

PAMELA DAVIES PETER FRANCIS

DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

THIRD
EDITION





**DOING
CRIMINOLOGICAL
RESEARCH**

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This is the third edition of *Doing Criminological Research*, and the first one that does not have the name of Victor Jupp on the cover. Victor sadly passed away in 2012, and, although his name was listed as part of the editorial team for the second edition, Victor was not involved in its compilation, writing and production. In the six years since his death, we have concluded that the time is right to move forward with just the two of us as named co-editors. Yet, although Victor's name does not adorn the cover, his influence continues to shape our thinking about doing criminological research. Victor's book, *Methods of Criminological Research*, originally published in 1989 and reprinted on numerous occasions, remains, for us, one of the best research methods texts in criminology. Whilst dated, its quality lies, first, in its originality – it was one of the first published textbooks on methods in criminology; second, in the accessibility of its writing; third, in its depth of ideas and use of illustrations; and, finally, in its application of concepts, theories and methods to real-world examples.

These qualities, we hope, continue to shape iterations of *Doing Criminological Research*. It has been our intention to produce a third edition that is as relevant today as it can be to students and academic colleagues studying and working in Higher Education, as well as to practitioners working in the criminal justice, voluntary and charitable sectors, and to those working in business and corporate institutions. We have broadened its reach and scope, deepened its examination of particular methods and methodologies, and located discussion of their application in a wider range of contemporary criminological topics. Feedback on earlier editions has consistently been excellent; and in writing this edition we have also tried to incorporate the helpful observations and recommendations from the various anonymous reviewers of the second edition. We would like to thank them for their helpful and thoughtful comments.

Of course, the key marker of any textbook is the quality, relevance and accessibility of the content. As we have done for every other edition of *Doing Criminological Research*, we identified a long list of researchers whose work we admired greatly, and whom we knew were involved in doing interesting, novel and high-quality research that is challenging, critical and reflective in equal measure, and importantly impactful both on the discipline and on wider society. In simple terms, we wanted to showcase some of the best work being carried out by criminologists from a range of countries. Each chapter demonstrates the power of having a criminological imagination and confirms the expertise of each contributor in crafting accessible, exciting and impactful chapters that are not only insightful, but also tell it like it is. We would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of

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Pamela Davies and Peter Francis
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GLOSSARY TERMS

decision making	primary data
research questions	secondary data
reflexivity	interview
generalizability	participant observation
research design	ethnography
validity	case study
research proposal	

1

DECISION MAKING AND REFLEXIVITY IN DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PAMELA DAVIES AND PETER FRANCIS

INTRODUCTION

Criminology as a subject of study is diverse, wide-ranging, international and fragmented. It is carried out by a variety of researchers (for example, students, academics, policy analysts and practitioners) who study and work within a variety of institutions (for example, universities, central and local government, criminal justice agencies, voluntary and third-sector bodies), working with a variety of different discipline bases (for example, sociology, politics, psychology, geography, economics, history, law and business). Criminologists are likely to ask questions about the following: the nature of crime and its extent; the perpetrators of crime; victims of crime; institutions of the criminal justice system and their workings; and how each of these interacts with wider social structural dimensions such as power, inequality, age, social class, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. Typical research questions might include ‘How much crime is there and how is it geographically and socially distributed?’; ‘What kinds of people commit crimes?’; ‘Are there any patterns to victimization in society?’; ‘In what ways does the criminal justice system discriminate against categories of people?’. Such research questions are broad but are an essential element in decisions about what to study and what to research.

Your criminological imagination can be stimulated in all manner of ways and yet, for some of us, turning ideas into research projects can be quite daunting, and difficult. Starting to do criminological research may be individualized, but, more likely than not, it often starts as a collaborative effort, whether working alongside a supervisor, with co-investigators as part of a wider research team, or with research partners, sometimes stretching across geographical boundaries and sometimes across strategic corporate organizations and businesses. Doing criminological research is something we can all do, but it does require particular disciplinary knowledge, abilities and skills, and we all need to engage in critical reflection and continue to grow and develop our own thinking and approach to doing it. Often, that can be done by learning from the mistakes and errors that we make in doing research – it does not always go as planned. We can also learn from what our peers – supervisors, colleagues, reviewers, markers, etc. – say about it. You may find yourself taking risks that pay off or that lead to disappointing results. Your criminological imagination may sometimes need to be reined in and tempered as you realize the practical considerations, and ethical and professional standards that are demanded and expected by your supervisors, peers and professional bodies.

