

Research Projects

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Identifying Sexual Trafficking Online.

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Identifying Sexual Trafficking Online has been funded by the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP). N8PRP has been established to enable and foster research collaborations that will help address the problems of policing in the 21st century and achieve international excellence in policing research.

Leading institution: University of Sheffield, UK.

Partners: Teesside University, UK & South Yorkshire Police.

Responsible academics: Dr. Xavier L'Hoiry (PI) and Prof. Georgios A. Antonopoulos (CI).

Research Context:

The aim of this project is to create and test a scoring matrix for the effective identification of high-risk cases of sexual trafficking online, specifically those found on open source Internet sites such as escorting websites and online classifieds.

Although human trafficking, sexual exploitation and Modern-Day Slavery (MDS) are not new phenomena, over the past decade such activities have experienced an unprecedented boom and widespread facilitation due to the development and proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly those constituting digital and networked environments (see Latonero et al., 2012; Europol 2016). In the UK, the government has highlighted the immense and ongoing difficulties of tackling serious and organised crime in the context of constantly evolving ICTs, drawing specifically upon MDS and exploitation to demonstrate the challenges of policing in this context of offending (HM Government, 2018). This is particularly true

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for sexual exploitation, with researchers, policy-makers and practitioners identifying the use of escorting websites and/or online classifieds such as Adultwork, Vivastreet and others as prominent amongst offenders to carry out sexual trafficking and exploitation activities. Indeed, some police forces have begun to pro-actively investigate such websites to try to identify instances of trafficking. Emerging research has shown that offenders using these websites often display similar patterns of behaviour including the use of key words, phrases and other patterns.

This project will build on this early research by creating a matrix which synthesises such behavioural and technical patterns in order to allow law enforcement officers to use this matrix to identify and target these types of serious and organised crime offenders with greater precision and efficiency. This will enable law enforcement agencies to direct their resources more effectively by using the matrix as a triage tool during proactive investigations of suspect profiles online. More broadly, the matrix seeks to provide an up-stream solution to the ongoing challenge of sex trafficking facilitated online, thereby helping the police to protect those individuals who are vulnerable and are exploited in this manner.

The study has been co-designed with the participating police force and emerges directly from discussions between all collaborating partners concerning the most pressing challenges for law enforcement in the policing of serious and organised crime – and how best to resolve these challenges.

Research Methodology:

The key objective of the project is to design and test a matrix for the identification of cases of sexual exploitation and trafficking facilitated online. With this in mind, the project is divided in five parts:

1. Academic partners will conduct a systematic literature review of relevant research, together with (up to) 20 expert interviews with scholars, practitioners, policy-makers and other stakeholders. Interviews will focus on the use of the internet and digital technologies in the process of human trafficking in the UK, with a focus on sexual exploitation.
2. On the basis of this research, academic partners will design a matrix of indicators that will allow law enforcement authorities to filter and identify cases which are much more likely to result in human trafficking networks being identified (by identifying online profiles that are highly indicative of trafficking/ exploitation).

3. Representatives from South Yorkshire Police will ‘test’ the matrix in the course of their pro-active investigations and intelligence gathering via open source websites.
4. Academic partners will gather the views of South Yorkshire Police representatives on the utility of the matrix via interviews and/or focus groups, and identify ways of improving it.
5. Academic and police partners will carry out dissemination activities.

References

Europol. (2016) Trafficking of Human Beings in the EU. The Hague: Europol

HM Government (2018) Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. London: HM Government

Latonero, M., Musto, J., Boyd, Z., Boyle, E., Bissel, A., Gibson, K. and Kim, J. (2012) The rise of mobile and the diffusion of technology-facilitated trafficking. University of Southern California, Centre on Communication Leadership & Policy.

UrbanCrime: Spatial aspects of Crime and insecurity in the era of economic crisis: Trends, dimensions and correlations – Mapping crime and insecurity in times of economic crisis. Trends, dimensions and correlations.

Elena Syrmali³

Leading institution: H.F.R.I. (Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation).

Partners: Panteion University- Social and Political Sciences.

