University of Huddersfield Repository

Reeves, Carla

Negotiating Research Relationships: undertaking fieldwork with sex offenders and probation staff

Original Citation


This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/13756/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/
Negotiating Research Relationships: undertaking fieldwork with sex offenders and probation staff

Dr Carla Reeves
University of Huddersfield
c.l.reeves@hud.ac.uk
2 year ethnographic study of the lived experiences of sex offenders residing in a Probation Approved Premises (hostel)
- Observation of life in the hostel
- Observation of MARAC (MAPPP)
- Informal interviews with residents (24) and staff (17)

These were vital to the fieldwork
Interviewees -> active participants in research

- Residents:
  - 23 male, 1 female
  - 21 sex offenders

- Staff:
  - 15 male, 2 female
  - 8 RSO, 3 relief RSO, 5 PSO and 1 SPO
Gatekeepers to fieldwork

- Help or hinder access to:
  - Research site
  - Research population
  - Individuals
  - Other forms of data such as files
  - The quality of data

- Formal and Informal gatekeepers
Formal Gatekeepers

Formal gatekeepers
Grant access to
Fieldwork site,
population,
other forms of data

Formal approach
required and
formal access
agreed

Hostel staff
Hostel Residents
Resident files
Hostel Operation
MARACs
# Primary Gatekeeper

- Hostel Manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positives</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Ensured initial access granted</td>
<td>*Retained control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Facilitated later informal staff access</td>
<td>*Limited access to line managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Remained supportive</td>
<td>*controlled transmission of info. from above &amp; below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*gave info. re: operation of hostel</td>
<td>*requested breaches of confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negotiating formal access = managing relationships

- Mainly with primary gatekeeper
- Relationship characterised by power

- Did I relinquish some of my own control over the fieldwork to him to secure his support?

- Maybe a little...
Managing informal gatekeeper relationships

1. Staff gatekeepers
   Essential to establish rapport
   – Manager support both helpful & unhelpful
   – Most imp. = work as a staff member
   – Who was I?

Staff were gatekeepers to residents
(often gave false impressions)
Managing informal gatekeeper relationships

2. Resident gatekeepers
   - Essential to establish ‘non-staff’ status
     - Problems of changing population – informed consent possible?
     - Most imp. = spending time in the hostel
     - Who was I?
     - What purpose could I serve them?
Rapport: the foundation of productive relationships?

- Yes - need to be able to identify with people
  - Be empathic & understanding
  - Put them at ease
  - Establish trust in confidentiality

- No – ‘Trust No One’
  - Different organisational & personal agenda’s
  - Lulls researcher into false sense of security?
Summary

- Undertaking fieldwork is primarily about managing relationships.
- A close working relationship with gatekeepers can have negatives as well as positives.
- Managing these relationships requires constant re-negotiation of the researcher role, position and status.