Crime and criminal justice research at the University of Sydney
Research brief 7

This is the seventh in a series of briefing papers showcasing some of our projects and introducing you to our research staff. It looks at work we're doing in witness accounts of crime, social inequality, socio-economics and problem gambling.

Improving how witness accounts of a crime are collected: iWitnessed App

Witness recall of an event can sometimes be unreliable; however it can be relied on as a key piece of evidence during court cases. To minimise this problem, eyewitness memory experts **Dr Helen Paterson** and **Dr Celine van Golde** from the University of Sydney, and Professor Nicholas Cowdery (Former Director of Public Prosecutions, NSW) developed 'iWitnessed'. This is an innovative smart phone app designed to help witnesses and victims provide a detailed account of any event, in a way which helps preserve and protect their memory for the event. The app is free, available to anyone in Australia, and can be recorded in any language.

iWitnessed uses a guided recall procedure and can be used for any type of event, including one-off or recurring events. The app can store a range of information including text, voice recordings, voice-to-text, and images, and be time-stamped. There are also additional security protections, where PIN codes can be used prior to accessing the information. iWitnessed also provides direct links to support services and information about the psychological effects of trauma.

The app has been downloaded nearly 12,000 times since its launch in early 2018.

Find out more about the iWitnessed app:
http://sydney.edu.au/science/psychology/iWitnessed

Email: app.iWitnessed@sydney.edu.au

Understanding the social inequalities faced by people with disabilities

Spotlight on Professor Eric Emerson

Eric Emerson is Professor of Disability Population Health at the Centre for Disability Research and Policy, where he leads on the Centre's stream of work on disability and disadvantage. He is an expert on issues related to the wellbeing and social inequalities faced by people with disabilities, especially children with disabilities and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Eric has led and contributed to research projects which seek to understand and address health and social inequalities faced by people with disabilities. In 2015 he led a team which examined perceptions of safety and exposure to violence in public places among adults with a disability in the UK. The team found that these people were more likely to have been made to feel unsafe, or be attacked or insulted in a public place, and that the risk increased among women and people living in poverty. However, this did not mean that people in the study who reported being victimised were more likely to avoid public places as a result.

Eric also contributed to an Australian population-based study into the prevalence and risk of violence against people with and without disabilities. Similar results to the UK were found; men and women with disability had double the chance of experiencing physical and sexual violence than non-disabled peers of the same sex. However, men with disabilities were more likely to experience physical violence, while women with disabilities experienced greater likelihood of sexual violence, partner violence, and stalking and harassment.

Find out more about Professor Emerson and his work at:
http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/about/people/profiles/eric.emerson.php#publications-by-year

Identifying the association between adverse childhood experiences and lifetime economic outcomes

Can adverse experiences in childhood affect a person's economic outcome later in life? Is there a difference between those with low or high socio-economic backgrounds?

Despite the existence of many studies that look at poverty and a child's access to education and financial resources, it is not often distinguished whether socio-economic disadvantage when the child becomes an adult is due to the lack of resources, or if the type of adversities a child faces — which disproportionately occur in poorer households — have more influence (eg parental abuse, neglect, unstable relationships).

In 2017 a study conducted by **Associate Professor Stefanie Shurer** and Honours student **Kristian Trajkovski** from the University of Sydney's School of Economics attempted to quantify how much early-life adverse childhood experiences were associated with economic outcomes later in life. They conducted a longitudinal study on the cohort using existing data collated on 18,558 children in the UK. They examined their net individual earnings, welfare dependency and the cohort's own subjective experience of poverty at 55 years of age, and compared this information to whether individuals had any adverse childhood experiences (ACE) between 7 and 16 years of age.

They found that children who came from economically disadvantaged families were twice as likely as those from privileged families to have experienced ACE. Despite this, they also discovered that irrespective of a child's socio-economic background, ACE were strong predictors of economic outcomes — indeed, affecting a child's earning potential by 7.3%, increasing the chance of welfare dependence, and increasing the chance of subjective poverty. In particular, neglect was considered a strong factor in later economic earnings. They suggest that targeting household dysfunction could help alleviate childhood poverty and reduce the economic and social burden of ACE within the community.

Find out more about Associate Professor Schurer and her work at:
http://sydney.edu.au/arts/economics/staff/profiles/stefanie.schurer.php

Reducing the harms of problem gambling

Spotlight on Professor Alex Blaszczynski

The harms of gambling are well known, and Sydney University is a leader in how to research and treat people afflicted with problem gambling. **Professor Alex Blaszczynski** is the Director of the Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic located in the University's Brain and Mind Centre. He is leading expert in this field, hose research interests include pathological gambling, impulse control behaviours, and internet addiction.

Alex has undertaken extensive research in partnership with other leading experts. In 2016 Alex and Lia Nower from Rutgers University in the United States developed and validated the 'Gambling Pathways Questionnaire' to use as a screening tool for treatment-seeking gamblers. Recently, he contributed to a study which examined whether there is a relationship between gambling behaviour and fantasy sports (FS) play — an online gaming platform whereby players can 'manage' fictional teams using real-life athletes in sports such as football, with players earning points based on the performance drawn from actual game statistics using a pre-defined scoring system. The study found that daily FS players gambled more frequently, with more severe gambling issues and comorbid problems such as suicide ideation than gamblers who didn't play daily FS.

Alex has also partnered with Sydney University colleague **Melanie Hartmann** to review existing studies on the relationship between psychiatric disorders and gambling disorders over time. They found evidence to suggest psychiatric disorders could be either a precursor or the result of problem gambling. However, individual and environmental characteristics play a key role in this process. They conclude that problem gambling initiatives should therefore target both gambling disorders and the psychiatric conditions associated with it.

Find out more about Professor Blaszcyznski and his work at:
http://sydney.edu.au/science/people/alex.blaszczynski.php
And read a recent systematic review he co-authored on crime and gambling disorders -
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10899-018-9794-7

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