Crime analysis.

Crime analysis (sometimes also called intelligence analysis) is one field of work which draws upon criminal psychological methods. Crime analysts are generally employed by the police (or policing agencies, for example in the UK the National Crime and Operations Faculty and the National Crime Squad) in order to analyse crime data to aid the police carry out their roles.

One of the most common roles of crime analysts is that of case linkage. This process involves the linkage of crimes based on the similarities in the behaviours of the offender as reported by the victim or as inferred from the crime scene. For example, let us examine a rape case committed by a stranger on a woman walking home alone after a night out with her friends. Crime analysts could use the details of this case – the fact that she had just left a nightclub, that the rapist took some of her clothing away from the scene with him, and the content of the threats used towards the woman – in order to check against an already established database of similar crimes to see whether there are any similarities to past crimes. If matches are found – the same threats were used, similar items of clothing taken by a rapist, and it was in a close geographical location to another rape – then this information can be used by the police to investigate the potential that the same individual offender has committed both crimes. This allows the focusing of the resources of the investigation in order to avoid duplication of work. (The case linkage work that crime analysts carry out, along with a case study of case linkage in relation to Jack the Ripper, is outlined in much more detail in chapter 2).

CASE STUDY.

Sarah is a criminal psychologist who is employed by a national police agency within the UK. Sarah has received information from a local police force on a serious undetected stranger rape. She will read through the statements and reports relating to the case and pick out information relating to the behaviour of the perpretator. This will then be compared to the behavioural indicators recorded from similar crimes, to look for any indications that the same person committed more than one crime.

Sarah will then prepare a report for the police, summarising as to whether the behavioural evidence indicates that the undetected crime was likely to have been committed by the same individual as any of the crimes held on the national data- base. This information can be used by the police force to focus their investigation, or if the crime on the database is solved, the police can use Sarah’s report to aid them when building a case to arrest this individual for the undetected rape.

Offender profiling has received a great deal of attention from the media in recent years. Media reporting of the utilization of criminal psychologists in high profile cases has introduced the general public to the notion of offender profiling. While this has raised the profile of the field, it could be argued that the (largely) sensationalist portrayal of profiling has resulted in a general confusion of what profiling actually is, how often it is done and who does it. This uncertainty amongst the general public is not altogether surprising however, as there is an absence of an agreed definition of the term ‘profiling’, even in academic circles.

What we can be clear about is that profiling uses information gleaned from the crime scene relating to the offender’s behavior during the crime. This can be pooled with other information, such as victim statements (if available), in order to draw conclusions about the nature of the person who committed the crime. Was the crime planned meticulously or was it impulsive? Does the offender live locally to the crime scene? What age range is the offender likely to fall into? What gender is the offender? This information can then be used to aid the police in investigations and in targeting resources.

But how exactly is a profiler able to look at the scene and use this to specify the characteristics of the offender? The answer to this question is not entirely clear mainly because different people involved in offender profiling can, and do, use a variety of techniques in order to reach their conclusions. Even those individuals who claim to be working from the same theoretical standpoint can still vary in how the theory is applied to any given case. Chapter 2 describes the different approaches of clinical and statistical profiling in detail.

One of the most important tasks during an investigation is collecting reliable evidence in order to put together a case of what happened during the event in question. One of the main sources of this evidence is the people who were eyewitnesses to the event. In order to gain this information, an interview needs to be con- ducted by the investigating police officers with the aim of gaining as much accurate information from the witness as possible. In addition, once a suspect has been identified, he or she too is inter- viewed in order to gain his or her view of events and to possibly extract a confession to the crime. Hence the interview (whether with a witness or suspect) and the manner in which it is conducted can be crucial to a case.

It is not surprising, therefore, when you think of the processes (those relating to memory and the retrieval of memory) that are involved in the interview situation, that psychologists have been interested in this area for years. Given research findings such as those that state that the recall of events by witnesses can be manipulated by the interviewer (either intentionally or unintentionally – for example, by the type of questions asked), it is clear that those carrying out the interviews need to receive training in how to con- duct the interviews appropriately. Psychologists have been instrumental in developing guidance and advice on how best to interview witnesses and suspects and have also provided training to various police forces on these techniques. (For more on this see chapter 4).

The police can also use psychologists in order to gain advice on how to interview particular types of witnesses or suspects. For example, psychologists have conducted research into interviews with vulnerable witnesses such as the young, the elderly and learning disabled witnesses. This research can be used to inform the police on how best to retrieve the information that they require from such witnesses without causing them too much stress while at the same time ensuring that the information received is as accurate as possible.

Research performed by criminal psychologists investigating the detection of deception also has useful applications for the police when interviewing witnesses and in particular suspects.

How do people behave when they are lying and what cues can police officers look out for that might indicate that the suspects are lying about their whereabouts during the crime? Is it possible to tell with a level of accuracy when someone is lying? And are polygraphs reliable in detecting deception? These questions will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

CASE STUDY.

Robert is an academic who works within the field of criminal psychology. He specialises in the interviewing of vulnerable witnesses, such as the elderly and the young, and has been carrying out active research within this area for a number of years. The police have asked him to provide them with some advice in relation to a case they are working on.

An adult male has been found murdered and the only known witness is a little boy. The police wish to gain as much accurate information from the child as possible in order to help their case but are unsure as to how much they can rely on his statement due to his age and the trauma he has been through. The police also need advice on how best to approach the little boy so as not to traumatise him any further. They therefore need the help of an expert in this area and contact Robert, who is able to use the findings from his research to advise the police.

police psychology.

The information in this section has, thus far, been concerned with the application of psychological knowledge to assist in police investigation. However, there is another field within which the work of psychologists, and the application of their knowledge, is useful to the police. Like many organizations, the police force itself presents its own challenges – what type of person makes a good police officer? What is the best way to train police officers? How might the attendance at unpleasant scenes of crime, or repeated exposure to negative events, impact on an individual and how are those affected in this way best treated?

This area of work is not a new one – psychologists, both occupational and criminal, have been advising the police on such matters for the last twenty-five years or so. Psychologists have contributed their knowledge to the process of police officer recruitment through the introduction of psychometric tests which measure psychological characteristics that may be import- ant in relation to such work. These could assess, for example, whether a person is an assertive individual, open to persuasion, and conscious of detail. Psychologists have also provided advice on the composition of interviews and assessment centres which will eliminate those who do not have the necessary qualities for the role as well as providing an indication of those who will pros- per in such a role.

Another important area of police interest where psychologists have an ongoing input is the moderation of police stress. The stress faced by police officers is somewhat different from that in other types of employment. Whereas stress can be elevated in most jobs through organizational change, such as decreased workload or a pay rise, the police can be faced with unexpected, perhaps threatening, situations at any time during their daily work. These events, due to their unpredictable nature, cannot necessarily be mediated by organizational change so the police also need stress management measures that can assist at an individual level, as and when they are needed. Psychologists have been instrumental in advising the police on what mechanisms would be beneficial (such as peer counselling and self-help programmes), but will also provide professional services to police officers who require more intensive stress management.