Responsible academics: Professor Christina Zarafonitou, Director of the Laboratory of Urban Criminology Panteion University Social and Political Sciences.

Research Context:

The research project "UrbanCrime: Spatial aspects of Crime and insecurity in the era of economic crisis: Trends, dimensions and correlations", has as its ultimate goal the recording of all the relevant data on crime and insecurity through spatial aspects, in order to formulate proposals for tackling the phenomena and suggests solutions that can be used in the context of crime prevention policy. Spatial aspects of crime, as well as the research of the feeling of insecurity of the citizens, is particularly important in the planning of a successful crime prevention policy and also highlights the public's trust in the Institutions, which are the bases of any Democratic State.

Research Methodology:

Briefly, the Actions of the research project include the following points:

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- Recording needs and data capabilities.
- Socio-economic analysis and behaviour regarding crime. Design and implementation of research in three Municipalities.

All data will be used to develop a questionnaire that provides information that is not available through existing databases, such as socioeconomic and demographic data related to crime.

- Spatial analysis of the crime. Crime data analysis in space and in time.
- Maximize the impact.

The project's findings will be published in Scientific Conferences and Scientific Magazines. An information day will be organized in order to acquaint the general population as well as the stakeholders, with the problem of fear of crime and its relations with various population groups of the study area, as well as with the socio-economic factors.

The resulting research findings can be used to create a framework for comprehending and understanding the factors that create and exacerbate the insecurity of the citizens in the economic crisis and to help prevent crime and develop effective countermeasures. They can also be used in designing policies to properly inform citizens about crime, organize local councils for crime prevention and delinquency, and design a more effective, non-violent policy with respect for human rights. Finally, they can also contribute to improving the functioning of the bodies of official social control (police and justice).

BeSercure-FeelSecure (BSFS).

Elena Syrmali

Leading institution: European Regional Development Fund (Urban Innovative Actions: Urban Security).

Partners: City of Piraeus (CoP), Laboratory of Urban Criminology Panteion University Social and Political Sciences, Singular Logic, University of Piraeus RESEARCH CENTER, European Forum for Urban Security (Efus), SPACE Hellas, Minister of Citizen Protection.

Responsible academics: Professor Christina Zarafonitou, Director of the Laboratory of Urban Criminology Panteion University Social and Political Sciences.

Research Context:

The BeSercure-FeelSecure (BSFS) project aims to reinforce urban security and promote positive perception of urban safety by providing strategies & tools to link the main urban security stakeholders & facilitate their collaboration in physical-and-cyber space. BSFS will introduce the Local Council for Crime Prevention (LCCP), where the urban security city stakeholders will be represented (municipality, police, local chambers etc.) under the common goal to decide on activities and interventions that increase city resilience against crime. BSFS will offer a digital platform enabling the assessment of combined physical cyber threats and the visualization of risks and other relevant activities through geospatial mapping to facilitate decision-making. The BSFS solution will be validated and evaluated in the City of Piraeus (CoP), one of the highest populated cities in Greece with a systemic long-lasting corruption and problematic criminal situation, and will develop a set of replication guidelines for the wider adoption of BSFS solution in other cities.

Research Methodology:

Under the supervision of the LCCP, BSFS will apply a number of spatial interventions, such as image management, target hardening following the CPTED “Crime Prevention through Environmental Design” model, accompanied by social activation strategies to enhance community cohesion and connectivity at neighborhood level.

The actions of the program will be implemented in both natural and digital environments, through the creation of an original electronic platform which will be created for this purpose . Urban security depends on objective conditions as the form and dimensions of crime as well as subjective factors that contribute to prevent risk and criminal threats. That is why an empirically substantiated assessment, of the elements that determine and the factors that create the state of the "vulnerable", is necessary. In this context an empirical study will be conducted based on the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, in collaboration with those involved parts and communities of the Municipality of Piraeus.

This empirical study, combined with complex methodological approaches included in the research design, will lead to the formation and implementation of the holistic program to prevent insecurity, which will be implemented and evaluated, in order to be create an empirically documented holistic form of prevention, with the prospect of sustainability and expansion to others urban sections beyond the research area.