UNDERSTANDING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

a guide to data analysis

JOHN MARTYN CHAMBERLAIN

UNDERSTANDING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

SAGE has been part of the global academic community since 1965, supporting high quality research and learning that transforms society and our understanding of individuals, groups and cultures. SAGE is the independent, innovative, natural home for authors, editors and societies who share our commitment and passion for the social sciences.

Find out more at: **www.sagepublications.com**

⑤SAGE

UNDERSTANDING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

a guide to data analysis

JOHN MARTYN **CHAMBERLAIN**

For my daughter Freyja,
because she understands why I still need her hand to hold,
particularly when crossing the street.

For my nana Freda,
as without her I wouldn't have taken this path.

Contents

About the Author

Dr Chamberlain is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Social Policy in the Department of Social Science at Loughborough University. His academic background and research interests cross over the fields of criminology and medical sociology. Drawing on both fields, over the last decade and a half he has conducted research in a range of topics, including the care and treatment of mentally disordered offenders within the prison system, the identification and punishment of health practitioners who deliberately harm patients, as well as the surveillance and control of civil disobedience and public protest by crime control agencies, such as the police. Currently he is conducting research into contemporary developments in the risk management and treatment of offenders classified by the criminal justice system as dangerous, including violent and sex offenders, mentally disordered offenders and terrorists.

1

An Autobiographical Introduction

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 introduces the focus of this book on providing an introduction to how qualitative and quantitative data analysis is undertaken by criminologists. The chapter outlines the importance of numbers and words for exploring criminal life and discusses how, although criminology is a highly diverse and fragmented discipline, at its centre lies a common commitment to undertaking rigorous and systematic empirical research as a member of a broader academic community. The chapter ends with a brief summary of subsequent chapter content.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

The importance of words and numbers
The triangle of criminology
Purpose and structure of this book
Chapter reading list

The Importance of Words and Numbers

This book provides an introduction to different forms of data analysis used by criminologists to explore and examine the social world using words and numbers. A range of approaches to the analysis of narrative and numeric data are examined, including grounded theory analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, univariate analysis and bivariate analysis. There are several research methods texts specific to criminology which provide students with help managing a research project

(i.e. King and Wincup 2007; Crowe and Semmens 2008; Davies et al. 2011). Yet these texts don't focus in detail on the mechanics of doing different forms of data analysis. In addition to providing practical examples of how to do data analysis this book seeks to contextualise its content to help the reader understand the underlying key principles that serve to shape the analytic process. It does this by outlining the historical development of the different analytical strategies it discusses within the emergence of qualitative and quantitative research within criminology as an academic discipline. Self-study questions and further readings on a range of issues pertinent to the collection and analysis of criminological data, including research design and the presentation of empirical findings, are also provided. Although written with the budding criminologist in mind, students studying other social science subjects will also find it a useful text. After all, sociologists, psychologists, geographers, as well as communication and media analysts, all examine the world in which we live using words and numbers.

When I was an undergraduate student one of my favourite tutors used to like to end each lecture she gave with what she called 'question time', so each week we had to take it in turns to ask her a question. The question could be about anything we wanted. It didn't have to even be related to the topic we had just listened to. We were encouraged to speak our mind and constantly reminded that nothing was off limits and only a foolish person thinks there is such a thing as a stupid question. It was a small and friendly class entitled 'Humanity's place in Nature' which ran for the whole of the first year of my undergraduate degree on a Wednesday evening. It was as interesting as its title suggested. To this day I view it as one of the best classes I've attended and in no small part this was down to the lecturer who ran it. Each week we would explore our topic – the place of human beings within the universe – by examining an aspect of the history of western and eastern philosophy and religion. As we did so we learnt about the differences and similarities between, for example, Buddhism and Islam, Hellenistic and Continental philosophy, Psychotherapy and 'Hippie' Counter-Culture, as well as Cubism, Deep Ecology and Postmodernism.

As you can perhaps imagine, virtually all the questions we asked weren't that creative, or that memorable for that matter – although they certainly may have seemed so at the time. Nevertheless, our lecturer always used our questions as a starting place from which to develop a healthy exchange of ideas and opinions. Most importantly, she always reminded us what we were doing in her class: looking at the different ways human beings try to make sense of the world around them. She often talked about how humans liked to ask questions and seek answers by telling stories about the world and their place in it using a mixture of words and numbers. Indeed, one of the first things we do when we are children is learn the power of words and numbers for understanding and navigating the world around us. As we grow so does our appreciation of how they help us grasp its key features, reoccurring patterns and surprising events. She reminded us how each generation looks to both the past and the future as it attempts to explain why the

world looks and behaves the way it does. In our long search for answers we have sometimes been lucky enough to uncover the hidden structures and patterns which seem to control our environment. What is more, she said, we have learnt to express these in the forms of numbers and words. We give them names and tell stories about how we came to find them. So we associate the discovery of gravity with the story of Newton and his apple tree. While in their more abstract forms they compress the complex world around us into an eloquent mathematical equation, such as $E = mc^2$, or some equally seductive narrative hypothesis that explains why things are the way they are.