In putting together this book, we have been keen to address the needs of those of you who are fairly new to doing criminological research, but whose criminological imagination is flourishing. You may well be an undergraduate criminology student or a postgraduate researcher. However, you may also be an academic lecturer who is teaching doing criminological research or supervising masters or postgraduate

researchers. And we have also been keen to acknowledge that much criminological research is now conducted within organizations, third-sector bodies and public and private institutions. We have therefore attempted to acknowledge that there are a variety of researchers who would find a book on doing criminological research helpful and useful. With that in mind, we have not only tried to bring together the end-to-end cycle of doing criminological research within a single volume, we have also been keen to build on the real strengths of earlier editions of this book – that is, bringing together some of the best researchers doing criminology and letting them tell it like it is – warts and all. For us, this is the best way to learn – from the best there are, and from honest and reflective accounts of doing criminological research in the field. There is no better way – apart from doing it yourself. In delivering our vision for the book, we kept in mind a number of golden threads – or cross-cutting themes – that we wanted the book and its contributors to address. These are discussed below.

Golden threads and cross-cutting themes

The first golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that doing research involves engaging in a process of **decision making**. *Doing Criminological Research* commences by stressing the importance of: preparing and planning your research; designing your research project such that it will shed a light on your **research questions**; reflective thinking about decisions you have made and are making; and forward thinking about how you will undertake the research and analyse, write up and present it. Focusing on decision making at the preparation and planning stage encourages you to take decisions to rule out, as far as possible, potential risks and threats to the validity of your conclusions (see more below). One key initial decision concerns the choice of subject matter of research, or what is sometimes referred to as the research problem. This decision is pivotal because the research subject or problem provides the main focus for your research project and is a major influence on subsequent decisions about the ways in which your project is to be accomplished.

Another key decision that the book is concerned with is the kinds of methods to use and the sorts of data to collect. Crucially, each decision must be properly reasoned and justified to ensure that the research is as valid, reliable and robust as it can be. All of the chapters explore the many ways in which criminological research is entered into and carried out. They consider the exciting and innovative ways in which criminological researchers execute their research. This book assembles a collection of chapters that illustrate the importance of planning, preparing, doing and presenting criminological research, with each of the contributors giving some thought to these various stages. Importantly, they do this by drawing on their own experiences of doing criminology in the field, and by describing and reflecting on the decisions they made throughout that process.



The second golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that of the excitement, fun and reward of doing high-quality criminological research. Despite the need for good decision making, in what is often an uncertain and messy environment of working, doing criminological research is really exciting. Whether you are a third-year undergraduate student embarking on your dissertation; a postdoctoral researcher undertaking a funding council fellowship; an associate professor or a professor of criminology leading a collaborative research project, outlining the topic and the reasons for the research, developing your thinking and ideas as the evidence unfolds against a research question that you have formulated in light of an identified problem, can be hugely rewarding. Why wouldn't it be – after all, it involves doing what you want to do, in an area that you are interested in, with the intention of generating new and original research outputs and outcomes. Done well, it can stoke the criminological imagination; certainly it can ensure curiosity, challenge and criticality remain central to your thinking and practice – essential for being a good researcher. With this in mind, central to this book is the importance of the criminological imagination to doing criminological research. Indeed, each contributor focuses on how criminological research is accomplished. Each chapter does so through illustrations and exemplifications from those who have experienced doing criminological research in the field – even when their field is an office, library, archive and desk!

A third golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that despite the best-laid plans, the practice and experience of doing criminological research can be, and often is, different to that envisaged. That is, whilst decision making is key, sometimes those decisions may turn out to be wrong, or sometimes you may well need to make additional decisions that run counter to those you first made, to address errors in previous thinking or issues that have arisen in practice. Research is a social activity often influenced by factors external to and outside the control of the investigator. It is not possible to escape the reality that even the best-laid plans and designs have to be actualized in social, institutional, economic, cultural and political contexts. Many of these factors, often in different combinations, can be constraints and can have a profound effect on the outcome of research. Feminist scholars have long argued that 'methodology matters' (Stanley, 1993), yet it remains usual for the messiness of research to be sanitized, de-emotionalized and glossed over in published reports. Following Stanley and Wise (1993), Letherby (2003: 79) reminds us of the "dirtiness" of so-called "hygienic" research'. The untold hours of personal, ethical and reflexive pondering that goes on in preparing for and planning criminological research, around research design and operationalization, entry to the field, during fieldwork, on exiting the field and in the analysis, writing up, dissemination, conclusion and impact of research, are rarely acknowledged. This is often hard and challenging emotional toil and labour which researchers do and experience,

yet often they are encouraged to pretend they do not. Contributors to this volume dwell on some of these details and reflect, where possible, on how they might have overcome them.

