



CRIMINOLOGY CHALLENGE: SOCIAL HARM?

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INTRODUCTIONS

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- I am Programme Leader for the Criminology & Sociology (Joint Hons) degree, but mainly teach across the criminology programme.
- In terms of my research, I am interested in green criminology, crimes of the powerful, critical animal studies, as well as researching repression and surveillance of social movements.
- [Content note: this presentation discusses Grenfell Tower fire]



THE *DISCIPLINE* OF CRIMINOLOGY

- Criminology is a diverse interdisciplinary field of study which focusses on crime, its causes and effects. People working within the discipline include sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, philosophers, biologists, scholars of law and many more.
- When it first emerged in the mid-18th century, 'classical criminology' focussed on why people commit crimes and how we can best address criminal behaviours. It was founded on the belief that people have 'free will' and so their behaviour can be managed through deterrence and punishment.
- In the 19th century biological positivist approaches emerged which saw criminality as something innate in an offender, and which should therefore be treated like an illness.
- In the 20th century more sociological approaches started to dominate focussing on things like cultures and subcultures, labelling and identity, the importance of gender in offending and victimisation, and the relationship between social problems and crime.
- Today a wide variety of distinct and sometimes oppositional traditions co-exist under the banner of 'criminology'.

THE CHALLENGE

- Please watch this short video which provides a brief timeline of events on the night of Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 [note the video contains footage some people may find distressing]
 - <https://youtu.be/KczKIkGhpII>
- After the video make some notes in answer the following question:
 - What was the impact of Grenfell tower fire?
 - What questions might a criminologist be most likely to ask about this fire?
 - What might a focus on ‘crime’ miss when examining this case?



CRIMINOLOGY & GRENFELL

- What impact did the Grenfell tower fire have?
 - On 14 June 2017, a fire broke out in the 24-storey Grenfell Tower block of flats in North Kensington, West London. 70+ people died, 70+ others were injured, and 220+ people escaped. Grenfell resulted in a tragic loss of life, many injuries and illnesses, many people being left homeless.
- What questions might a criminologist be likely to ask about this fire?
 - Who caused the fire (or who was the perpetrator)? What, if any, laws have been deliberately or inadvertently broken? Do these laws need changing? Who were the victims? What, if anything, can be said to have motivated any illegal actions that led to the fire? What is the best way to punish people who break laws in this way?
- What might a focus on 'crime' miss?
 - A focus on crime might miss the many diverse impacts that this case had, many of which would not be captured by a focus on legality/criminality. The crime of not complying with safety regulations might seem relatively minor and mundane, and would often be ignored by criminologists in favour of more 'exciting' interpersonal crimes, despite this case showing that such a thing can result in significant loss of life and injury.

STEVE TOMBS- SOCIAL HARM

- Scholars like Steve Tombs have a radically different view about where criminologists should be focussing their attention.
- Tombs favours a 'social harm' approach which sees crime as a construct. What constitutes a crime will vary across time and space (look at the way homosexuality was criminalised in this country until the late 1960s).
- For this reason, many serious harms are not captured under the banner of 'crime', and so focussing on crime distracts from the many other serious problems in society.
 - One good example of this is the many harms that result from the criminal justice system itself- many people in prison experience forms of violence and mental health issues, and there is little evidence that prison rehabilitates offenders, yet our prison population continues to expand.
- This approach is sometimes known as 'zemiology' (from the Greek word 'zēmía' meaning 'harm').



GRENFELL TOWER- CRIME OR HARM?

- Now watch this short video of Steve Tombs talking about his own work focusing on the Grenfell Tower fire. In it he identifies four categories of harm that were generated by the events of Grenfell (summarized below):
https://youtu.be/XOT5Fj_lrfg
 - **Physical Harms**
 - Obvious ones: burns, smoke inhalation, physical injuries sustained whilst trying to escape in the dark and smoke. Less Obvious ones: long term health effects of toxins released into the air and breathed in by residents and wider community. Residents with drug/alcohol dependency might have their health issues exacerbated by the events.
 - **Psychological and Emotional Harms**
 - Loss/bereavement; guilt (inc survivor's guilt); mental health effects on residents, survivors, emergency service workers, witnesses.
 - **Economic Harms**
 - Costs to residents. Costs to government (local and national) of legal fees, relocation of residents, extra money for emergency services, costs of removal of flammable cladding.
 - **Cultural/Relational Harms**
 - The contempt with which the residents were held. Residents had warned about a potential fire/high fatality event, but were ignored, but even since the events, survivors haven't been listened to, promises have been broken. The contempt which led to the fire, also continued after it. .
- The key point is that many of these harms have little to do with 'crime' or 'criminal events', and so might be missed if we adopt a purely criminological approach.

SOME FINAL COMMENTS: SOCIAL HARM

- Criminology focusses on crime, why it happens, who it impacts, and how we can best deal with it or prevent it from happening. There are many different competing traditions in criminology and studying the subject will allow you to discover where you fit in.
- A social harm approach can be useful in widening our focus and revealing many forms of harm that might otherwise be missed.
 - Criminology has traditionally focussed on interpersonal forms of violence, which, whilst eye catching, account for a relatively small amount of harm experienced in society.
 - Thinking about the world in terms of social harm helps to broaden our perspective on the impacts of harmful events like Grenfell, which disproportionately impacts working class people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- By participating in this challenge you've done some zemiological thinking! Well done!