Words and numbers not only provide us with access to the underlying structures present in the world around us, they also help us build a sense of self and allow us to communicate to others our own life story alongside that of the time and place in human history in which we live. But perhaps most importantly, they help us manipulate our environment and change it to get what we want. Harnessing the power of words and numbers, we have been able to change our surroundings, mass produce crops and livestock to sustain growing populations, eradicate certain diseases and contain still others, build extraordinary cities, as well as develop amazing information and communication technologies which make the global truly local. Important events from all over the world, which historically would have taken weeks or even months to reach us, now appear instantaneously on the screen in front of us. Coincidences, such as finding out that a new acquaintance also knows an old friend, are simply an expression of the underlying structures which drive the natural and social worlds we inhabit and the stories we in turn tell about them. After all, in a world built on probability and chance, but which nevertheless likes a good story, coincidences are bound to happen. What is more, they happen more often than we would care to admit.

My interest in how numbers and words can be used by the social sciences to examine the world around us has lasted throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate studies and into my subsequent academic career. During my Master's degree I conducted research in a prison in the United Kingdom, looking at the care and treatment of mentally disordered offenders. At this time (the mid-1990s) more formalised multi-agency working had been introduced nationally for the treatment of offenders who have mental health problems in prison as well as on their release into the community (James 2010). The numbers have consistently revealed that a disproportionately high level of mental illness and alcohol and drug abuse exists amongst the prison population. For example, a recent House of Commons report estimated that at least 70 per cent of prisoners in the United Kingdom suffer from two or more mental disorders, while noting that in the general population the comparative figures are 5 per cent for men and 2 per cent for women (Berman 2011). The situation was much the same when I was doing my research. Against this stark statistical background I sat and talked over cups of tea and biscuits to people whose life stories reinforced the complex nature of the problem of how best to care for individuals with mental health issues within an

institutional environment primarily designed to punish wrongdoers. The narratives I collected to my mind revealed the presence of underlying socio-economic, cultural and ideological structures, which were at work shaping peoples lives and restricting the life opportunities and personal choices some individuals have available to them, particularly if they happen to be born in the wrong geographical area, look and act differently, come from a troubled family background, or just have had a run of bad luck. Each day I spent completing my research in the prison environment not only made me more grateful that I could go home to my family but also reminded me of the power of words for exploring the social world around me.

Yet it wasn't until I began my doctoral research looking at the reasons why health and social care professionals sometimes use their position to commit murder and other criminal acts – such as in the case of the general practitioner Harold Shipman, who killed some two hundred of his patients – that I really started to get to grips with a broader range of analytical approaches available in the social sciences to analyse words (or qualitative data analysis as it is more formally called). Up until this point I had primarily used what is called grounded theory to analyse the stories I collected. This approach is sometimes referred to as thematic analysis owing to its tendency to 'chunk' pieces of text (usually interview responses) into thematic categories. Grounded theory analysis is perhaps the most commonly used qualitative analysis method in the social sciences, and involves building up your story of what is happening and why from people's own accounts, instead of approaching them with some pre-existing theory in mind. We will look at this approach in more detail in Chapter 3 when we examine different strategies for collecting data, as well as in Chapter 4 where we discuss grounded theory analysis in detail. For the moment it is enough to say that it was at this point that I began to expand my analytical repertoire beyond grounded theory analysis through exploring how to incorporate narrative analysis and discourse analysis in my work. For me, these approaches opened up a range of new theoretical opportunities for critically exploring criminal life and the role played by language, power and social structure in shaping human agency. I hope after reading Chapters 5 and 6, which respectively discuss narrative analysis and discourse analysis, that the reader will agree with me that their emergence within the social sciences over the past three decades has done much to enhance the reach of the criminological imagination.

