

# editorial

crime, families and communities

**Peter Francis and Una Padel put this issue into perspective.**

The family is a powerful rhetorical tool in discourses regarding social order, as Dick Hobbs suggests in the introduction to his article on families and organized crime in this issue of *Criminal Justice Matters*. It is often lauded as the bedrock of society: the strong family is often presented as synonymous with the safe family, a haven away from the perils and evils of society. Yet the idea of the family is complex; it can be a source of love, support and friendship, but at the same time it can be a site of conflict, oppression and destructive relationships. Communities possess many of the same characteristics and have also featured heavily in analyses of social order and its breakdown. They often provide the primary relationships beyond family and are frequently discussed in terms of the strength of relationships and the nature of inter-dependencies. Strong communities have multiple interdependencies and can provide mutually supportive environments for their members, but they can also be the sites of conflict, and may even define themselves through the exclusion and marginalization of those who are not permitted to participate.

From the criminal families of the 1960s, such as the Krays and the Richardsons, through public displays of anti-social behaviour, disorder and violence in Oldham in 2000, to the gang violence which shocked the nation at the start of 2003, crime, families and communities are inextricably linked. Crime is often described as a consequence of experiences in the family and the community.

Crime also strains the functioning of both the family and community. Crime can be reduced, prevented, and controlled in the family and the community. This issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* is concerned with the various complexities and dynamics associated with crime, families and communities. It draws upon a range of academic and practitioner contributions and takes in a wide variety of issues and themes.

The issue opens with a dissection of the family through analysis of family influences and wider social settings. There is a large body of evidence, according to David Smith, to show that family functioning is related to adolescent delinquency and adult criminal careers. However, for Smith, acknowledging the links between social structure and the family "may have important implications for the way we interpret the best research on family functioning". One such implication is in the way we define and interpret 'good parenting'. As Smith goes on to suggest, "it can be argued that the notions of good and effective parenting need to be rooted in local culture and local practice, and cannot be imposed from outside". It may well be that parenting differs by context, and that practices are adopted that are the most appropriate to the setting. This view questions the idea that a 'one size fits all' approach to good parenting is the most effective way of promoting crime reduction and prevention.

The nature of family and its relationship to crime is the focus of two other contributions to this issue by Dick Hobbs and Pam

Davies. For Dick Hobbs, who explores the changing nature and role of the family in the commission of crime, the family continues to form the cultural and economic bedrock of British organized crime, while Davies explores the consequences of family and community on women offending.

The focus on community is taken up by Lynn Hancock. There has, over the last few years, been a proliferation of initiatives, programmes and schemes that aim to regenerate those communities experiencing deprivation. Many of these initiatives have promoted crime reduction and community participation, and can be found across urban Britain, especially in the most marginalized communities. However, for Hancock, while there has been some impact associated with these initiatives, more needs to be known about the complexities of the relationships between crime, community and regeneration. Karen Evans takes up the discussion of community, this time in the context of partnership working. Here she argues that it is time that the crime control community abandoned its stereotyping of problem neighbourhoods and dangerous groups and grasped the complexities and subtleties of local experience of crime, criminality and victimization.

Beyond these contributions, which in many ways outline the parameters of and set the scene for the discussion of family and community within this issue, various contributors grapple with a range of pertinent issues and concerns. For example, Roger Grimshaw focuses discussion upon one consequence of the breakdown of family and community, that of homelessness and housing need.

An area which has received little academic research attention is that of young people's experiences of crime and victimization. Rachel Pain and Sally Gill explore the experiences of children and young people, identifying that

children's needs, as victims especially, are not always met by their families or the wider community. The need for early intervention and ways of developing and delivering it are the focus of the contribution by Sue Raikes, who explores what is known and what works in early intervention.

The consequences for family and community of punishment are taken up in a number of contributions. Mike Nellis explores the consequences of punishment in the community, most notably the effects of electronic monitoring, while the contributions by Adrienne Katz, Kelli Brown and Lucy Gampell explore the nature of and the consequences that the imprisonment of a family member can have on family life and children's experiences. Tracey Moses describes how volunteers are becoming involved in resettlement work with prisoners released after short prison sentences.

Rod Morgan, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, draws attention to the increased workload of the probation service and contends that the effectiveness of community penalties is threatened as caseloads silt up with low level, low risk offenders, diverting resources from those who most need them.

Louise Dominion worked on the Social Exclusion Unit's report *Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners* which was published in July 2002. She has now moved to the Home Office to head the unit with the task of implementing the report's recommendations and spoke about her new role at the CCJS AGM. An edited version of her speech, which concentrates on the reintegration of prisoners into the community, is also included in this issue.

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