It seems that the central problem continues to be the mentality of the use of custody (for short-term periods) as a last resort when no other option seems to work (Loureiro, 2021). Leading to the thought of prison working as a therapeutic institution, and the only legitimate viable option that has public confidence. This thinking needs to be inverted otherwise little will change. Community sentences need to be seen as the default position, not the alternative, and not a soft option, but an option that can provide opportunities for individuals to rehabilitate as well as to preserve links with family, employment, and society (ibid). The over-reliance associated with custodial sentences to hold people for short periods of time only increases the likelihood for individuals to return to prison repeatedly. This thinking only reduces custody to the default position. Instead, it is necessary to start developing an approach where certain purposes for imprisonment should be excluded (e.g. rehabilitation) and the focus shifted to specifying situations in which imprisonment should never be considered in the first place (Tata, 2016; Platts and Waterton, 2016).

More still needs to be done regarding community sentences. It is crucial that further investment on sentences in the community focus on embedding stronger infrastructures, better support services and judicial confidence. Without these in place, even the most robust programmes would not work.

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Yet another problem for scholarly communication in criminology: The case of a Spanish journal turned into a paper mill

Fernando Miró-Llinares, *Miguel Hernandez University, Elche, Spain*

David Buil-Gil, *University of Manchester, Manchester, UK*

The *Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology* (in Spanish, *Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología*, RECPC) was founded in March 1999 by Jesús Barquín at the University of Granada. Over time, it became one of the most influential journals on criminal law and criminology in Spain and across the Spanish-speaking world. Articles published in the journal have been cited more than 14,000 times, reaching an h-index of 57¹; that is, at least 57 articles have each been cited a minimum of 57 times. RECPC also appeared in the influential 2023 ranking of criminal-law journals produced by the Conference of Deans of Law Faculties in Spain (Conferencia de Decanas y Decanos de las Facultades de Derecho de España, 2023), where it was one of only three Spanish journals to appear in the first quartile (Q1) of that ranking. It was also rated the highest by experts in the discipline, ranking number one among all journals in the Criminal Law area². As of today, according to the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) 2024, RECPC is placed in the third quartile of all law journals worldwide, with an h-index of 5 (coverage 2019-2024)³; in other words, among the top 75% of law journals globally. RECPC has therefore enjoyed, or once enjoyed, both national and international prestige, having published high-impact articles. Both authors of this note have previously published in this journal, and one served on its Scientific Board until May 2024.

As of 2 October 2025, information on the journal's former website⁴ indicated that in June 2024 RECPC changed editorial management and its content was migrated to a new website⁵ (Figure 1). No further details were provided about the reasons for or the process behind this change, although the context suggested that the journal may have been purchased by a new group. The name of the new group managing the journal was not specified on the website; the only clear statement was that, from May 2024, the RECPC Scientific Committee ceased to have any connection with the content published in the journal.

¹ <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=OGF0DnsAAAAJ>

² <https://www.facultades-derecho.es/registro-conferencia-decanos-2022/>

³ <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=21101056812&tip=sid&clean=0>

⁴ <http://criminet.ugr.es/recpc/>

⁵ www.revistacriminologia.com

Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología

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En mayo/junio de 2024, la Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología cambió de gestión editorial y de URL (www.revistacriminologia.com). En su ubicación original (criminet.ugr.es/recpc), quedará permanentemente disponible lo publicado desde su creación en marzo de 1999 hasta mayo de 2024. En el nuevo dominio podrá accederse en exclusividad a los contenidos incorporados a partir de dicha fecha, además de al contenido histórico de la revista.

Todos los miembros del Comité Editorial (incluidos el director y el editor) y del Comité Científico de RECPC dejaron de tener cualquier vinculación o responsabilidad en la revista a partir de junio de 2024.

La información contenida en esta página y en otras albergadas en la ubicación original de RECPC es válida a fecha de 20 de mayo de 2024.

Desde el 1 de junio de 2024, la Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología ha pasado por completo a <https://revistacriminologia.com>

Cualquier nuevo envío/publicación en esta revista solo estará disponible en la nueva web oficial.

From June 01, 2024, the Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology has been fully shifted to <https://revistacriminologia.com>

We request all authors, readers and subscribers to note the change in the official journal website.

Figure 1 Screenshot from the old RECPC website announcing the change in editorial management (captured on 2 October 2025)

[In English: In May/June 2024, the Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología changed its editorial management and URL (<https://revistacriminologia.com>). On its original site (criminet.ugr.es/recpc), everything published since its creation in March 1999 up to May 2024 will remain permanently available. On the new domain, only the content incorporated from that date onwards will be accessible, along with the journal's historical content. All members of the Editorial Board (including the Director and the Editor) and of the Scientific Committee of RECPC ceased to have any link or responsibility with the journal as of 1 June 2024. The information contained on this page and in other pages hosted on the original site of RECPC is valid as of 20 May 2024. Since 1 June 2024, the Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology has been fully transferred to <https://revistacriminologia.com>. Any new submissions/publications in this journal will only be available on the new official website.]

On 5 August 2024, a new domain name for the journal was registered⁶, and shortly thereafter the new website was launched. The site contained no information about the group now managing the journal. All articles published in RECPC up to that date appeared on the new portal. The names of the editorial team and scientific committee up to May 2024 were displayed in several places (Figure 2). One of the authors of this note appeared on the list of committee members.