For all I valued having a range of different analytical approaches to help me look in different ways at qualitative data, I never forgot the emphasis placed by my undergraduate lecturer on using both words and numbers when exploring the world around us. But examining the world using numbers, or quantitative data analysis as it is more formally called, doesn't appeal to all students. Reviews of quantitative teaching in higher education in the United Kingdom by Williams et al. (2006, 2008) reveal the wariness social science students can feel towards quantitative methods teaching, with the research showing that two out of three would rather write an essay than analyse numeric data and do statistics. As my postgraduate

studies progressed and I began my academic teaching career I increasingly recognised the importance of nurturing students' statistical skills and understanding of the role played by quantitative research in the ongoing intellectual development of the social sciences. My experience has shown that students may perhaps feel nervous when they find out they will be doing 'numbers analysis'. Nevertheless, if approached in the right way, quantitative methods teaching can significantly enhance their personal development and educational experience – partly through developing their awareness of the diverse range of statistically focused career and employment opportunities available to social science graduates, but mainly because, if managed carefully, quantitative teaching can enrich their understanding of the dynamic relationships which exist between criminological disciplinary discourse and practical real-world social problems and issues. Yet, to my mind, achieving this goal requires students be introduced to quantitative analysis in the first year of their studies, with this teaching being progressively deepened during subsequent years. This does not always happen in the United Kingdom – a state of affairs which deeply concerns the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in its role as perhaps the key social science research funding body in the United Kingdom, which also grants PhD studentship bursaries (ESRC 2011).

In a recent report the ESRC strategic advisor on quantitative methods recommended after reviewing teaching provision nationally that cultural and institutional change was needed across the higher education sector 'to secure increased curriculum space for quantitative methods, including teaching in year 1 and more contact time for students' (MacInnes 2009: 27). In no small part this is why the introduction to quantitative data analysis covered in Chapters 7 and 8 of this book is specifically designed to introduce students to the main features of how the analysis of numbers is approached by criminologists. The goal is to provide a foundation to the analysis of numbers which students can apply in their own project work as well as subsequently build on as they move forward to examining more complex statistical procedures and techniques. Taken together Chapters 7 and 8 are an invitation for the reader to take the first step in what is a vitally important aspect of the study of the criminal life. More advanced students will find these chapters useful as an aide-memoire to the basics of doing quantitative data analysis.

This focus on outlining the key features of how quantitative research is undertaken by the criminological academic community brings us to an important point concerning the analysis of words and numbers. Our ability to ask questions, to listen, to observe and critically reflect on the world around us, is built on our ability to use words and numbers to negotiate everyday life – we use them to manage our personal finances, choose the right house to buy, make a case for a job promotion, or decide which political party to vote for. But as we will discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, criminological analysis may well be built on our everyday commonsense understandings concerning the world around us and how it works; however, as an academic discipline it also seeks to move beyond these. As such it has developed its

own distinctive ways of examining the world which are often expressed in the form of key disciplinary concepts, theories and perspectives. A key theme of this book is that criminological research is a systematic and accumulative endeavour, undertaken by a community of scholars, all of whom contribute to a growing corpus of shared knowledge, even when they disagree with each other. Indeed, many academics, myself included, would say this is especially the case when they disagree with each other. Consequently Chapter 2 discusses, amongst other things, what is commonly referred to as the literature review and how this plays a key role in shaping criminological research even when we adopt a grounded theory approach. But for the moment I think it is important to focus on the fact that criminology is a highly diverse and fragmented discipline – no one viewpoint dominates, no one theory explains all. For this brings us to what I like to call the triangle of criminology.
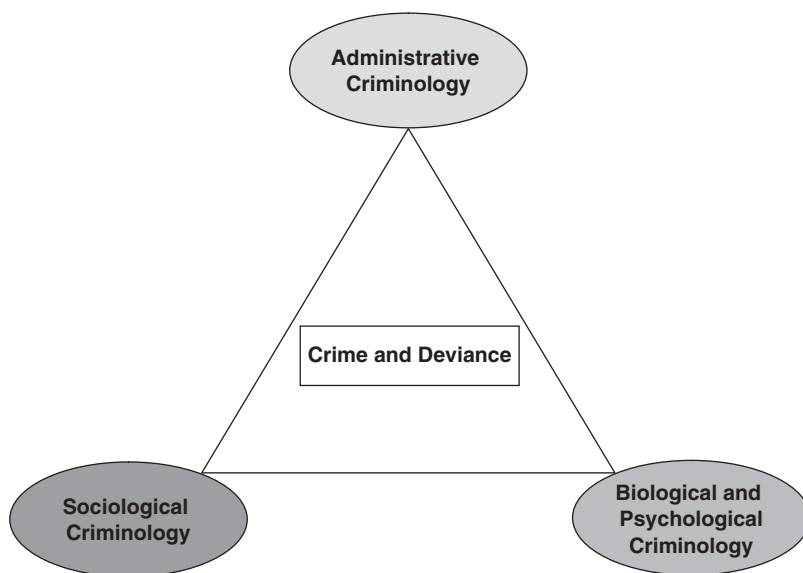
The Triangle of Criminology

