Researching Missing People

PROFESSOR CAROL HAYDEN, PROFESSOR FRANCIS PAKES, DR. KAREN SHALEV GREENE (ICJS)

Wednesday 17th June 2015
St Andrews Court 4.09, 4:00 – 5:30 pm
Social Justice and Penality seminar

Professor Carol Hayden: The blue light social services? Responding to repeat reports to the police of people missing from institutional locations

The issues that arise in responding to repeat reports to the police of adults and children missing from institutional locations (such as hospitals, mental health units and children’s residential care) are the focus of this paper. This focus relates to the broader issue of policing vulnerability and the concepts of ‘duty of care’, ‘safeguarding’ and ‘risk’ as they apply to the police response to missing people. The paper is based on research with Karen Shalev-Greene on 1,321 missing persons cases that were closed in 2011; these cases came from 149 institutional locations in a police force in central England. The research illustrates that reports from institutional locations account for a significant part of all missing persons reports and the great majority of repeat reports to the police. The problem the police are faced with is providing a response that is proportionate to the different types and level of risk posed by adults and children who go missing from institutional locations.

Professor Francis Pakes: Crisis, trauma and loss: an exploratory study into those who ‘come to notice’ to police and health services and subsequently abscond

This presentation considers a phenomenon of which both the prevalence and the causes are quite unclear. It refers to individuals who contact the police, or check into hospital (or who are found by members of the public) with real or imagined emergencies only to leave or abscond before any intervention can be implemented. These individuals frequently refuse to give their name or use aliases. They tend to engage repeatedly in this behaviour. This article reports on a thematic analysis of the case notes that are kept in the UK Missing Persons Bureau database, in order to shed light on the question of what it is that brings these people to ‘come to notice’ (in police jargon) and why they subsequently seek to evade the attentions of health care and criminal justice agencies.

Dr. Karen Shalev Greene: Why do some missing children receive extensive media attention while others are forgotten to the public eye?

The aim of this presentation is to examine why some missing children within the UK receive extensive media coverage and are well-known to the wider society, whilst other missing children receive much less coverage and seem to be forgotten about in terms of the public eye. This is despite the evidenced rising statistic for children who are missing.

An online survey was carried out in January-February 2015. The survey approached newsmakers; including editors, journalists, sub-editors, and those in executive managerial position of local, national and regional news and asked them questions about their opinions and decision making in reporting missing children cases. Overall, 45 people responded and the analysis revealed a number of theme which will be explored.