⁶ <https://who.is/whois/revistacriminologia.com>

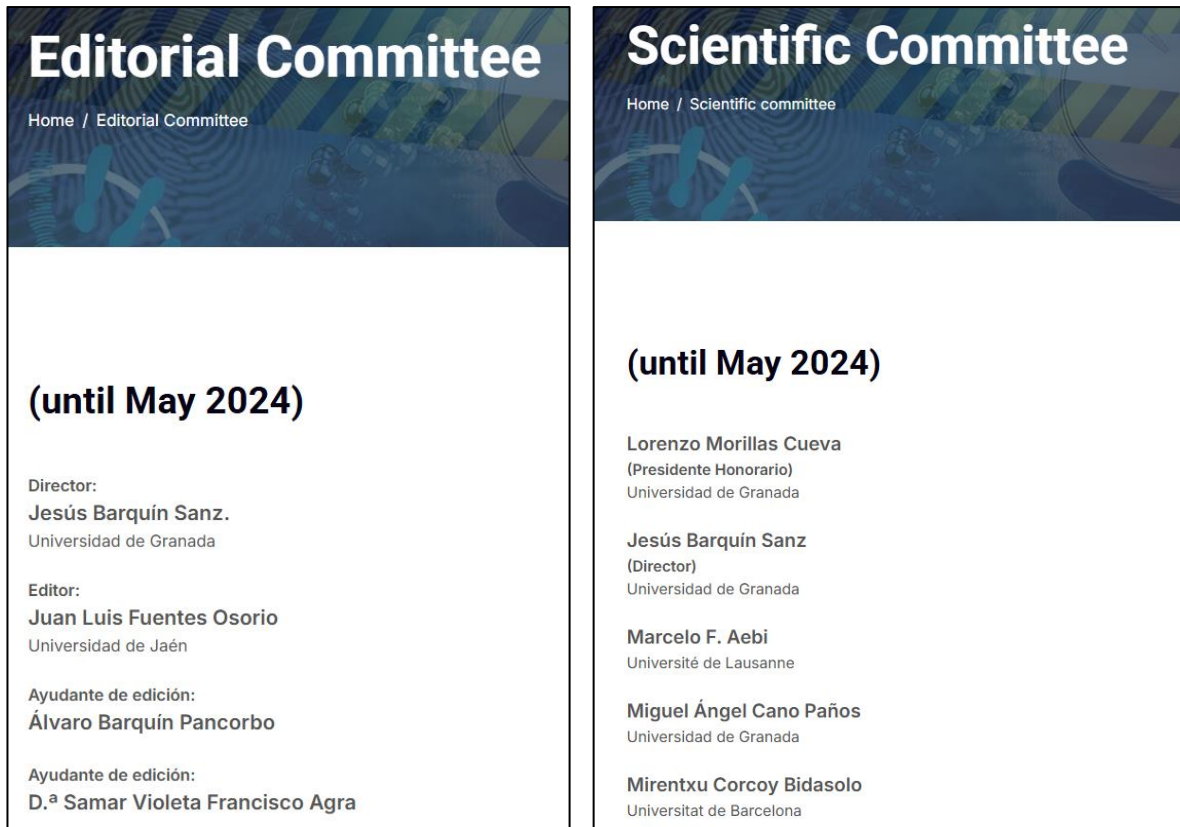


Figure 2 Screenshots of the editorial committee and scientific committee (cropped) on the new RECPC website

We consider that all articles published up to issue 24 of the journal correspond to the previous editorial management, whereas those in issue 25 (2025) are under the new management. Since the last week of September 2025 up to 3 October 2025, multiple articles appeared in RECPC, all of them in English, covering topics such as organised crime, youth gangs and digitalisation. The authors of this note have decided not to cite these new articles so as not to “whitewash” the problem described below.

The authors of the new articles come from the countries listed in Table 1. In addition to articles by authors claiming affiliation to Spanish universities, the remainder list affiliations to institutions in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Bahrain. Our concern began when we noticed at least one author using the most common female first name in Spain (María) combined with two of the five most common Spanish surnames (García and López), alongside an implausible affiliation to a non-existent university: *the Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana* (Metropolitan University of Seville). This pattern was repeated in at least three articles by purported researchers affiliated with other non-existent Spanish universities, such as the *Universidad de Castilla Urbana* (Urban Castilian University) and the *Universidad de Granada Sur* (South Granada University) (Figure 3).

We therefore reviewed whether reliable evidence of the existence of the remaining authors could be found. By “reliable evidence of the existence of an organisation” we mean the presence of an institutional website. By “reliable evidence of the existence of a researcher” we mean at least ten Google search results unrelated to the current article, or an institutional profile, or a profile on ORCID, Google Scholar, or ResearchGate. Of the five Spanish

universities named in the latest issue, three do not exist; and there is no evidence that any of the authors affiliated with them exist either. All the named institutions in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iraq appear to be real, but we found reliable evidence for only four of the eleven authors.

Table 1 Authors of articles in RECPC issue 25 (up to 3 October 2025)

Country	Affiliation	Author name
Spain	Universidad de Sevilla	María López García*
	Metropolitana*	
	Universidad de Castilla Urbana*	Carmen Sánchez Muñoz*
	Universidad de Granada Sur*	Laura Fernández Alba*
	Universidad del País Vasco	Pablo Díaz Navarro*
Bahrain	Universidad de Zaragoza	Isabel Martínez Cordero*
	Kingdom University	Omar Fakhri Alhadithi
Iraq	AL-Iraqia University	Walaa Hussein Khazzar*
		Hussein Jaber Hussein Al-Shweily*
		Mustafa Abdullah Hasan
		Zaid Khalid Habib Al-Rawi*
		Mohamed Abdalla Hassan Hamad*
		Hanan Abdel Moniem Gubara Elbashir*
		Shihab Sulaiman Abdalla Osman
		Abdelfattah Mohamed Abdelfattah Hassan*
		Ahmed O.K. Hosnia
		Randa Osman Ahmed Abd Alwahab*
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Electronic University	
	Hail University	
	Shaqra University	
	Dhofar University	
	University of Bisha	

* No “reliable” evidence of the existence of this institution or researcher on Google.

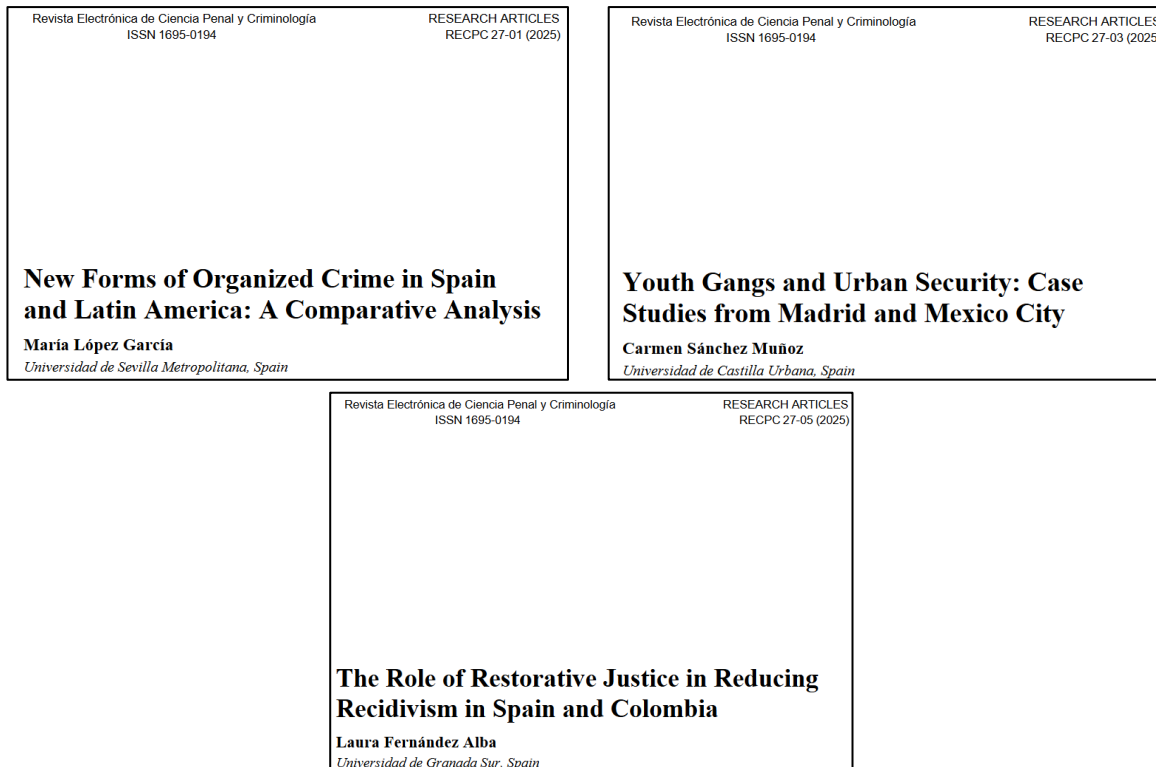


Figure 3 Screenshots of three articles in RECPC issue 25 listing authors and affiliations for which no reliable evidence of existence could be found

We also reviewed the coherence of the articles' content and the existence of the cited references. All published articles were of very low quality, well below the historical level of RECPC. It is highly probable that most (and probably all) of the new articles were entirely written by Large Language Models (LLMs). We recognise that human judgements about AI-generated text can be fallible and may lead to both false positives and false negatives (Ibrahim et al., 2023), yet there were clear indications consistent with fully fabricated, automated writing (Strzelecki, 2025). Typical signs include:

- (a) generic, repetitive phrasing and "boilerplate" academic text;
- (b) sections that do not correspond to the article title or abstract;
- (c) inconsistent or fictitious data tables and figures;
- (d) works that are misquoted or distorted; and
- (e) perfect grammar and style but no substantive originality.