When asked about the undergraduate criminology degree course I teach I often find myself talking to prospective students (and sometimes their parents) about the triangle of criminology. I find this is a useful device for reinforcing the multi-disciplinary nature of criminology. So I explain that, like a triangle, criminology can be said to be made up of three interconnected 'angles': administrative crimi-nology, biological and psychological criminology, and finally, sociological crim-inology. I find the metaphor of a triangle works quite well as it reinforces how each discipline is connected to each other and all are concerned (but in different ways) by a shared concern with crime and deviance, which consequently can be said to lie at the centre of the triangle (see Figure 1.1). Typically I point out that saying the subject matter of criminology is crime is more than a little problematic. Although it may seem like common sense to say criminologists are concerned with crime, we need to ask ourselves if we really want to restrict our thinking to a topic whose content and boundaries are defined by the state and its institutionalised agencies of social control, i.e. the legal system, the police and so on. Shouldn't criminology as an independent academic discipline be concerned with critically analysing the lawmakers and lawkeepers just as much as the lawbreakers? Although we may feel we have a strong innate sense of right and wrong the fact of the mat-ter is that crime is a social construct and indeed definitions surrounding what constitutes a criminal act change over time. For example, homosexuality was once considered a crime in the United Kingdom. What is more, definitions of what is a crime also vary by geographical location. For example, the age of consent for sexual intercourse varies worldwide, indeed within Europe alone it is 13 in Spain and 16 in the United Kingdom. It is for these reasons that criminologists usually add the concept of deviance when discussing the focus of their disciplinary subject.

Deviance is usually defined as behaviour which may not necessarily be illegal but nevertheless deviates from what is perceived as normal group behaviour. Hence including it in the focus of criminology allows us to examine both the social construction of 'the other' and so the processes by which certain behaviours come to be labelled as 'criminal' while others do not.

Figure 1.1   The triangle of criminology

Being the subject matter of criminology, crime and deviance lie at the centre of our criminological triangle. Our next step is to consider the angles of our triangle. Let us begin with administrative criminology. Within criminology, administrative criminology is often taken to refer to a distinctive policy-oriented disciplinary development that emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980s; it is concerned with situational crime prevention, that is, the measures taken at a local level to close down the opportunity for crime through preventive strategies such as the use of CCTV, the employment of shop security, the design of urban or city centre space, and so on. However, what I am referring to here under the banner of administrative criminology is the structure and processes of the criminal justice system and its associated agencies of social control, i.e. the police, legal system and so on. Students studying undergraduate criminology programmes tend to expect that they will be taught about how the criminal justice system in the United Kingdom is organised and operates in practice, what its underlying principles and

key procedures and who its key social actors are, as well as how certain key historical and contemporary legislative developments have impacted on the policing of crime and punishment of offenders. As part of this, students may well also explore the origins of criminology as an academic discipline and so be introduced to the next angle in our triangle: biological and psychological criminology.

A concern with crime and punishment may have existed for as long as recorded history yet it is only in the last 150 years or so that a distinctively scientific form of criminology has emerged. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, from the nineteenth century onwards we see an increasing emphasis on incorporating within criminology the methodological techniques of modern science with the result that a growing emphasis was placed by criminologists on collecting empirical evidence and engaging in practical experiment. While the focus of administrative criminology could be said to be on how society manages and deals practically with the problem of crime and deviance via a criminal justice system, with biological and psychological criminology the emphasis is very much about looking at the causes of crime and using the tools of modern science to do so. Most importantly, it is about looking at the causes of crime within the context of evolutionary, genetic or psychological predispositions to commit crime. Forerunners of this approach in the nineteenth century were Lombroso, Ferri and Garofalo, who sought to identify 'the criminal type' – which they felt was a throwback to an earlier stage in human evolution and so inferior to the normal population – through collecting and scrutinising the physical features of offenders. Their research led them to conclude that common indicators of 'the criminal type' included large cheekbones, flat noses and large eyebrows. Following Darwin's evolutionary theory such 'abnormalities' were perceived to be inherited from one generation to the next, creating a predisposition to crime within certain sections of society (who just also happened to be the poor, dispossessed and socially excluded).

More recently a range of biochemical factors have been discussed as possible biological triggers for crime: hormone imbalances, serotonin levels, testosterone, vitamin B deficiency and hyperactivity have all been suggested as risk factors for a propensity for aggression and violence, which in turn may lead to criminality (Rowe 2002). It is also worth noting that the growth of psychiatry as a medical discipline was tied up with the development of early research surrounding the criminal type, for its focus on organic and so biological explanations for mental illness fitted well with a growing political and cultural emphasis on value-neutral science and natural (as opposed to religious) explanations for human behaviour and social problems. Over the last several decades psychological explanations have joined the debate through locating possible causes of criminal behaviour within responses to traumatic life experiences, such as childhood abandonment or instances of physical and sexual abuse (Howitt 2006).