The fourth and final golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is the importance of **reflexivity**. In the main, social and criminological researchers are concerned with individuals – although not always at first hand – and these are people with feelings, opinions, motives, likes and dislikes. What is more, typically, criminological research is a form of interaction and what comes to pass as ‘knowledge’ can be the result of interactions in the research process. We have already noted that decision making is a theme that we see as key to conducting criminological research from start to finish. Reflecting on the decisions which have been taken in research and on the problems which have been encountered is an essential element of doing research. In fact, it is often the case that a reflexive account is published as part of a research report or a book; indeed, whole articles, chapters and even books have been written on this very topic. Typically, such an account covers all phases and aspects of the research process. For example, it will outline and discuss how a research problem came to take the shape that it did, how and why certain cases were selected for study and not others, the difficulties faced in data collection, and the various influences on the formulation of conclusions and their publication. Reflexive accounts should not be solely descriptive but should also be analytical and evaluative. Reflexivity is not a self-indulgent exercise akin to showing photographs to others to illustrate the ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ of a recent holiday. Rather, it is a vital part of demonstrating the factors which have contributed to the social production of knowledge. The contributors to this book reflect on, and offer transparent accounts of, the various constraints and impediments to research, the decisions they made, the operational rules they followed and the methodological choices they often had to continuously ‘make up’ during the research process, in order to ensure their research stands up to ethical scrutiny and is valid.



Reading and using *Doing Criminological Research*

Doing Criminological Research is a hugely successful book. This third edition is completely new and refocused. Of course, the previous two editions had strengths, namely:

- the focus on decision making and reflexivity throughout the research process
- the range of examples and case studies used to demonstrate different methods in practice
- the accessibility of the book and the learning features used throughout.

However, this new edition offers much more than those previous volumes, builds further on their strengths, by expanding the scope and depth of methodological interrogation and breadth of contributors doing criminological research in new, innovative, dynamic and novel ways. It is our belief that this third edition represents a single point of reference and a comprehensive resource. We have been keen to identify a common format for each chapter that helps your reading and understanding in order to:

- ensure consistency in approach and to secure a thorough review of all aspects of the academic and scholarly research literature
- strengthen the student-centred nature of the book, allowing for a focused, accessible and user-friendly approach
- provide a more useful and ‘ready-made’ teaching and learning tool
- signpost theoretical, research, practical and reflective aspects of the book.

Where relevant, each chapter offers:

- a concise critical overview and review of the academic and scholarly research on particular related topics
- a robust discussion of the literature on the methodology and methods used
- an examination of the use of the methods in practice
- judicious use of presenting visual material (lists, bullet points, tables, boxes, etc.)
- summary/review sections, questions/activities, suggested further readings, creating a more interactive internal structure generally.

Chapters variously also incorporate the following features:

- enhanced and consistent use of definitions and explanations, key themes, concepts, terminologies, etc.
- greater and more specific cross-referencing for ease and speed of use within and between chapters – signposts (jigsaws) throughout the text direct you to the glossary
- textual illustration and exemplification/case studies
- good use of diagrammatic illustration and visual imagery, such as tables, boxes, extracts
- questions within each chapter as well as tasks to complete.

Doing Criminological Research (third edition) is a book that can be read from start to finish, yet it is also a book that can be dipped into, with individual chapters serving as resources in their own right and relating to specific and particular aspects of doing criminological research. We hope that you enjoy it.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Here, we pull out the salient structural elements of the book and its chapters, and offer new and additional material that we think will help you develop not only your approach to doing criminological research, but also your criminological imagination.

Defining the topic, cases, context and time

Deciding ‘what to study’ and what your research problem is together form the first important decision you have to make. There must be some initial statement of the territory to be examined. This acts as a benchmark against which progress is measured. One of the hallmarks of effective research is the clear formulation of research problems and questions. These will guide you as the researcher to constantly return to key issues, whilst not acting as strait-jackets to inhibit creative inquiry (and possibly reformulation of the research problem) as the project progresses. One of the hallmarks of ineffective research is a research problem which allows an investigator to lose his or her way, with the outcome that conclusions do not address what was intended. A key decision, then, concerns topic – what to study? For most criminologists, the starting point for a research topic is an idea or a topic that is of interest to them, the source of which may be many and varied and can include personal interest, the research literature, social problems or a new development in society.

Typically, research questions begin by being broad and unfocused. What is more, they form a platform for making decisions about who to study, where and when. That is, there are decisions not just about topic but also about cases, context, and time. Broad research questions can be refined and reformulated to be more incisive and penetrative to take the form of, for example, ‘How do urban and rural areas (context) differ in terms of victimization of racially motivated crimes (cases) in the period between 1980 and 2010 (time)?’ In this way, decisions are taken to open up some dimensions of a broad topic to inquiry and not others. Peter Francis in Chapter 2 describes the process of formulating research questions.

