Report on the Proceedings of the Second ESRC Research Seminar

The second seminar in the ESRC-sponsored series on **Governing Through Anti-Social Behaviour** was held at the University of Brighton on 24th January 2008. The seminar focused on themes relating to **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) management and young people, families and schooling**. The day was organised around larger plenary sessions in the morning led by Barry Goldson, Judy Nixon and Helen Carr. After lunch the programme was stranded to allow smaller workshops on young people, families and parenting, and schools, bullying and ASB. One of the two final sessions had to be cancelled at the last minute due to a family illness which prevented Joe Yates from presenting his paper on ASB and behavioural disorders in children) and so, the final session, to close the workshop was led by Andrew Millie.

Barry Goldson: Child Governance as Industry. Barry presented a lecture addressing the conceptual conflation over the past decade, of notions of 'disorder', 'anti-social behaviour' and 'crime'. In particular he drew attention to an increasing emphasis on 'partnerships' and multi-agency/disciplinary approaches; the institutional 'corporatisation' of youth justice in the course of which an unprecedented corpus of new statute and policy have, together, underpinned "industrial-scale expansion in the apparatus of youth social control". Such phenomena have focussed sharply, although not exclusively, on the governance, regulation, control – and ultimately the punishment - of children. The paper sought to review these developments and analyse their legitimacy with reference to national and international research evidence.

Five initial themes were addressed within the paper:
- 'Child' 'governance' as a new 'industry' (UNCRC, Rose and Christie)
- The complexities, obstructions and variabilities of contemporary policy rationales
- The simultaneous, yet contradictory, state postures and presences: for example - on the one hand laissez-faire neglect (receding and retreating) **and**, on the other interventionist zeal (imposing and intruding). Abdicating *and* aggrandising at one and the same time
- The paradoxical imperatives/purposes of multi-agency partnerships. Obfuscating, dispersing, fragmenting and diversifying *responsibility*
  And simultaneously, Sharpening, consolidating, intensifying and corporatising *power*
- The decentralisation of policy formation and the mediation of policy translation/impact

These developments, he argued, were linked to four key policy drivers:
1. A new language of RISK

2. The development of Multi-disciplinarity and inter-agency 'partnerships' (a new industrial infrastructure)
3. The presumed necessity of practice of earlier and earlier intervention.
4. Evidence of international and comparative analysis, policy and practice.

That said he quoted Sutton, Utting and Farrington, often assumed to be amongst the principle academic architects of the new policies, to dispute the predictive interventionism of current practice:

'Any notion that better screening can enable policy makers to identify young children destined to join the 5 per cent of offenders responsible for 50-60 per cent of youth crime is fanciful. Even if there were no ethical objections to putting "potential delinquent" labels round the necks of young children, there would continue to be statistical barriers. Research into the continuity of anti-social behaviour shows substantial flows out of - as well as in to - the pool of children who develop chronic conduct problems. This demonstrates the dangers of assuming that anti-social five year olds are the criminals or drug abusers of tomorrow [...]'   (Sutton, Utting and Farrington, 2004).

Theoretical and conceptual critiques and languages of these developments within contemporary applied social science:

- ■ 'Childhood and youth is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence' (Nikolas Rose)
- ■ The 'dispersal of control' (Stan Cohen)
- ■ The 'disciplinary society' (Michel Foucault)
- ■ The 'surveillance society' (David Lyon)
- ■ The 'surveillance state' (Fredric Jameson)

He ended by calling for an informed academic critique of the policy development focusing upon:

- ■ A better understanding of socio-economic context in the production of both ASB and vulnerabilities and insecurities
- ■ A policy of Universality – more comprehensively engaging the 'social'
- ■ More consistent diversion strategies

In articulating the case for the de-industrialisation of youth justice Barry cited the insights derived from the Edinburgh study of youth transitions which concluded:

'Doing less rather than more in individual cases may mitigate the potential for damage that system contact brings… Our findings suggest that targeted early intervention strategies … are likely to widen the net of potential recipients even further. Greater numbers of children will be identified as at risk and early involvement will result in constant recycling into the system, thereby swelling rather than diminishing the number of young people retained in the system… More significantly, our findings provide some support for the international longitudinal research… In particular, they confirm that repeated and more intensive forms of contact with agencies of *youth justice* may be damaging to young people in the longer term… As we have shown, forms of diversion … without recourse to formal intervention… are associated with desistance from serious offending. Such findings are supportive of a maximum diversion approach'.   (Lesley McAra and Susan McVie, 2007, emphasis added)

The next contributions were by Helen Carr (University of Kent) and Judy Nixon (Sheffield Hallam University) their presentations closely related to one another covering on the one hand: Women's work: locating gender in the discourse of anti-social behaviour and, secondly, the media demonising of bad parenting associated with the national Family Intervention Projects initiative.