Many, though not all, of the references listed actually exist.

Upon discussing these findings with the journal's former Editorial Committee, we were informed that RECPC had been acquired by a group called Oxbridge Publishing House. Recently, Martín-Martín and López-Cózar (2025) documented the predatory practices of this publisher, which follow a consistent pattern: acquiring journals indexed in international databases, increasing publication volumes originating from outside the journals' academic communities, and often escalating publication fees. Importantly, they also reported that other criminology journals, including some with an international profile, have been acquired by Oxbridge Publishing House. These include the *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*,

once a respected outlet in cybercrime studies, as well as the *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*.

On 3 October 2025, following concerns about the journal's new direction, the founder and former director posted an urgent note on the legacy RECPC site (Figure 4). In it, he dissociated the former Editorial and Scientific Committees from the journal's new stage and raised doubts about the authorship and scholarly quality of the newly posted items.

Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología
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NOTA URGENTE DEL FUNDADOR Y ANTIGUO DIRECTOR A 3 OCTUBRE 2025

Durante los meses transcurridos entre junio de 2024 hasta la fecha y a pesar de que el acuerdo entre las partes preveía expresamente la plena desvinculación de quienes éramos antes responsables, en la web de la nueva etapa de la revista se siguen mencionando los nombres de los miembros del Comité Editorial y del Comité Científico. Ciertamente es que en todos los casos se indica expresamente "until May 2024", pero la práctica no deja de constituir un uso indebido de nuestras identidades. En reiteradas ocasiones he intentado hacer llegar a los nuevos responsables mi firme exigencia de que los retiren. Hasta ahora, sin respuesta de ningún tipo, lo que me llevó a incluir en esta misma página web la advertencia en negrita que sigue apareciendo más abajo. Sin embargo, puesto que hasta hace unos días la subsistencia de la cabecera de RECPC era meramente formal al no haber publicado ni un solo artículo nuevo, la cuestión consistía fundamentalmente en desvincularnos de unos criterios de gestión que repudiamos.

Ahora nos encontramos con un hecho nuevo que agrava sensiblemente la situación, ya que en fechas recientes se ha producido (y se está produciendo) la publicación de varios pseudoartículos en la nueva web de RECPC que resultan, cuando menos, sospechosos –y me quedo muy corto al elegir este adjetivo–. Por seguir con los eufemismos, hay serios motivos para pensar que su contenido y su autoría no responden a unos mínimos criterios de seriedad investigadora: centros inexistentes («Universidad de Granada Sur», «Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana», «Universidad de Castilla Urbana...»); autores desconocidos con apellidos comunes (García, Sánchez, López, Fernández, Martínez...) que no aparecen en los directorios de las instituciones existentes a las que supuestamente pertenecen; emails de contacto invariablemente de outlook; textos con indicios de haber sido elaborados por IA. Dada la gravedad de estos burdos hechos, debo pararme de nuevo a expresar de modo rotundo una obviedad: estas prácticas editoriales son detestables, como sin duda opinan también todos los demás académicos vinculados a la etapa anterior de RECPC y todos los universitarios con un mínimo de integridad.

Como se ha dejado claro en esta propia página web desde el principio, la vinculación con la revista de mi persona, así como del editor y los ayudantes de edición, y de los miembros del Comité Científico, cesó definitivamente en mayo de 2024. En esta fecha, la cabecera de RECPC fue traspasada a un grupo editorial, Oxbridge Publishing House, cuya dudosa actividad no era aún conocida. Desde luego, si hubiera sabido lo que con posterioridad se fue haciendo público sobre ciertas prácticas editoriales depredadoras, habría cerrado simplemente la revista, en lugar de ceder su cabecera en la esperanza de que pudiera vivir una nueva etapa con bríos renovados (véase <http://criminol.ugr.es/recpc/26/recpc26-r2.pdf>). Iluso de mí, y primer perjudicado a la postre, pero no el único, por una decisión que ahora lamento profundamente.

Jesús Barquín Sanz, 3 de octubre de 2025

Figure 4 Note posted on the legacy RECPC website by the journal's founder and former director (3 October 2025)

[In English: URGENT NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER AND FORMER DIRECTOR. During the months from June 2024 to the present, and despite the agreement between the parties expressly providing for the complete disengagement of those of us formerly responsible, the names of the members of the Editorial Board and the Scientific Committee continue to be mentioned on the website of the new stage of the journal. It is true that in every case the phrase "until May 2024" is explicitly indicated, but this practice still constitutes a misuse of our identities. On repeated occasions I have tried to convey to the new managers my firm demand that they remove these names. So far, I have received no response of any kind, which led me to include on this very webpage the bold warning that still appears further down. However, since until a few days ago the continuation of the RECPC masthead was purely formal (no new article having been published) the issue consisted mainly in distancing ourselves from management criteria we repudiate. We now face a new development that seriously aggravates

the situation, as in recent dates several pseudo-articles have been (and are being) published on RECPC's new website that are, to say the least, suspicious; and I am putting it very mildly in choosing that adjective. To continue with the euphemisms, there are strong reasons to believe that their content and authorship do not meet even minimal standards of research integrity: non-existent institutions ("Universidad de Granada Sur", "Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana," "Universidad de Castilla Urbana"...); unknown authors with very common surnames (García, Sánchez, López, Fernández, Martínez...) who do not appear in the directories of the existing institutions to which they supposedly belong; invariably Outlook contact emails; texts showing signs of having been produced by AI. Given the seriousness of these crude facts, I must once again emphatically state an obvious truth: these editorial practices are detestable, as no doubt also think all the other academics linked to RECPC's previous stage and every university scholar with a minimum of integrity. As has been made clear on this same webpage from the outset, my connection with the journal, as well as that of the editor, the editorial assistants and the members of the Scientific Committee, ended definitively in May 2024. At that time, the RECPC masthead was transferred to a publishing group, Oxbridge Publishing House, whose questionable activity was not yet known. Of course, if I had known what later became public about certain predatory editorial practices, I would simply have closed the journal instead of handing over its title in the hope that it could live a new stage with renewed vigour. Naïve of me, and in the end the first harmed (though not the only one) by a decision I now deeply regret.]

Taken together, these factors clearly suggest that, in its new stage, RECPC may have been converted into a factory for false articles; a so-called "paper mill". A paper mill is an organisation (sometimes disguised as a journal, sometimes selling manuscripts to authors) that produces fabricated or low-quality papers, often with fake authorship or data, for a fee. These papers are then submitted to journals to inflate publication counts or citation metrics (Byrne et al., 2024; Committee on Publication Ethics, 2022; Pérez-Neri et al., 2022).

There are several plausible reasons why RECPC may have been transformed in this way. The most likely explanation is that the new management seeks to boost the publication output of certain real universities so that these institutions rise in global rankings. Another, closely related, possibility is that the fabricated papers are designed to inflate the h-indices of genuine scholars by repeatedly citing their work. It is also conceivable that a once-prestigious journal is being repurposed as a predatory outlet in which authors pay to publish. When we tested the submission system, no fee was requested at the point of submission, but it remains unclear whether payment is demanded later in the process. A less probable, but not impossible, scenario is that these activities are intended to disrupt the scholarly publishing system more broadly.