End purpose of research

Many factors influence decisions about the topic, cases, context and time, one of the most important of which is the end purpose of research. For example, where an investigator is commissioned to evaluate the introduction of some aspect of crime prevention policy, or a particular initiative, the selection of topic, cases, context and time will typically be specified in advance by the sponsor. Rob White, in Chapter 22, explores in detail the process and opportunities that come with doing criminological evaluation, and, importantly, he offers some reflection on the similarities and

differences between criminological research and evaluation research. Box 1.1 details an example of an evaluation project that was designed by the police. This new approach to tackling domestic abuse by serial perpetrators had five key objectives, and the evaluation needed to be designed such that it could report on the outcomes with respect to these after one year and then again at the end of a two-year period.

Even where there is a commitment to a broad academic aim of making some contribution to knowledge and to theory, it will be necessary to ground empirical inquiry in specific cases, contexts and time periods. The significance of decisions about such 'grounding' lies in the limits of **generalizability**. That is, all research takes place in particular contexts, studying particular cases at specific times, and yet aims to make broad claims beyond the particularistic scope of inquiry. The extent to which it can do so depends on the representativeness and typicality of the contexts, cases and times which have been chosen. The project referred to in Box 1.1 was confined to a northern police region. The evaluation was case (domestic abuse), context (the MATAAC), area (northern area) and time specific (over two years). Though there are general principles that might be replicated in other areas and thus there may be some aspects of the approach that are generalizable, it is not possible to claim that the results can be generalized. The end purpose of this research was for the local commissioners and project team.



BOX 1.1 DESIGNING AN EVALUATION OF A MULTI-AGENCY PROJECT AND STUDY QUESTION

Evaluation of an approach to tackling domestic abuse developed in a northern police area. Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAAC) was launched as a new approach to tackling perpetrators of domestic abuse. MATAAC had five key objectives:

- to prevent further domestic abuse related to offending
- to improve victim safety
- to improve criminal justice system outcomes
- to improve offender behaviour
- to improve partnership engagement.

Study question: What sorts of data would you need to collect to measure whether or not these objectives were met by the project?

International, cross-cultural and comparative research

Sometimes, the research is much broader in outlook, reach and scope. With the forces of globalization impacting more readily in late modern society on crime, victimization and criminal justice (see, for example, Loader and Sparks, 2007),

criminologists have become much more open to exploring doing criminological research in a comparative, cross-cultural and global context. That has required different approaches to doing criminological research, in order to address the many challenges that arise once the focus of the research becomes wider, broader and bigger. In some instances, you might be wondering what these problems are – much of the world is similar and offers similar approaches to the control and regulation of crime. Crime in one country is similar to that in another. And, yes, some are. But, as the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) identifies, there remains significant variation within and between countries relating to crime, victimization and experiences of criminal justice (see van Dijk, 2015; van Kesteren et al., 2014). Indeed, language challenges aside, criminal justice approaches differ significantly, as do definitional and conceptual understandings, not least with regards what we may see as simple terms such as crime and victims. Thus, alongside social, political and economic factors, globalization can and does impact considerably on how criminological research is carried out, with what tools and methodological approaches, and with what success. Matthew Hall, in Chapter 20, provides a good overview of the various approaches, challenges and opportunities of doing criminological research in a globalized, late modern world.

Anticipating conclusions

When formulating research problems, you must not just consider what to study, where and when, but also anticipate the answer to the question, ‘What do I want to say?’ This is not to suggest that you can write a final paper or report before carrying out the research. Rather, it is to indicate that there needs to be some anticipation of the kind of conclusion that may be reached and the kind of evidence required to support it. For example, where the aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of the introduction of some form of criminal justice policy (for example, MATAC or the new law of ‘coercive control’), it is necessary to formulate research problems and questions in such a way that some conclusion can be reached about the effectiveness of the policy (see Rob White in Chapter 22). There are other ways in which researchers anticipate outcomes when formulating research questions. In a more radical and critical vein, what is sometimes termed standpoint research seeks to pose problems and address them from a particular standpoint (for example, a feminist, or gender-sensitive, perspective) and anticipates reaching conclusions which reflect that standpoint. Such research may be less likely to be concerned with questions about the effectiveness of specific policies and more concerned with addressing fundamental issues such as discrimination, inequality, oppression and justice (see, for example, Walklate et al., 2018).

It is not just about anticipating the conclusions that need some thought from the outset. It is also useful to think through the writing up and presenting of the research findings. Often, the findings will be written up for publication in a journal article and, sometimes, as a manuscript for publication by one of the leading academic book publishers, such as SAGE. During the research process itself, conference papers and