

# Talking about... crime in the 'new world'

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# COVID-19: A distinct criminal opportunity

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In early 2020 it became apparent we were entering uncertain times as we faced the outbreak of a global pandemic, COVID-19. This began a period of intense rapid social change. Whilst many adapted to the first 'lockdown' with the novelty of working from home, baking banana bread, and joining Britain's newest PE teacher Joe Wickes in morning exercise routines in their living rooms, others experienced the lockdown in a different way.

- For organised criminals, COVID-19 became a distinct criminal opportunity.
- For those in prison it meant 23 hours locked in the same cell, no visits from family and an inability to social distance from staff.

# Lived Experience

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## What is so important about lived experience?

In qualitative phenomenological research, lived experience (LE) refers to a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices.

The focus of this research was to identify the way in which those with lived experience of crime, deviance and social control were able to adapt to the current crisis and identify areas within Criminal Justice and the security sector where innovation was being shown by LE actors.

## The research study

I interviewed 18 people with lived experience of crime, deviance and social control who also identified themselves as working within the CJS or security sector. I also performed ethnographic research (online), examining online events, social media accounts and blog posts organised or written by LE actors in these areas. From these interviews and digital ethnography, I identified two case studies to examine in closer detail. Including interviews with others within the organisation, further ethnography and co-production of academic writing.

# Background: Innovation & Adaptation

## We Fight Fraud Live

WFF created an 8hour live webinar detailing the criminal opportunity of Covid-19 from the perspective of ex-criminals, ethical hackers, and fraud and financial crime experts.



## Our Empty Chair

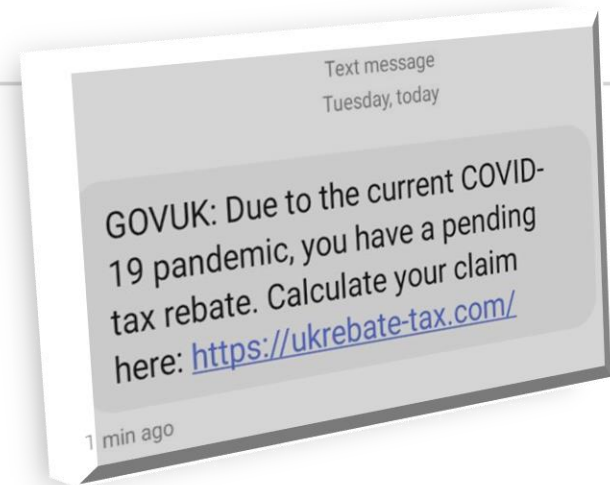
OEC ran, and continues to run, a social media campaign to highlight the experiences, concerns, worries and fears of the families waiting for prisoners outside the prison gates.

# The Criminal Opportunity: Fraud & Financial Crime

# £11,000,000

Lost between 16<sup>th</sup> March – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

2,866 victims of Covid related scams.



## Simplified case study (from June 2020):

*"Covid-19 lockdowns mean that thousands of my staff are now working from home to answer calls, manage accounts, and take payments. What is the threat to my company?"*

**Cyber threat analysis** shows that hacking home networks easier.

**Social engineering analysis** shows workers not following KYC processes due to new 'work from home' working practises.

**Underworld intel** shows focus on opening fraudulent accounts while it is easier due to lack of in person checks.

## We recommended:

**VPN use** for staff to access company systems.

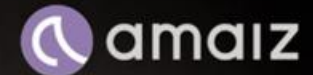
Raising staff awareness through **training** about work from home threats & importance of following procedure.

**Auditing** identity check processes to ensure robust processes in place to counter fraudulent identity documents.

# We Fight Fraud Live

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Supported by:

A 3D model of a virus particle, likely representing COVID-19, is shown in the upper left quadrant. It has a spherical, textured surface and several long, thin, cylindrical protrusions extending from it.

**FRAUD, LOSS AND CRIME DURING A CRISIS  
COVID-19 SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF CRIMINALS**

GLOBAL ONLINE CONFERENCE AND NETWORKING EVENT

**28 APRIL 2020**

# The Criminal Opportunity: Covid-19 in Prison

# 77,942

Prisoners currently in prison  
(England & Wales)

**498** prisoners testing positive  
(week ending 11<sup>th</sup> Jan)  
**4800** since start of pandemic



Pledged to release  
**4000** prisoners, but  
only released **316**  
before scheme closed  
in August

**71** prisoners have died  
due to COVID-19, **24** in  
December 2020 alone

**54,000** unheard cases, it will take some cases until **2022** to be heard  
**15%** of the prison population are on remand awaiting trial

Between **310,000 - 500,000** children have a parent in prison

# Our Empty Chair



"He is not a prisoner in our eyes, he's a Dad and a Husband and that's what we wanted him to feel like for at least 1 day of the year and we couldn't do it."

@OurEmptyChair



"I don't know when my kids will be able to see their Daddy again and it breaks my heart knowing they are longing to cuddle the hero in their lives."

@OurEmptyChair



# Mobilising Lived Experience

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Both case studies showed that additional work needs to be done by those with expertise and knowledge that stems from lived experience before this knowledge can be heard. Once heard, further work needs to be done to prove the LE actor and the knowledge that they have to offer is legitimate. The basis of this is the stigma attached to LE of crime, deviance and social control.

## Moving forward

Beck, J & Harding, N (Forthcoming) 'The aesthetic labour of undoing stigma'

ESRC IAA funded collaboration between Lancaster university Law School and WFF  
"Rapid Response to Fraud and Economic crime"

# Any questions?



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