After the publication of the preprint of this entry on CrimRxiv on 6 October 2025⁷, all articles with authors from non-existent universities, as well as some other articles published in September 2025, were deleted from the website. The editorial board was also removed from the journal website. This suggests that our preprint reached the new management group of the journal, who, concerned with the reputational damage, took measures to make the

⁷ <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.11373ed7>

fraudulent and predatory practices less evident. The signs that the journal has been converted into a paper mill and predatory journal, however, remain.

In light of this evidence, it is imperative to take a clear stance. We will refrain from publishing in the journal and from citing any of its articles published from 2025 onwards, so as not to “whitewash” the problem. At the same time, we intend to alert relevant bodies and indexing services so that journals engaged in these practices lose their rankings and visibility. Only by doing so can we protect the integrity of scholarly communication.

We are therefore committed not only to distancing ourselves from RECPC’s recent practices but also to working with colleagues, editors and professional bodies to ensure that similar situations do not arise in other journals. By speaking openly about what we have found and by refusing to legitimise fraudulent publications, we aim to help safeguard the integrity and credibility of scholarly publishing for the wider academic community.

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Digital, Data and Technology-Driven Police Reform, and the Problem of Hyperreality

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Introduction

This commentary piece examines recent developments in UK police reform, in which a digital, data and technology (DDaT) driven approach is being installed as the foundation for organisational transformation (NPCC, 2025). It argues that DDaT-driven policing risks prioritising digital proxies of crime over lived realities. As data and dashboards increasingly become operative, policing will optimise a simulation (what I call '*crimulation*') that governs deployments, priorities, and accountability, sidelining context, judgment, and democratic scrutiny. The analysis applies Baudrillard's concept of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard, 1994) to this form of policing: the ways in which digital representations of crime and data-driven methods are not merely tools and applications but actively shape how policing is constructed and executed. The discussion focuses on the implications of this latest strategic shift, particularly how digital 'signs' (*crimulacra*), and a representational system and practices (*crimulation*) come to define and map the 'reality' of policing. Together, these two mechanisms generate a 'hyperreality,' wherein digital constructs supplant and redefine the experience and understanding of crime, public safety, and the functions and practice of policing.

DDaT in Policing

DDaT-driven policing encompasses the systems, personnel, processes, and governance structures that enable the creation, management, security, and use of digital tools and data to support and deliver police services (NPCC, 2025). Within this framework, models, dashboards, and performance metrics shape the definition of effective and efficient policing. While this emphasis offers potential, it also carries risks, particularly when digital representations diverge from or fail to fully reflect the lived experiences and social realities of the communities affected by the predictions and outputs of DDaT tools and applications.

Critically, DDaT-driven policing does not simply add a suite of new tools to face an objective reality; it also shapes and reinforces a particular way of understanding the world. Within this framing, social life and events are recognised only insofar as they can be translated into data, and the future is imagined as a predictable extension of past patterns. As a result, metrics come to define 'truth': whatever the dashboard measures and displays becomes what the organisation knows, acknowledges, and prioritises. The success then of DDaT-driven policing turns on this constructed ontology, a social reality organised as data, which determines what is visible, actionable, and justifiable. Recognising this helps to explain why well-intentioned programmes encounter recurring issues: they excel at optimising within the boundaries of the model but overlook what the model cannot capture. The important questions are not whether DDaT-driven policing is efficient and effective, but rather, *for which version of reality does it*

make sense? In which world does it work? The act of defining that reality is a prerequisite for developing technologies and for how police organisations use them.

DDaT-driven policing is rooted in a distinctly positivist approach, assuming empirical data such as crime statistics, codified surveillance footage, and risk scores represent objective truths. This data-centric orthodoxy is built on a narrow view: crime and disorder as a series of observable, measurable events that, with enough data, can be quantified, categorised, and predicted. From this perspective, data become social reality, and all knowledge about crime or disorder and people is merely reduced to data points. This epistemological orientation also presumes that outputs generated by predictive models, such as the designation of ‘high-risk’ individuals, public events, or locations, constitute actionable truths. Consequently, algorithmic determinations can prompt operational responses without examination or nuanced understanding of the underlying causal mechanisms or contextual factors that might otherwise inform mere correlations (see Rouvroy, 2020).

DDaT-driven policing is underpinned by a technocratic optimism: the conviction that sophisticated data analytics can resolve fundamentally social problems. This outlook reflects what Morozov (2014) describes as ‘technological solutionism’, whereby complex societal issues are reimagined as technical dilemmas. In the context of policing, this manifests as an eagerness to pursue and implement new digital tools and applications driven by the belief that more advanced technology will automatically produce better outcomes. At its core, this assumes human behaviour and social dynamics to be made fully legible and controllable through data, provided the ‘right’ application or algorithm can be found. Such enthusiasm verges on the utopian or even dystopian, a future of ‘precision policing’ in which resources and services are allocated according to ever larger and ‘better’ data insights. However, this form of policing lacks context and qualitative depth. Criminologists, sociologists, and police professionals have long recognised that crime and incident statistics offer only a partial view (the so-called ‘dark figure’ of crime) and that such data are inherently incomplete. As Pearson et al. (2024) report, crime data used in predictive analytics often lack social and contextual grounding, leading to the under-representation of certain crime categories, victims, and offenders. Moreover, in the UK, while the situation may have improved, there is a history of persistent issues with data integrity and completeness (see McDaniel and Pease, 2021), which further complicates reliance on official datasets. Yet the prevailing DDaT approach tends to overlook these nuances, risking skewing priorities toward what can be readily quantified while neglecting less visible forms of harm. There are other wider implications, as Rouvroy (2020) notes, automation in this area diminishes opportunities for critique or democratic oversight: if decisions are driven entirely by correlations, where is the space for questioning or doubt? Consequently, this results in governance without discourse: algorithms operate without explanation or publicly visible reasoning, acting on aggregated data to produce policing outcomes. This technocratic worldview demands trust in the ‘machine,’ a stance that conflicts with the liberal-democratic principles of transparency and contestation that should underpin our criminal justice system.

Crimulacra and Crimulation

Jean Baudrillard observed that we live in a world with ‘more and more information, and less and less meaning’ (Baudrillard, 1994, pg.79). He is perhaps best known for arguing that late-modern societies are saturated with signs, models, and metrics that no longer reflect reality

so much as produce it. He proposed the idea of 'hyperreality': constructed worlds where dashboards, narratives, and simulations become 'realer than real,' guiding what we see, value, and do, and shaping official practices, structures, budgets, and behaviours until the indicators *become* the reality being managed. In short, the map precedes the terrain.

This commentary piece applies two neologisms, *crimulacra* and *crimulation*, in a style and vocabulary deliberately reminiscent of Baudrillard's terms in his theoretical monograph *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994). *Crimulacra* (plural) are the signs of crime and criminality, scores, alerts, visual hotspots, and 'hits,' which circulate as if they were crime and criminality. *Crimulation* (the operating reality made from those crimulacra) follows from those signs, facilitating the 'doing' of policing. In this formulation, *crimulation* is simultaneously a system, a practice, and a method of operation: it uses models, categories, and interfaces to define what can be acted upon; it establishes routines and actions that respond to those definitions; and it forms feedback loops in which each action reinforces and generates data that shape future responses. While these concepts may seem abstract philosophical posturing, they have tangible and significant effects on individuals and society. Referring to *crimulacra* and *crimulation* is not about dismissing DDaT-driven policing as mere fakery; rather, these representations shape very real outcomes and consequences for people and communities.