Helen Car's paper sought to focus upon the ways in which 'single mothers seem to be especially vulnerable to the sanction of eviction'. According to Young: 'Governmental and criminological discourses pick out the figure of the single mother as the contemporary embodiment of responsibility for the criminal child' (Young 1996:147). Carr's presentation sought to point out that this situation also applied to the single mother of the anti-social child. Moreover her reliance

on the social provision of housing enables her to be disciplined through the loss of her home. The focus on the responsibility of the single mother dependent upon welfare resources seems more than coincidental. The purpose of this presentation was to highlight the disciplinary manifestations of social interventions in housing and draw attention to the contemporary role of the social construction of gender as a disciplinary mechanism.

The Presentation began by considering the origins of housing policy, demonstrating that the discursive themes, including the critical disciplinary role of gender, which inform contemporary approaches to anti-social behaviour, were evident in the early stages of government interventions. She then turned to an analysis of two examples of contemporary discourse on anti-social behaviour. The first example is judicial discourse which is powerful because it is authoritative in constructing gender (represented by *Manchester City Council v Higgins and Moat Housing Group South Ltd. v Harris,* both housing repossession cases). She then turned to the wider public discourse of the media by way of considering **Take a Break's** (a popular woman's magazine) 'Mum's Army', a discursive construct which draws its power from its authenticity linking motherhood and the survival of civil society in a particularly potent way that resonates with Victorian fears of the irresponsibility and contagiousness of the 'residuum'.

Addressing similar themes, Take a Break Magazine sought to organise a Mum's Army intended to give mothers a new role as collective actor, determined to vent their frustration at the continuing growth of 'yob culture' and demand that every effort is made to restore decent community values. Taken together theses two powerful and complementary examples of discourse, one speaking with an authoritative voice, the other with an authentic voice demonstrates that gender permeates government's problematisation of and response to anti-social behaviour.

In a similar vein, Judy Nixon's presentation drew attention to the contrasting political rationales (or discourses) which have surfaced around the Family Intervention and Parenting Policy – one which we might, Like Carr, describe as 'authoritative', politically legitimate, evidence based and politically rational as compared with a more populist, exclusive and demonising rhetoric of 'neighbours from hell', 'feral kids' and family 'sin-bins'. With with a minority of 'problem families' described in emotive, and potentially self-defeating, terms as 'hardcore' offenders.

The first session after lunch comprised three parallel workshops:

Young People and ASB	Families, Parenting and ASB	Schooling, Bullying and ASB
Brian McIntosh (Cardiff) Carlie Goldsmith (Brighton)	Amanda Holt (Brighton) Rachel Condry	Carol Hayden (Portsmouth) Denise Martin (Brighton)

SESSION A: Young People and ASB
Presented by Brian McIntosh (Cardiff) and Carlie Goldsmith (Brighton)

Both presenters made the point that the issue of ASB is frequently presented as 'about' young people but only seldom does it feature their own experiences. Although a certain amount of literature is now filtering though on young people's perceptions of and experiences of ASB management both are in substantial agreement that this has, thus far, had relatively little impact upon the broader debates about ASB management policy. In agreement with Burney, "Anti-social behaviour has become a convenient peg on which to hang generalised prejudices about

young people and their activities which make restrictive policies popular" (Burney, 2005:67). The focus towards anti-social youths has led to them becoming the disproportionate recipients of many of the new statutory and non statutory interventions, Furthermore, the way that the media, constantly link the term 'ASBO' with images of hooded adolescents consolidates "the anti-social master status of such youths".

McIntosh argued that there is sometimes a suggestion that conducting such 'appreciative' research with the youth perpetrators is equated with not taking the issue seriously enough. Although acknowledgement of the perpetrator perspective, along with empirical research that engages with the perspectives of other actors involved, such as victims, needs to be brought together in ASB policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

In a similar manner, Carlie Goldsmith explained how her research, based upon an in-depth ethnography of 2 age cohorts of young people growing up on a particular relatively deprived estate in the South of England, suggested that vital transitions between youth and adulthood were being further problematised for young people by both the climate of ASB suspicion centring upon youth and the practical consequences of a much more intensive enforcement of 'public order' on the public spaces of the estate.