The viewpoint that certain sections of society are inherently 'bad' or 'criminal' may not carry the immediate sense of legitimacy it perhaps once did amongst political

elites and professional groups, including criminologists. Yet the idea that criminality is immutably connected to some underlying element of human nature, which may lie dormant within certain individuals unless certain biological or psychological trigger events occur, nevertheless to some degree still influences commonly held notions concerning why some people commit crime. The popularity of this viewpoint for political elites which advocate a more punitive approach towards crime to some extent lies in the fact that the analytical focus stays on individuals rather than the social environments in which they live. This leads us to our next angle in our criminological triangle: sociological criminology. Here the emphasis remains on looking at the causes of crime, but the focus shifts from looking for this inside individuals towards searching for it within the broader social conditions in which people live.

It would be oversimplistic to say that biological and psychological perspectives concerning crime do not recognise the importance of 'the social' when examining human behaviour. But their focus typically remains on an individual's familial background and social relationships, particularly during childhood and key transitional life stages from puberty to adulthood, rather than the key sociological themes of power, inequality and social structure. Within sociological criminology, emphasis is placed on exploring crime in relation to the unequal gender, class, race and ethnicity relations present in society. These social constructs are held to shape human behaviour as well as the opportunities and choices an individual has available to them. A concern with exploitive social relationships, social exclusion, as well as the unequal distribution of social opportunity, lies at the centre of sociological criminology. Hence, sometimes the terms critical criminology, radical criminology and sociological criminology are used interchangeably to describe this approach – while the more recent development of cultural criminology serves to further complicate matters. Key analytical concepts for this approach to criminology include patriarchy, institutional racism, social disorganisation, differential association and differential opportunity, strain, status frustration, labelling and social control. This brings to the foreground the point that criminology is a broad church incorporating a variety of perspectives or movements, including the sociology of deviance, left and right realism, feminism, subculture analysis, victimology, cultural criminology, postmodernism and peacemaking criminology (Tierney 2006).

This broad brushstroke outline of the criminological triangle reinforces three key issues relating to the study of crime and deviance. First, when exploring a topic we need to consider the relevance of each angle of our triangle even if we wish to focus our attention on one aspect of it. For example, with the issue of domestic violence we may be primarily concerned with exploring the impact of culture and ideology in the form of patriarchy on the experience of victim reporting (sociological criminology). But we must also consider how the criminal justice system responds to this offence, both punitively and in terms of offender rehabilitation,

particularly if we are interested in critically evaluating whether how victims are treated by the legal system has changed over time (which is a concern for administrative criminology, but in some respects sociological forms of criminology too). It would also be useful to identify what is known about the profile of the offender, the effectiveness of offender treatment and victim support programmes, as well as what the personal, emotional and psychological impact for victims may be of reporting this offence and subsequently giving evidence in court (psychological criminology).

Recognising the need to view 'all the angles' surrounding a topic leads us to the second key issue highlighted by our discussion of the triangle of criminology. Namely, criminology may have its own disciplinary academic corpus in the form of published research, journal articles, books and so on, but it nevertheless does borrow empirical findings, viewpoints and conclusions from a range of other academic disciplines, including social policy, law, biology, philosophy, medicine, sociology, genetics, education, history, economics, psychology (social and forensic) and geography, to name but a few. Criminology is inherently a fragmented discipline and is arguably better off for being so. For one of the key consequences of the fact that no one theoretical perspective holds sway over criminology's intellectual foundations is that it always welcomes alternative opinions and viewpoints, which in turn means it remains ever open to new theoretical insights and empirical research possibilities.

This point brings us to our third and final issue, which also is one of the key themes running through the subsequent chapters of this book. Criminology may well be a fragmented discipline but as a social science what distinguishes it from everyday commonsense discourse is a commitment shared by its members to rigorously exploring and testing disciplinary assumptions and theories through engaging in systematic empirical inquiry. This does not mean armchair theorising is not valued as highly as empirical inquiry. Both are needed in equal measure for any academic discipline to flourish and grow. But it does mean that criminological research is often designed and undertaken by individuals with academic and policy-making communities in mind, a fact we perhaps can see most clearly in the role of the published literature surrounding the topic in helping a researcher formulate their initial research question, design a project to answer it, analyse their findings, as well as subsequently consider what the implications of their results may be.

Purpose and Structure of this Book

The act of doing criminological research requires that we undertake a commitment to incorporating the work of others within our own thinking about a topic, and open up our research findings to critical peer appraisal. Ensuring that we can

justify how we went about analysing our research data is a central feature of this process: when we present our findings it is necessary to outline not only why we asked the research question we did and collected our data in a certain way; we must also critically discuss how we went about analysing our data. This book seeks to make this process a little easier for the first-time researcher through outlining the main features of different approaches to qualitative and quantitative data analysis against the background of their emergence within the development of criminology as an academic discipline. Hence it has two key aims:

1　To provide an introduction to different forms of qualitative and quantitative data analysis, as well as to place this discussion within the context of the development of criminology as an academic discipline.
2　To outline key features of the research process and provide guidance and further readings to help students plan a research project.