Police work has always been mediated in some way, but DDaT puts that to work at machine speed and in highly particular ways. As Neocleous (2000) noted, policing does not merely maintain order in society; it reinforces a particular type of order, a tendency intensified by the affordances of DDaT. For example, a police operations room is lit up with representations: hotspots that glow, graphical user interfaces, app icon badges and touch targets, risk assessments and registers, statuses and performance metrics that drive activities and reassure managerial and governance boards. They are more than indicators. These *crimulacra* are operative, wired into the business of police response, tasking, and activities; the *crimulation* at work, reflected in a world it has constructed.

To illustrate further how this plays out, consider the 'data double' of a person: a composite of digital identity, markers, flags, and antecedents that DDaT weaves together. In the queue at a front desk, at the edge of a cordon, or in a police stop and search, it is often this composite that arrives first: the Police National Computer (PNC) markers and antecedents; address and incident histories; safeguarding notes, and biometric hits and records. The living person is measured against their 'data double.' Any divergences, name spellings, address anomalies, a marker, a record entered in error or one that should have been spent or expunged, appear as anomalies. The *crimulacra* stand in for the person, and the physical person must explain themselves to the *crimulation*.

Now shift the lens to place. 'Problem neighbourhoods' consist of, *inter alia*, hotspots derived from crime reports and incident logs, police stop-and-search returns, intelligence reports and assessments, call volumes, gang matrices, and social deprivation indices. The created interactive map (albeit a filtered, selective one) looks like the actual terrain, but not only does it describe; it *does work*, because patrols are scheduled, surveillance directed, attention rationed accordingly, partnerships convened or not, according to the hues of RGB, pop-ups and tooltips on a screen. Because recorded crime and incidents are also functions of patrol presence and reporting habits and rules, the places most read by this 'map' contribute more data that validate its next iteration. This *crimulation* becomes locked in a loop: collect, record,

represent, predict, deploy, encounter, then collect, record, represent, predict, deploy, encounter *ad infinitum*.

Conclusion

To summarise, DDaT-driven policing encounters the problem of ‘hyperreality.’ The *crimulation* created by *crimulacra* achieves primacy, but it is not a precise copy of social reality, merely a version of it. DDaT, as advanced within current reforms, rests on the surface appeal of objectivity, suggesting that data will form the most reliable foundation for shaping the future of policing. However, as demonstrated, this premise is fraught with ontological and epistemological inconsistencies. DDaT-driven policing presupposes a reality that is fully quantifiable and assumes a specific kind of police knowledge, yet these assumptions often fail under empirical and critical investigation. The dominant worldview behind DDaT-driven policing prioritises administrative efficiency and predictability, frequently at the expense of the complex and unpredictable realities inherent in street crime and everyday police work. Furthermore, despite good intentions, much of what is labelled as ‘responsible and ethical’ AI and technology perhaps functions less as a genuine check on power and more as an aesthetic: multiplying legislations, frameworks, policies, playbooks, toolkits, and guidelines that give the appearance of oversight and governance. Such measures may offer comfort as symbols of reassurance, while inadvertently contributing to the very simulation they are meant to disrupt and restrain.

The takeaway message is that DDaT-driven policing may provide a *solution*, but for the self-referential world it constructs, treating that construction as a precise rendering of the external world. It may deliver *efficiency*, but chiefly for that constructed world, not necessarily the diverse social realities in which communities live.

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A Police Detective's Perspective on Investigating Interview Techniques

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I was raised in a safe, suburban neighborhood in Northern Virginia in the United States and was lucky enough to have an uneventful, crime-free childhood. The only time I can remember thinking about the criminal justice system was after our neighbor crashed his motorcycle into a tree across the street from my house and a few officers arrived to investigate, but all that changed when I entered high school and read the book *Helter Skelter* by Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry. This true crime novel describes Charles Manson's rise as a charismatic cult leader, the 1969 Tate-LaBianca Murders, and the successful prosecutions of Manson and others who were involved in those shocking homicides.

While not a typical reading choice for a teenager, I became fascinated with *Helter Skelter* and its portrayal of a criminal mastermind, which made me decide right then and there that I wanted to understand why people engage in criminal behavior, so I started reading crime novels, using class projects as excuses to research serial killers, and taking psychology and sociology elective courses to get an inside look of the criminal mind. But instead of satisfying this itch, these actions only deepened my captivation with the subjects and ending up shaping most of my academic and professional decisions over the last 18 years, from earning higher-level degrees in criminal justice and forensic psychology, working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the Behavioral Analysis Units (where "criminal profiling" originated), and joining a local sheriff's office with hopes of becoming a detective so that I might use my academic knowledge to bring offenders to justice.

As a new deputy with the sheriff's office, I attended a regional police academy, where I was taught an overview of how to be a law enforcement officer, from writing reports, driving a police cruiser, shooting a firearm, the legal definitions of crimes, how to protect myself in case of a physical altercation, and how to arrest someone should I gather sufficient probable cause to do so. Although this may sound comprehensive, all of this was taught in a span of five months, so most of the instructional blocks were a maximum of four hours long, which was just enough time for the staff to teach the basics, but not long enough to fully explore any of the topics and/or tailor their courses to my specific agency. That's where field training came in.

After graduating from the academy, I spent three months in a field training program (FTO), during which I was assigned three different field training officers from my agency. I spent a month with each of them, riding side-by-side in their cruisers, going with them to calls for service, and learning how my agency expected officers to act and to engage with the public. Yes, the academy is important for instilling the basics, but FTO is how new officers gain hands-on experience, develop the skills they will use for the rest of their careers, and find out that being an officer is nothing like the police procedurals on television. For example, FTO is when

I learned that most of what police officers do is interview people involved in incidents and then document what they learned in reports.

FTO is also when I learned that most police officers are inadequately trained in interviewing, from the science behind trauma to the different types of questions to the variety of interview styles an interviewer may choose to use. During the academy, I spent at least 40 hours at the gun range honing my firearm skills and another 40 hours at the driving range learning defensive driving skills, but I only spent approximately four hours learning how to interview people, which means that I spent at least 80 hours on skills that I was rarely going to use during my career and only four hours on a skill that I would use every day.

I believe the American policing community gets away with this imbalance by saying that officers need to know how to handle a weapon in order to keep the public safe during emergencies and that they can learn other skills, like interviewing, by taking in-service education courses throughout their career, and the policing community as a whole is not wrong; my state requires all sworn law enforcement officers to take at least 40 hours of relevant continuing education every two years to maintain their certifications, so officers were often going back to the academy for in-service courses, which offered more in depth looks at various topics, but the courses are subject to availability and personal preference. For example, I wanted to become a detective, so I registered for investigative and interview courses, which allowed me to hone my investigative skills, get more information from those involved in my cases, and have more thorough investigations that I could present at court, but I knew some officers who chose to pursue courses about high-risk tactics and defensive skills since they were more interested in joining takedown teams than specialized investigative units.

After a short three years, I achieved my then professional dream and was promoted to detective. I was assigned to various units within the Criminal Investigations Division (CID), but spent much of my time as a detective in the Special Victims Unit, investigating sex crimes and/or crimes against children. These investigations were difficult, not only because many were the colloquial “he-said-she-said” investigations with little forensic evidence, but also because the crimes themselves were sensitive and often disturbing in nature. In fact, I am still haunted by some offenders I was unable to hold accountable for their actions, but I often find some solace from cases in which I was able to bring the perpetrator to justice.

