

# editorial

## violence

Editors Carol Martin, Penny Fraser and Kimmitt Edgar set the issue in context.

**V**iolence arouses strong feelings and raises profound moral issues.

It is important to approach the problems of violence from an open, multi-disciplined perspective. In the lead article of this issue on violence, Professor Betsy Stanko, Director of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Violence Research Programme (VRP), sets the current debate in context. In fact, context is her theme. She highlights the tension between research aimed at producing quantitative data and that being undertaken by various VRP projects which seek to contextualise and explain violent incidents. Violence itself is a problematic term. Its meaning and impact vary for different people; even those who use violence are not necessarily the 'innocent' or 'guilty' parties perceived by others. As Professor Stanko points out, without understanding why or how violence arises it becomes impossible to seek strategies to prevent it, either at an individual or structural level.

Three articles focus on racial violence. Larry Ray, David Smith and Liz Wastell describe their research in Greater Manchester with perpetrators of racist violence. This work, part of the ESRC's programme, aimed to understand the motives of perpetrators and explore their links with their local communities. The authors describe the 'techniques of neutralisation' that the racist

perpetrators they interviewed engaged in to legitimise the act in its context.

Ben Bowling urges the development of greater sophistication in the debate on the penology of racist violence. He discusses whether custodial sentences alone will be counterproductive for those convicted of racially motivated offences by confirming their racist identities and leaving their ideologies unchallenged. Robyn Thomas, a community safety officer, examines some of the challenges facing practitioners attempting to formulate and implement corporate strategies to deal with perpetrators of racist crime.

There is a range of articles relating to domestic violence. Hannana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters addresses the issue of domestic violence in a culturally specific setting - the experience of black and minority women. She looks at the particular difficulties faced by black women who have suffered this type of abuse, and stresses the need for criminal justice agencies to recognise the special difficulties that black women face particularly where there may be pressures in such cases to allow ethnic minority groups with strong cultural traditions to 'police' themselves. Alana Diamond of the Home Office and Kevin Wong from Nacro write about the new Home Office 'Violence against Women' initiative, which has commissioned and funded 34

projects across the country. These will be independently evaluated and the outcomes will be known in 2003. Gerry Heery describes a new project in Belfast for violent and abusive men in relationships. The programme began in 1999 after a wide-ranging consultation process and challenges the pre-suppositions of men who use violent and controlling behaviour in their relations with women. Women who have experienced abuse should play a greater role in planning service provision argues Gill Hague. Furthermore, consultation should be adequately resourced, flexible and supported by professionals. Rosie Campbell and Hilary Kinnell argue that violence against women street workers in the sex industry is downplayed by criminal justice agencies and the legal process. They propose action to redress this, including the development of national guidelines for police and improved liaison between agencies working with sex workers and the police.

Frances Heidensohn presents a view of the realities of women offenders and violence and highlights the familiar 'doubly deviant' model of female criminality. A theoretical paper examining the link between masculinities and violence is provided by Richard Collier. In this, he explains how men's violence is a more appropriate term than either male or masculine violence. He recognises that violence is socially structured and mediated in many ways including class, age and race - not only gender. An article on abuse of the elderly, by Rachel Pain, challenges some commonly held stereotypical views and suggests that there should be specific legislation to protect the elderly. In the past elder abuse has usually been considered as a medical or social welfare issue rather than requiring criminal justice interventions. This, she argues, reflects the (inferior) status which the elderly have in our society.

The sad and shocking death of Damilola Taylor in Peckham, South London recently has inevitably reminded the general public of another child's death nearly 8 years ago - James Bulger. Rob Allen analyses the reasoning behind the Lord Chief

Justice's decision to release the two young men convicted of that murder.

The owners and employees of small businesses as victims of violence are the subject of an article by Matt Hopkins. The kinds of violence he describes include racial attacks, robberies and assaults and he outlines important areas for future research in this somewhat neglected subject.

Joe Sim and Steve Hall address the issues of state mechanisms which mask violence and the market pressures which encourage it. Steve, along with colleagues in the North-east, has been researching the night-time economy as part of the ESRC's programme. Here he argues that previously declining and decaying inner city areas have been revitalised by the growing leisure industry. Economic regeneration defies effective regulation of anti-social behaviour, allowing much alcohol or drug induced violence to flourish unchecked. Joe Sim provides a critique of the 'strange silence' which surrounds the reporting of violence perpetrated by, rather than on, agents of the state. He argues that the pervading focus on individual 'bad apples' and the greater emphasis on state officials as the victims of violence masks the institutionalised acceptance of violence by state officials.

Finally, our own article highlights prisoners' perspectives on conflicts and violence in prison. This project was also part of the ESRC's VRP and set out to examine how and why prisoners' conflicts escalated into or moved away from violence.

For those of us who have studied violence in one or more of its forms, the diversity of these articles and the variety of the specific subject areas will come as no surprise. We hope that for others it will start a welcome debate about the context-specific nature of different forms of violence and contribute towards informing a wider audience.

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