

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR CRIME AND JUSTICE STUDIES

The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King's College London aims to encourage and facilitate an understanding of the complex issues concerning crime and related harms. Our mission is to promote just and effective responses to crime and related harms by informing and educating through critical analysis, research and public debate.

Support our work

The Centre publishes the quarterly magazine, *Criminal Justice Matters* and owns the *British Journal of Criminology* (BJC). If you would like to support our work, please join as a member. Our membership package includes free copies of our magazine, reduced rates for the BJC and our publications. In addition you will also receive advance notice of our policy briefing papers and priority bookings for our lectures and seminar series.

Find out more about our projects, policy and research work by visiting our websites – www.kcl.ac.uk/ccjs or www.harmandsociety.org.uk.

If you like what we do and want to find out more, sign up for the Harm and Society monthly e-bulletin and daily newspaper summary using the form below. We will also send you information about becoming a member of the Centre. To join online, visit www.kcl.ac.uk/ccjs or email ccjs.enq@kcl.ac.uk.

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Harm and Society

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Harm and Society

Changing the terms of debate

Since 2003, the Crime and Society Foundation has operated as an independent project within the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King's College London. In 2007, we are taking forward the project in two ways. We will be developing further our interest in harmful behaviours beyond those generally defined as crime. Our work will also be much more closely integrated with the other work of the Centre. Alongside these changes, our commitment to developing fresh and challenging policy perspectives remains.

To reflect this change, the Foundation will be known as the Harm and Society project, operating under the name of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. This leaflet sets out our plans in more detail.

Harm and Society

The aim of Harm and Society is to stimulate debate about the limitations of criminal justice and promote alternative perspectives on social harm, crime and social policy. It seeks to change the terms of the debate by working with others to catalyse a fundamental shift in social and criminal justice policy.

Harm and Society has three objectives:

- To stimulate an informed debate about the range of social harms and the limitations of criminal justice approaches in relation to them.
- To develop and enhance an understanding of the social, economic and political foundations of a society in which social harm is less prevalent.
- To promote a solid and reliable evidence base around our first two objectives.

By publishing and disseminating critical analysis, we aim to act as a bridge between the academic, practitioner and public policy worlds, stimulating and invigorating public debates and providing a space for thinking critically about crime, social harm and criminal justice.

Our vision and Harm and Society

The vision of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies is of a society in which everyone benefits from justice, safety, economic and social security. The Harm and Society project raises questions about the adequacy of 'criminal justice' and the concept of 'crime' as useful tools in reaching that vision.

Our work is premised upon the view that it is only by understanding crime, harm and criminal justice in the context of our political, economic and social worlds that we can begin to think seriously about justice, safety and economic and social security. Whilst this is an ambitious and long term goal, Harm and Society seeks to engage thinkers, academics, practitioners and policy makers in creative thinking – whilst keeping our feet firmly on the ground through a solid evidence base and informed policy development.

Does criminal justice work?

The government never tires of telling us that crime has fallen dramatically in recent years but at the same time ministers claim that the criminal justice system is failing and needs radical reform. Yet the drive to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system fails to address some of the most serious offences, so ignoring the suffering of many thousands of victims with the vast majority of some of the most serious and violent harms never resulting in a successful conviction.

What role for criminal justice?

Given that the government significantly underestimates the scale of failure of the criminal justice system, and when the true scale of victimisation of serious offences such as child abuse and sexual assaults are acknowledged, it is clear that the criminal justice system will never have anything but a marginal impact. Surely the real challenge involves giving up on the hopeless attempts to drive up criminal justice performance and seek a much broader array of solutions than the criminal justice system can ever deliver.

Why a social harm approach?

Within current approaches only some harmful events are defined as 'crimes'; very few of these are known about and a very small proportion appear in the crime statistics or reach the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system quite simply does not and cannot begin to respond to all events we currently think of as crime – and is even less likely to be able to address the vast bulk of events that are socially harmful.

Is there an alternative?

We want to work with others to develop perspectives around a broader understanding of social harm to stimulate debate about how government policy and society as a whole should respond. If you are working on a piece of policy development or research that you think would be of interest to us then please get in touch.