As I gained more experience as a detective and took even more investigative courses, I learned to tailor my interview style to the specific case and to the specific person I was interviewing. For example, if I were assigned a case in which a 13-year-old accused her uncle of molestation, I would likely use a forensic interview style, such as Child First, and would spend more time building rapport with the teen until she felt comfortable disclosing the abuse rather than asking pointed questions, but if I were interviewing her uncle, I may take a different approach. To me, this case-by-case method to interviewing was obvious, but I quickly learned that I was an anomaly and that not everyone assigned to CID felt this way.

While talking with my colleagues, I learned that most of my fellow detectives attended one interview course throughout their careers, typically around the time of their promotion, and then formed their own way of interviewing that was based on their training and professional experiences. In fact, it seemed that the more veteran detectives were often the ones most

resistant to change and, if they were mandated to attend a course about an interview technique that was different than the one they normally used, they often failed to pay attention to the new material and sometimes even ridiculed the training. For example, while talking with a newer, more open-minded detective assigned to an elite investigative unit, I learned that the more experienced detectives in her unit often chastised her for prioritizing actionable intelligence (information that can be independently checked to either prove or disprove someone's statement) over confessions while she questioned suspects because they were trained to seek a confession above all else.

This fixation on a confession reminds me of tunnel vision or "a compendium of common heuristics and logical fallacies" (Martin, 2002), which often occurs during investigations when a detective believes a person to be guilty of the crime and then discounts (or doesn't even recognize) evidence to the contrary, which can lead to a fumbled investigation, false confessions, and/or false convictions (Martin, 2002). These investigative problems exploded into the forefront of criminology in the 1990s when DNA tests of inmates proved their innocence even though many gave confessions during their respective investigations, which prompted many researchers to study how these miscarriages of justice occurred and whether police interview techniques were a contributing factor (Kassin, Appleby, and Perillo, 2010).

The PEACE method developed out of this movement, is a research-based interview style that values non-accusatory, open-ended questions to gather the most information from the subject as possible (Kassin, Appleby, and Perillo, 2010). PEACE is an acronym that stands for the different stages of an interview: preparation and planning, engage and explain, account, closure, and evaluate. The evaluation stage is unique to the PEACE model and has encouraged many studies on the technique's effectiveness as it applies to different types of crime and has led this method to be adopted as the interviewing standard in British policing (Izotovas, Kelly, and Walsh, 2021),

Conversely, there is currently no standardized interviewing technique at any level of law enforcement in the United States; in fact, interview training varies so greatly that even two officers within the same agency rarely receive the same interview training throughout their careers. However, the REID technique is the one most fictionalized in American television and movies and is seen as quintessentially American. This method breaks down the conversations with suspects into two parts: a non-confrontational interview that is supposed to help the interviewer determine how the suspect lies, and the confrontational interrogation aimed at eliciting a confession (Kassin, Appleby, and Perillo, 2010).

I first learned about the REID technique when I was studying forensic psychology and determined that REID was not a good match for my natural interview style, so, throughout my law enforcement career, I purposely chose to avoid REID-based courses and to focus on models with greater scientific foundations, including a one-day, introductory course on motivational interviewing, during which I started thinking about the other interview courses I had attended. I thought about their similarities and differences and about how useful it would be to know which techniques gathered the most usable information specific to a certain type of crime. For example, do rape survivors respond better to forensic-style interviews than cognitive ones? Do child abuse suspects provide more actionable intelligence, not just confessions, when interviewers use PEACE-style interviews rather than the REID model?

After this class, I looked at the current literature to find some answers, but instead found mostly gaps because while there were many studies on the strengths and weaknesses of each interview style, few compared two or more techniques to determine which one obtained more information on which the interviewer could follow up, and while there were some studies researching how well a certain interview style (for example, PEACE, or motivational) fares with victims of certain crimes, very few looked at how the same type worked with suspects, and there were even fewer studies that broke down the efficacy of the interview model by crime offender typologies (for example: rape offenders who have been categorized into different types of rapists based on several factors, including the criminal acts, motivation, and personality as described in *The Handbook of Sexual Assault and Sexual Assault Prevention*).

Since the research failed to answer my questions, ones that could potentially help law enforcement better their investigations and help more victims have the justice they deserved, I decided to become a postgraduate researcher at the University of Kent so that I could fill these empirical gaps. This year, I plan to conduct two literature reviews, one investigating the various interview styles currently being taught to law enforcement officers and one looking at crime offender typologies, and then conducting my own study with actual police interviews to compare the PEACE and REID interview styles to see how much actionable intelligence they gather from offender interviews based on the offender's characteristics. This is a hefty undertaking, so I am planning to focus on rape offenders, which gives me the opportunity to expand my research to other crime types in the future, and while my study may not give law enforcement all the answers, I am hopeful that it may help officers learn more about the different interview styles available to them and how choosing a specific style based on their subject's typology may help advance their investigations more than a confession.

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When to Stop Digging? Ethical Dilemmas Researching Crime Histories

Nigel Brearley, *Independent Academic*

Heritage websites combined with archival sources offer opportunities to contact individuals, or their descendants, involved in historic criminal events. Such research can provide rich data, restoring voices formerly lost to conventional 'true crime' narratives. The research does however throw up a number of ethical issues.

For many years I have been undertaking archival historical research on some of the criminal cases that first stirred my initial interest in crime, history and criminology. In connection with this research, I developed and taught modules on 'true crime' and 'famous cases' from the 2000s but, over the past ten years or so the range of media products in the field has altered significantly - expanding, diversifying and attracting enormous audiences. A recent bustle of academic activity and a useful new book by Cummins, King and Wattis, has enhanced our understanding of the criminological significance of the production and consumption of 'true crime' with a critical view of how much, but not all, of the genre tends to be produced with questionable ethical intent¹. Conventional 'true crime' can be seen as a direct descendant of 'hanging ballads' and the Newgate Calendar, focussing on the conventionally salacious and driven by the profit motive to highlight the spectacular, extreme and bizarre while neglecting the social, political and historical context of criminal events required for authentic accounts. The ethical concerns that academics have expressed regarding the conventional form of the genre is that it exploits victims of crime and risks becoming merely a semi-respectable form of voyeurism and, that by heightening dramatic aspects of crime events for commercial purposes, presents a highly distorted perspective on criminal justice².

Among the explosion in what might be more broadly termed the 'true crime' genre are, however, works that more closely align with academic sensibilities and understanding. Considerable critical acclaim has been awarded to the, perhaps awkwardly termed, 'popular scholarly crime non-fiction' genre, commonly associated with authors such as Summerscale, Colquhoun and Rubenhold³, who combine academic research with literary talent. These writers have produced works of crime history that eschew the salacious in favour of the pursuit of understanding crime, victims, perpetrators and agents of social control in wider social and historical context and with careful, evidenced, critical consideration of issues of individual motivation. These works reflect the general concerns of academic criminologists and crime

¹ Cummins, I., King, M and Wattis, L. (2025) *True Crime: Key themes and perspectives*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

² *Ibid.* pp.2-3.