The following chapters are structured in such a way as to fulfil these aims. Chapter 2 discusses the importance of deskwork and the need to carefully organise and plan a research project before conducting fieldwork. The chapter also focuses on the process of moving from initially identifying a broad research area to subsequently focusing this down into a researchable topic with a clear question to answer. The role played in this process by study skills, project management, assessment criteria and the existing academic literature are also outlined. Following on from this dis‐cussion Chapter 3 acts as a bridge between Chapter 2 and subsequent chapters, which are concerned with different data analysis techniques; hence it discusses project planning and research design and management issues, including making contacts, gaining access and obtaining ethical approval to conduct research. In doing so the chapter examines important aspects of the history and conduct of criminological research, including the role of criminological theory in initial research design.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are concerned with qualitative data analysis, and discuss, respectively, grounded theory analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. Each chapter follows a similar format, first outlining the history of each approach to the analysis of words, before detailing their main analytical principles using illustrative examples from published research to help the reader apply what they have learned in their own research. Chapters 7 and 8 follow a similar format although they discuss, respectively, univariate and bivariate quantitative data analysis. The focus here is on exploring how to summarise statistical data and identify possible relationships between two variables, such as gender and the fear of crime. Finally Chapter 9 returns to the theme of deskwork and discusses the purpose of doing criminological research alongside the writing-up and dissemination of research findings.

Box 1.1

Self-study tasks, case studies, recommended readings and chapter review activities

Each chapter has study boxes which contain self-study tasks, illustrative case study examples of key points, recommended readings, as well as chapter review activities.

Self-study tasks are provided to help the reader: first, develop their own research project and identify an appropriate topic and question given their practical circumstances; second, design an empirical study using a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approach; and third, write up and present research findings after completing the data analysis process.

Illustrative case studies are provided throughout the book to help the reader understand key issues and points as well as how the forms of data analysis outlined are conducted so they can apply them in their own research. The examples used are drawn from internationally published academic sources to help the reader contextualise their learning within criminology as a critical discipline concerned with examining criminological life using a variety of sources and materials.

Recommended further readings are provided at key points during chapters to act as resources and help the reader examine a topic or issue in greater detail. Not all the further readings are book-based; some useful website references are also provided.

Chapter review self-study activities can be found at the end of each chapter. These take the form of tasks which can be completed using the content of a chapter as well as the further readings provided therein. Completing these task activities will help the reader to further consolidate their learning.

Taken together the contents of this book are an invitation to the reader to enter the world of numbers and words as a means to capture and explore criminological life in all its colourful hues. It is up to the reader to decide how they respond. Although in my experience I have found that most students relish the challenge of doing their own research project, nevertheless often a little nervousness and self–doubt creeps in. Furthermore, just as there are no easy and straightforward answers to the problem of crime, similarly there are no easy options when it comes to entering the world of *doing* criminological research and data analysis. However, the first–time researcher should not underestimate their ability to successfully manage a research project. After all, they already use words and numbers to explore and understand the world around them. Indeed, this ability is essential to completing a whole host of everyday tasks. Nor should the first–time researcher underestimate

the value of a 'can do' attitude, dogged persistence, as well as a good dollop of sheer luck and serendipity, particularly if they are going to successfully negotiate all the potential and actual problems which lie before them when they begin a practical research project. This said, each person must learn for themselves the truth of the axiom that no research project ever goes completely to plan no matter how well planned it may be. The resources, guidelines and rules of thumb scat– tered throughout this book should, however, make this journey of self–discovery a little easier.

CHAPTER READING LIST

Berman, G. (2011) *Prison Population Statistics*. London: House of Commons Library.

Crowe, I. and Semmens, N. (2008) *Researching Criminology*. London: McGraw-Hill.

Davies, P., Francis, P. and Jupp, V. (2011) *Doing Criminological Research*. London: Sage Publications.

ESRC (2011) *Undergraduate Quantitative Methods Initiative Curriculum Innovation and Researcher Development Initiative Call Specification*. Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/15407/latest-opportunity-13.aspx

James, D.V. (2010) Diversion of mentally disordered people from the criminal justice system in England and Wales: an overview, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 33(4): 241–8.

Howitt, D. (2006) *Introduction to Forensic and Criminal Psychology*. London: Prentice Hall.

