

CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network

Ninth CRIMVOL virtual working paper
session: May 19, 2022

Paper Presenter: Dr. Gemma Morgan, Senior Lecturer,
Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy, Swansea University.

Digital technology, co-production, and desistance



Event Chair and Report Author: Dr Gill Buck, University of
Chester.

About CRIMVOL: An international, multidisciplinary criminal justice voluntary sector research network for academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The network fills an important gap in scholarship and infrastructure: the criminal justice voluntary sector is more topical than ever before but has not received academic attention commensurate with its importance anywhere in the world. The network is chaired by [Dr Philippa Tomczak](#) (Senior Research Fellow, University of Nottingham, Author of The Penal Voluntary Sector) and [Dr Gill Buck](#) (Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Chester). CRIMVOL was established with the generous support of the British Academy (Rising Star Engagement Award) and the Socio-Legal Studies Association (Seminar Competition). A core focus is the development of specialist early career researchers and scholar-activist work.

CRIMVOL hosted their ninth virtual event on Thursday 19th May 2022 with a presentation from [Gemma Morgan](#), Senior Lecturer, Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy, Swansea University.



Screen shot of CRIMVOL Teams meeting.

Digital technology, co-production, and desistance

Gemma introduced the innovative 'My Journey' digital application (app) designed to assist people through the desistance process. The app has been coproduced with members of '[Include](#)', a lived experience-led voluntary sector organisation. Gemma noted how Covid-19 drew attention to the need for new digital technologies to support services and hypothesised that digitally mapping desistance journeys could support working relationships and desistance. The app is not a replacement for human connections, which remain vitally important, but may enhance the working alliance.

Drawing on the existing evidence base, Gemma explained how digital applications can improve access to and engagement with services and improve personalised supports. They can enable progress with goals and/or feelings to be shared in-between appointments and potentially offer more agency to users and more accountable services. However, digital exclusion is a consideration as not everyone has access to a smart phone or the confidence to work online. There are also concerns about privacy breaches and misuse.

Gemma's team designed their app to be web-based in case people do not have a phone, but the platform will work on phones. They also plan to evaluate the app to contribute to the (limited) evidence base on digital technologies in criminal justice. They will offer clear and accessible user guides to encourage the app being used for support, not punishment. Individuals will also have some control over how their data is seen and used.

Gemma shared the 'My Journey' platform with CRIMVOL members so that the functionality could be seen in practice. Written instructions within the app are limited and accessible, e.g., there is a visual wellbeing self-assessment that people can complete daily, this includes signposts to support organisations as needed and visual maps can be created of changes over time. People can complete journal entries using just emojis if they don't want to write and they can choose who can see their information (e.g., just themselves, a particular worker, or the whole team). There is a diary function which appointments can be added to, and reminders sent from and a 'key contacts' area. The organisation can also embed surveys to collate feedback from members.

The app received excellent feedback for its appearance and usability and ways that it could potentially engage people and enhance working relationships. Questions focused on the practicalities of coproduction and collaboration (with experts by experience, technologists, and other agencies), the ways that desistance is/could be conceptualised in the app, how digital literacy will be supported, and how data and privacy will be safeguarded.

The next CRIMVOL virtual network session will take place on:

- **Wednesday 7th September 2022, 15.00-16.30 GMT – Teaching the PVS Workshop:** This session invites CRIMVOL members to reflect on and discuss how they (could) include the penal voluntary sector in university curricula.