³ Summerscale, K. (2009) *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*. London: Bloomsbury. Colquhoun, K. (2011) *Mr Briggs' Hat*. London: Sphere. Rubenhold, H. (2020) *The Five*. London: Doubleday.

historians but are written for wider audiences, as opposed to the conventional pursuit of (re-)marketable 'cultural legends'. Hallie Rubenhold's recent observations on her own work in the field of 'popular scholarly historical crime non-fiction', as distinct from conventional 'true crime', are useful here:

One of the problems of historic true crime is...how these stories are told to us and how uncritically we are willing to receive them. With time [they] evolve from news stories into cultural legends...The process of rarefying a crime into legend removes all nuance. That which is left is easily digestible – established fears and prejudices, and neat binaries: good and evil; heroes and villains. Legends speak to us in shorthand, but real murder stories are infinitely complex, their implications wide ranging. They are bigger than a narrative about a killer or a detective; there is more to understand about a crime than a motive or a method, and the capture of a suspect by no means signals the conclusion of a case. No matter how guilty a suspect might appear, judges and juries decide the ultimate outcome; and even then, a crime which is about people – a criminal, a victim, their family, their friends, their community, our society never entirely ends... It feels uncomfortable to acknowledge nuance in something so atrocious as a murder, but human beings are morally ambiguous creatures and therefore nothing is ever as straightforward as we would like it to be⁴.

In aspiring to produce work in this genre I have recently been working with conventional 'true crime' as well as more critical 'crime non-fiction' writers and content providers. The approach to research ethics of many of my associates sometimes troubles me as an academic researcher and member of bodies such as the BSC with defined codes of ethics. The main concerns that I wish to raise here are derived from the use of the relatively recently available research opportunities offered by the substantial opening of official UK archives from the 2000s and the possibilities of locating and communicating with individuals or, more often descendants, of people involved in criminal cases via publicly accessible heritage databases such as Ancestry and Find My Past.

It is possible using contemporary accounts, previous literature and publicly accessible criminal justice case files, to identify a range of individuals who were participants, victims or witnesses and their families and then to use heritage databases to contact any descendants or relatives who may have posted a family tree and be seeking more information about their family history. Usually, the heritage site will provide a private communication contact facility so that people with information or a shared interest can establish contact. There are considerable benefits to be gained from information gleaned from such sources: Accounts and information withheld at the time may be more likely to be revealed at a distance; the long term impact on victims, friends and family might be explored; detail and voices omitted from official and public records might be retrieved and the *nuances* sought by Rubenhold may be become better understood for the development of a richer and more authentic account than those previously created.

Despite the valuable potential of researching and accessing the experiences and memories of the elderly or subsequent generations, these activities are problematic. I have on occasion

⁴ Rubenhold, H. (2025) *Story of a Murder: The Wives, The Mistresses and Doctor Crippen*. London: Doubleday 409-10.

raised concerns about research ethics at 'true crime' conventions, trade shows and amongst colleagues. For the most part my concerns have been met by a standard response that *'anything in the public domain is fair game'*. There seem to be very little sense of a duty of care for individuals or their descendants whose private or sensitive details may have been buried in archives for a couple of generations or more. Where any reservations were expressed, it was felt that it should come from the writer's agent or publisher. I have raised the issue that academic researchers are usually bound by ethical protocols such as the British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics as well as by the ethics committees of their own universities. Somewhat disappointing given the BSCs drive to enhance public engagement, was the response of a highly successful veteran true crime writer, who often describes himself as a criminologist, and expressed surprise that criminology 'was something that could be studied at university'. The writer and others to whom I posed the problem in presentations, were universally untroubled about using any detail or identifying or approaching any individual from materials that were publicly accessible. As a number indicated, *'when you approach them they can always say 'no''*. A number of issues that render this response problematic in terms of research ethics is illustrated by an example from my own research.

Using newspaper accounts and publicly available crime files, I identified a descendant of a homicide suspect, in a case going back a couple of generations where they had entered their family details on a heritage database. I wrote to the descendant using the website link, expressing my academic interest in their ancestor. I was confident that there was a significant omission from the official record and the press coverage. I also assured the descendant from the beginning that I would not use any information for publication gleaned from contact with them without their express approval. The reply and subsequent engagement that I had, caused me to reflect seriously on my research practice.

The response to my inquiry was not from the descendant site member but from an older relative who was not happy about the approach. The site member was a fairly young person who was perplexed by my enquiry as they had no knowledge of the events that I was inquiring about. The older relative said that family members had intended to appraise the site member of this aspect of their family history but had not done so until my inquiry arrived and they were forced to. It was made clear that the family regarded the issue as a very private matter. The relative related how it was only the arrival of the internet that had made them aware of *their* family connection to the crimes. Further, it was related that discovering that coverage of the case had been made so easy on the internet, when they had regarded it as safely publicly 'forgotten,' had caused considerable distress to older relatives who had been caught up in the events. The strength of distress recounted by the relative was indicative of the sensitivity that needs to be exercised in pursuing historic crimes even at the fringes or beyond living memory. Nevertheless, the relative was very kind in granting me a couple of telephone interviews which confirmed my suspicions about omissions from the official and media record and added extraordinarily powerful detail about the lasting impact of high profile crime on a family. It was telling that the respondent expressed appreciation for my assurances and relief that, 'I was not a journalist'.

In this example I was able to offer and supply the family with my research findings concerning their ancestor and I am committed to only publishing details that they have supplied with their permission. Among the ethical problems in this example was that the heritage site member was not aware of the family connection to the historic case and the revelation risked unsettling

the individual and the family. It might alternatively be argued that the attraction, but also risk, of joining the heritage site and inviting contact over family history is to discover precisely such detail from others researching and interested in your ancestors.

A contrary situation occurred regarding another case going back beyond living memory, although involving people who might once have been known to people still living. I contacted a descendant in Australia through the heritage site in the same manner as above. In this case the descendant was of the wife of the offender in a serious crime. The site member had, again, not been aware of the events and was delighted to have been contacted and appraised of the family connection. We have communicated extensively over the research for a couple of years and recently met to exchange materials.

In both of these examples I was able to acquire significant detail of the wider impact of the circumstances on women, families and communities – essential elements of the *nuance* identified and sought by Rubenhold and recognisable to academic historians and criminologists as voices commonly absent in both official records and conventional true crime accounts.

I am sharing these experiences as I am finding these research practices extremely valuable in restoring the voices of those marginalised or distorted in official, journalistic and conventional true crime ‘legends’. However, I wish to avoid accepting the stance that *‘if the research is legal and already in the public domain, I have no responsibility for the impact on subjects by approaching them’*. I am keen to receive observations on the propriety of the research practices described as well as views on any general principles concerning the use of heritage websites to approach descendants concerning criminal events.

Improving Progression Opportunities in Criminology Education on the Isle of Wight

Mike Sizer-Green, *Ise of Wight College & Doctoral Researcher, University of Portsmouth*

Since I began teaching criminology at the Isle of Wight College earlier this year, it has become increasingly apparent that our students face reduced opportunities to progress into higher education compared to their peers on mainland England.

This disparity is central to my Professional Doctorate in Education, which investigates how to improve progression from Level 3 criminology, law, and criminal justice pathways to degree-level studies.

Here are some relevant recent figures:

- In 2021, of students leaving 16-18 education at the Isle of Wight College, 47% progressed to higher education or training (Level 4+) after Level 3 study.
- The average for England in similar contexts is 70%.
- Regarding degree destinations specifically: 38% of Isle of Wight College students in 2021 went to a degree-level course; in England the comparable figure is around 66%.
- More recent “student destinations after 16-18 (2022 leavers)” data at the Isle of Wight College show 74% of students moved into education or employment following Level 3 study, compared to 80% nationally.

These gaps are substantial and persist even after accounting for differences in prior attainment and qualification type.