King, R. and Wincup, E. (2007) *Doing Research on Crime and Justice* (2nd edn). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacInnes, J. (2009) *Proposals to Support and Improve the Teaching of Quantitative Research Methods at Undergraduate Level in the UK.* ESRC Strategic Advisor Report. Available at http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Undergraduate_quantitative_research_methods_tcm8-2722.pdf

Rowe, D. (2002) *Biology and Crime*. Los Angeles: Roxbury.

Tierney, J. (2006) *Criminology: Theory and Context* (2nd edn). Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.

Williams, M., Payne, G., Hodgkinson, L. and Poade, D. (2006) *Student Perceptions and Experiences of Quantitative Methods*. University of Plymouth.

Williams, M., Payne, G. and Hodgkinson, L. (2008) Does sociology count? Student attitudes to the teaching of quantitative methods, *Sociology*, 42(5): 1003–22.

2

Getting Started: Focusing on Deskwork

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses the importance of deskwork and the need to carefully organise and plan a research project before conducting fieldwork. The main features of deskwork are introduced. The process of moving from initially identifying a broad research area to subsequently focusing this down into researchable topic with a clear question to answer is discussed. The role played in this process by study skills, project management, assessment criteria and the existing academic literature is outlined. The goal of criminological research in answering inductive, qualitative, 'what is happening?' questions as well as deductive, quantitative, 'why is it happening?' questions is explored. Exercises, further readings and review activities are provided to aid initial project development.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

The importance of deskwork

Formulating an initial research area

- *Review your study skills*
- *Get organised and develop a filing system*
- *Know your assessment criteria*

Developing a research topic with a clear question to answer

- *Focusing on what is doable: the square of crime*
- *The literature review and research question development*

The Importance of Deskwork

This chapter gives a general introduction to initial research project development. It provides a necessary background to the main focus of subsequent chapters: the collection and analysis of criminological research data. The chapter is written with the first-time researcher in mind and contains review activities and recommended further readings. It introduces some important elements of doing criminological research that will be explored further in subsequent chapters, including the need to question commonsense knowledge and shared assumptions surrounding crime and deviance, alongside the role within this of inductive, qualitative, 'what is happening?' questions and deductive, quantitative, 'why is it happening?' questions.

The previous chapter discussed how criminology is a fragmented discipline which draws on a range of differing theoretical perspectives and expert discourses when dealing with its subject matter. Some criminologists focus on the complex interplay between social inequality and injustice and commonly shared notions of deviance and criminality, highlighting as they do how social categories such as race, class and gender play key roles in the production and consumption of crime in advanced post-industrial societies. Others are not so concerned with wider social circumstance and power relations. Instead they busy themselves with exploring offender profiling and biological and psychological explanations of crime. But regardless of their differences criminologists share in common a questioning attitude towards the world around them. They are interested in why things are the way they are and happen the way they do. So they may ask questions like 'Why in the US are African-American men more likely to be given the death penalty than white men?', or 'Why do graffiti artists "tag" social spaces and objects when they know it is illegal to do so?', or 'Why do women feel reluctant to report domestic violence?' What is more, to answer their questions criminologists comparatively analyse death penalty statistics over time and collect the life stories of individuals on death row, spend time with people who graffiti public places such as shopping centres, as well as work with women who have been a victim of domestic violence to explore how their voices have been silenced.

Criminological research is not just done for the sake of academic disciplinary progress but to influence government and lobby for changes in social policy and the criminal justice system (although conducting criminological research for its own sake is certainly not a bad thing). This brings to the foreground issues relating

to research ethics and the complex social–political role played by criminology as a knowledge-producing and –consuming discipline: is a value-neutral model of criminology possible or even desirable? These questions have been touched on in Chapter 1 and are looked at in more detail as the politics and ethics of doing criminological research are explored in later chapters. For now it is enough to recognise that it is its potential to engender social change which makes criminology so rewarding: it can make a real practical difference to people's everyday lives. Yet it is only through conducting high-quality research that this goal can be realised. It is the task of this chapter to lay the foundations on which this can be accomplished by offering the reader guidance on how to initially develop their research project.

It is presumed the reader is an undergraduate or postgraduate student who has to complete a piece of empirical fieldwork on their own, but under the supervision of an experienced tutor, for an assessed piece of coursework. In this book the term fieldwork is used quite broadly to mean the collection of the information (or data if you prefer) to answer your research question. This definition covers what are referred to as primary forms of data (when you collect your own data) and secondary forms of data (when you use data which has been collected by others for your own purposes). Designing and carrying out a project to answer a research question can seem like a daunting task to the first-time criminological researcher. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that fieldwork is often approached with an equal mixture of excitement and anxiety by students who haven't done it before (as well as those who have!). Following the guidance offered in this chapter should bring to the foreground the enjoyable and rewarding elements of conducting criminological research. It is written to help alleviate your fears by taking you through how to manage your research project and avoid common mistakes and pitfalls.