Young people were identified and targeted as the main perpetrators of ASB. This resulted in increased surveillance and contact with the police. Concerns raised about this strategy by those who worked closely with young people were construed as excusing behaviour (McIntosh's point, above) and there was no attempt to address the wider socio-economic challenges faced by them. As a result, young people formed an increasingly marginalised group within their own neighbourhood raising questions about the extent to which they were an 'easy target' for ASB management in comparison to the (often more problematic and serious) behaviour of adults. Shifting patterns of the use of public neighbourhood space to incorporate increasingly 'hidden' spaces were acknowledged as consequences of the developments in ASB management. Potential longer term consequences were seen as likely to arise from these changes including making the transition from young person to young adult more difficult in already challenging circumstances.

SASSION B: Families, Parenting and ASB
Presented by Rachel Condry and Amanda Holt (Brighton)

This session picked up upon some of the themes arising during the second part of the morning, specifically relating to the genered discourses of responsibility surrounding the family, parenting and ASB. Rachel Condry's work, in part deriving from her earlier work on

Families Shamed explored the consequences for particular families and their members of being designated as anti-social or responsible for ASB. Amanda Holt focussed, related upon the Parenting Order and the discursive construction of the 'bad parent' and 'bad parenting'. She argued that Parenting orders require a more subtle analysis than they often receive, in particular because "parenting Orders only regulate certain groups of parents – predominantly lone mothers with few economic resources – by constructing them as 'at risk' and subjecting them to parenting practices where they can learn how to discipline both themselves and their family members according to standardised norms of child-rearing, which are increasingly difficult to resist as parenting discourse becomes ever more dispersed and pervasive."   The bulk of the scientific, political and lay communities legitimise such interventions and claim that parents are to blame, and yet such messages are typically combined with offers of 'support': support which (ironically) has frequently been requested by such parents over a number of years.

SESSION C: Schooling, Bullying and ASB
Presented by Carol Hayden (Portsmouth) and Denise Martin (Brighton)

This seminar covered a range of areas relating to schools and anti-social behaviour. Carol Hayden discussed her recent research relating to secondary school pupils' perceptions of safety, gang activity and weapons carrying in an English city. The discussion centred on the difficulties of accessing schools and key research findings of the research. Dr Denise Martin discussed her research on teachers' experiences of anti-social behaviour. This included a dialogue about how we define actions and behaviours as anti-social. Andy Briers contributed to the workshop by outlining the development of the Safer Schools initiative and the contribution that the police can make to reducing anti-social behaviour in and around schools. Debates raised in the workshop centred on the wider governance of schools and the ability of individual schools to manage behaviour. The involvement of the police in dealing with anti-social behaviour within was also considered contributing to markedly polarised views on the appropriateness of such interventions.

Carol Hayden's presentation in particular noted how, in the last few years, there have been a number of high profile incidents involving the use of weapons by or against school age children in England. These issues have been framed within a wider concern about the use of guns, knives and gang-related activities involving young people. Schools are seen as potential sites for prevention of the further development of these problems, but there is also concern about the extent to which these issues have penetrated the school environment.

The Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 increased the maximum sentence for weapons carrying and given staff in schools the power to search pupils for weapons. This is the broader context within which the current research has been conducted. The specific context is the fatal stabbing of a 15 year old boy in the City that forms the focus for this research. The survey upon which her presentation was based was designed in response to a request from a multi-agency group working to reduce knife crime and gang related activity in the City. Preventative work with schools was part of the remit of this group. A survey of ordinary ('mainstream') pupils was part of strategy development; it was also a chance to give information to pupils – about where to get help and the legality of weapons carrying. The research was undertaken with the help of the City's youth service. This paper will report on the politics and practice of conducting such school based surveys. It will also present key results from this survey of year 10 (15 year olds) pupils in all 14 mainstream secondary schools in one English City. The survey was conducted in late 2007 and around 1,400 young people completed the survey.

The final session of the day was a plenary by Andrew Millie, University of Loughborough entitled '**Youth and public space'.** According to Millie, anti-social behaviour is often regarded as a problem of predation by a disrespectful minority on a law-abiding majority. In many cases this minority is the young. Youths can certainly behave anti-socially; however, it is possible that some of their behaviour may be interpreted as anti-social because it does not fit the social and cultural - and adult - norms for particular public spaces. There are alternative youthful norms that rarely get considered. It is contended that cities should be risky places and that urban living is all about encounters with other uses for public spaces that are outside our particular expectations. Related parental and other concerns about youth and risk in public spaces are considered. The presentation covered material which has subsequently been published in full in the *British Journal of Criminology* (2008, Vol. 48(3)) entitled 'Anti-Social Behaviour, Behavioural Expectations and an Urban Aesthetic'.