Key Barriers

Drawing on my doctoral work (including early interviews with students and staff), the following barriers emerge:

1. Aspiration and awareness – Some students believe university is “not for them,” either because of cost, perceived grades, or lack of role models.
2. Access to outreach and university connections – Limited interaction with universit(ies), fewer guest lectures, site visits, or mentoring for island students, compared with mainland colleges.
3. Perceived logistical/financial barriers – costs of travel, relocation, accommodation; less flexible admissions options; fear of being disadvantaged due to geography.

Proposed Interventions (Based on Proposal & Best Practice)

Aligned with my doctoral research, I am exploring a multi-component intervention model to raise progression rates. Some elements:

- Partnership with local universities to co-design modules or preparatory coursework that bridges FE and HE criminology/law curricula.
- Mentoring and peer support, including current undergraduates acting as mentors; alumni sharing pathways and experiences.
- Taster days / “university in a week” workshops held on the Isle of Wight, to provide exposure to HE study.

Invitation for Shared Practice

Given the scale of these differences, I am keen to hear from BSC members who have evidence of successful programmes or models that have improved progression from college or sixth form to higher education in criminology, law, or related disciplines. In particular:

- Colleges or sixth forms in rural or island settings.
- Examples of bridging modules or dual-enrolment arrangements.
- Mentoring or outreach schemes with measurable impact.
- Admissions policies or partnerships that have shifted selective HE access.

Perhaps you can help design interventions that are realistic, equitable, and scalable - not only for the Isle of Wight but for similarly geographically isolated regions across the UK.

Please contact: Mike Sizer-Green at mike.sizer-green@iwcollege.ac.uk

Obituary: Terry Thomas (1946-2025)



It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Terry Thomas, a distinguished Professor of Criminal Justice Studies, a prolific author, and a deeply respected colleague and friend.

His near 40-year career was marked by scholarly rigour, a commitment to liberal values, and a profound influence on the fields of criminology and social work.

Terry began his professional life as a practising social worker for about a decade before moving into academia. In 1986, he was a lecturer at what was then Leeds Polytechnic, an institution that would later become Leeds Metropolitan University and is now known as Leeds Beckett University. By 2005, he was the Criminology Course leader at Leeds, tasked with starting a new degree in the subject. He was described by a colleague who joined at that time as a "consummate, accomplished and highly experienced professional who engendered immediate trust and confidence". He remained at the university until his retirement as a full Professor of Criminal Justice Studies in 2014.

Throughout his career, Terry was a prolific and well-regarded author. His books were known for being "scholarly, well researched, jargon free," and for posing sharp political and ethical dilemmas. His first book, *Police and Social Workers*, was published shortly before 1986 and established him as a "go-to" expert in the field; a second edition was released in 2000. His other major works include:

- *Sex Crime: Sex Offending and Society*, first published in 2000 with a third edition in 2015.
- *Criminal Records: A Database for the Criminal Justice System and Beyond* (2007)
- *The Registration and Monitoring of Sex Offenders: A Comparative Study* (2012)
- *Policing Sexual Offences and Sex Offenders* (2016)
- *Privacy and Criminal Justice* (2017) co-authored with Daniel Marshall, which compares 'public' and 'private' spheres and questions the extent of law enforcement intrusion.
- *The Sex Offender Register* (2021), a co-authored examination of the history, structure, and legalities of the UK's register policy.

A cornerstone of Terry's academic life was his collaborative work. He began a fruitful partnership in 1986 with Bill Heberton, then a researcher at the Police Monitoring Unit in Manchester, which lasted nearly 40 years. Together, they published titles such as *Criminal Records: State, Citizen and the Politics of Protection* (1993) and *Policing Europe* (1995), as

well as an influential report commissioned by the Home Office on US sex offender registers in 1997. This single partnership produced an estimated twenty academic journal papers and book chapters; and indeed, Terry had several other collaborators throughout his career. His research was extensive, involving archival work at the National Archives and funded research trips across Europe and to numerous US cities, including Washington DC, Seattle, and New Orleans. Independently, Terry also received a prestigious Leverhulme Fellowship in the 2010s to spend a year researching at the University of Minnesota.

A connecting thread runs through all of Terry's research and writing: a commitment to consummate English liberalism. He was deeply concerned with the balance between rights and duties, the importance of individual privacy versus an intrusive state, and the need for professional accountability. His academic work was firmly focused on exposing and correcting injustices and preserving privacy for the individual. Rather than an "Ivory Tower," he saw academia as a privileged platform to argue rationally for greater respect and tolerance of the foibles of others.

As a colleague, Terry was remembered as a gentleman and scholar who was kind, supportive, wise, and always showed solidarity. He was considered a godsend by those he worked with, helping to navigate the conflicts between academic and managerial values, and providing a wealth of knowledge on the criminal justice system from his 40-year career. Though a private man, he enjoyed the process of collaborative research. He leaves behind a legacy of important scholarship and the memory of a wry, supportive, and insightful academic who will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Sarah Kingston, Bill Heberton, Colin Webster

BSC Conference 2026

Nottingham Trent University are thrilled to be hosting the British Society of Criminology Conference 2026.

The theme for the conference is “**Building Resilience and Hope into Criminology and Criminal Justice.**”

The sub-themes for the conference are:

- Hope, transformation and justice: Developing capacity for change
- Justice in a digital age: Building digital resilience, literacies, capabilities and capacities.
- From disaster to recovery: sustainability and justice in the face of global uncertainty.

Key dates

Monday 12 January – Sunday 22 February 2026: Submission of abstracts (both PGR and main conference)

Monday 12 January – Sunday 29 March 2026: Early bird registration for conference and dinner (both PGR and main conference)

Monday 30 March – Friday 8 May 2026: Standard dinner registration for conference and dinner (both PGR and main conference)

See the poster on the following page or visit the [Conference Website](#) for more details.



British Society of Criminology Conference 2026

7 - 10 July 2026, NTU City Campus

Theme: Building Resilience and Hope into Criminology and Criminal Justice

Sub-themes

1) Hope, transformation and justice: Developing capacity for change.

2) Justice in a digital age: building digital resilience, literacies, capabilities and capacities.

3) From disaster to recovery: sustainability and justice in the face of global uncertainty.



The logo for the British Society of Criminology (BSC) features the letters 'BSC' in a large, white, serif font, centered within a dark blue square.

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Only papers presented at the 2026 British Society of Criminology conference are eligible. Papers must be accompanied by a separate cover sheet containing: paper's title; category (plenary, panel, or postgraduate); word count; author's full name; affiliation; email address; institutional address; an abstract of 150 words; up to 5 key words; and a brief biographical note. Papers must be written in English and will not have been published already, nor will they be under consideration elsewhere.

The maximum length for papers (including notes and references) is 6000 words. Please use Microsoft Word (or a compatible format), 1.5 spacing, generous margins, page numbers, and a maximum of three orders of heading. Use minimal / essential footnotes. Use minimal lengthy quotations and indent these if over 40 words. Use quotation marks (and page number, where relevant) to indicate shorter quotations within the body of the text. Clearly present and label all Tables, Figures and images, including sources and explanatory notes if appropriate. Please make your images, tables, and artwork as accessible as possible using [Alt Text](#). Poor quality images and artwork will be rejected. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of quotations and references, and for obtaining permissions and copyright clearances if appropriate. Use Harvard referencing and provide an alphabetical "References" list at the end (typed and 1.5 spaced). Papers should be proofread and carefully checked for errors prior to submission. Papers will be anonymously peer reviewed. *Please note: submission of a paper does not guarantee publication in the Online Journal.*

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