It is a key theme of this book that fieldwork begins and ends with deskwork. Of course in today's information-rich age of mobile interconnectivity it is no longer appropriate to imagine a researcher sitting alone at a large wooden desk, surrounded by their data, books and other papers, furiously 'doing research', while a well-inked calendar full of plans, appointments and deadlines hangs on a nearby wall as a constant reminder of just how far behind with their work they are. Without doubt the computer, the internet and mobile technology have together transformed the nature and location of deskwork. A researcher may well still work at a desk but the possession of a laptop and mobile phone makes at least some elements of their workspace portable and even virtual. Indeed it is now possible for a criminologist sitting at their desk in London to interview somebody sitting in their living room in New York, or indeed anywhere else in the world, using the internet and associated online communication technologies such as Skype. The rapid growth of information technology over the last three decades has undoubtedly transformed the practice of doing criminological research and will continue

to do so for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless it is important for the beginning researcher to recognise that regardless of the extent to which they are plugged into the world of mobile internet technology, deskwork remains *the* place where their plans come together. It therefore needs to be approached as carefully and methodically as possible.

We will now begin to look at some of the key features of deskwork (see Box 2.1). The rest of this chapter will focus on important initial aspects of deskwork: formulating initial ideas, reviewing the literature and developing a research question. Chapter 3 focuses on qualitative and quantitative research strategies and data collection, discussing as it does so project planning and research design, making contacts, gaining access, alongside the management of fieldwork. Chapters 4, 5 and 6, which focus on qualitative data, alongside Chapters 7 and 8 which focus on quantitative data, discuss different forms of data analysis used by criminologists. Finally Chapter 9 discusses the writing-up of research findings.

Box 2.1

Seven key elements of deskwork

It is useful to divide criminological research into two parts: fieldwork and deskwork. Deskwork happens before, during and after fieldwork. Key elements of deskwork include:

1 **Formulating an initial research area, focusing on study skills and dealing with assessment criteria.**
2 **Reviewing the literature and developing a research topic with a clear question to answer.**
3 Project planning and research design.
4 Making contacts, gaining access and obtaining ethical approval to conduct your research.
5 Managing your fieldwork: timetabling.
6 Conducting data analysis.
7 Writing up your findings and research dissemination.

Organisation of book chapters

This book outlines key features of qualitative and quantitative criminological research and data analysis. Each element of deskwork is looked at:

- Chapter 2 discusses deskwork elements 1 and 2.
- Chapter 3 discusses deskwork elements 3, 4 and 5.
- Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 discuss deskwork elements 3 and 6.
- Chapter 9 discusses deskwork element 7.

Formulating an Initial Research Area

Having project work to do can be the only time during their studies that a student gets to set the question they must answer. In my experience I have found the majority welcome this opportunity and can quite easily identify an area of criminology which personally interests them and they would like to look into in greater detail. The hints and tips on formulating a research project found in the rest of this chapter should help those students who are perhaps struggling with this task, in addition to supporting those who have a clearer idea of what they want to do, but as first-time researchers feel they would perhaps benefit from some additional guidance. To begin with I always ask students to identify at least one broad area of criminology that interests them. Perhaps a series of lectures or even an entire teaching module has inspired your criminological imagination? Books, academic journals, magazines, newspaper articles, films, documentaries and TV programmes can all inspire you to look at a particular area of criminal life for a research project. Never choose a research area because you think your tutor likes it and that alone will help you get a good grade (in fact often the reverse is true). The first rule of choosing your research area is the same as with any other task: when you have the choice of what to do always choose something that stimulates your interest and creativity. But if nothing immediately catches your imagination it is useful to remember we can initially define a research area as a generalised thematic grouping which comes under the broad disciplinary remit of criminology, such as 'victimology', 'white collar and corporate crime', 'prisons and imprisonment', 'youth and crime', or 'mental illness and crime'. These groupings are often used as chapter headings in introductory criminology textbooks to help familiarise the reader with the main features of substantive disciplinary topics and their associated key themes, issues and questions, such as Tim Newburn's *Criminology* (2007), James Treadwell's *Criminology* (*Sage Course Companions*) (2006) or Larry Siegel's *Criminology: The Core* (2010). For this reason they can be useful for helping students to initially identify a research area they would like to look into in greater depth. But this is only the first step involved in developing a project: a research area must be focused down into a topic with a clear and answerable research question. We will discuss that process shortly. First we need to pay attention to three important aspects of deskwork which together shape the initial development of a project: 'study skills', 'getting organised' and 'assessment criteria'.

Review your study skills

It is a goal of higher education to enable students to become critical thinkers and independent learners.

(Matthews and Jessel 1998: 242)