

Finding A Better Way To Interview Fraud Suspects

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A fairer and more efficient method of interviewing those suspected of benefits fraud is being presented to international law enforcement officers by a University of Derby lecturer.

David Walsh, Programme Leader for the University's BA (Hons) Crime and Justice degree, has presented his fresh take on interviewing suspected benefits claims fraudsters at both the 20th European Association of Psychology and Law conference in Sweden and the third International Investigative Interviewing Research Group annual conference in Norway this month (June).

It is hoped the new approach will be taken up by national and local government benefits claims investigators, with a view to treating interviewees more professionally, while also increasing conviction rates. Police forces may also learn something from the new techniques.

David, who was involved in benefits [fraud](#) detection before he became an academic, said: "Around 100,000 interviews are conducted each year by criminal law enforcement officers other than the police in mainland UK, concerning benefit fraud. Interviewers can be Government officers in the Department of Work and Pensions, or local council housing benefit investigators.

"However, almost all the academic research so far conducted has been into police interview techniques."

David looked at hundreds of films and transcripts of actual benefit fraud interviews, and spoke to interviewers and interviewees, as part of his research. He also ran mock interviews, with students acting as suspect interviewees.

He found that interviewers often failed to listen properly to people's individual stories, establish a rapport with interviewees at the interview's start, or effectively challenge any gaps in their accounts.

This often meant a lower confession rate, compared with the average one for police interviews.

From his research he is now proposing a new model for interviews based on the acronym TOWARDS, which measures the:

- Tactics and skills used
- Outcomes
- Weight of evidence
- Attitudes of the interviewer/ interviewee
- Respect for interviewee's rights
- Degree of Shift towards a confession.

David added: "It represents a more ethical [interview](#) regime. More safe confessions would mean that conviction rates would go up, it would be less stressful for the interviewee and any witnesses, and less costly than a trial."

He realises that establishing TOWARDS as the preferred model followed by law enforcement officers in their interviews could take years but that, in the long run, it would make for a much more efficient investigation culture.

David's work will be featured in the University's annual Research

Review publication, which will be out shortly.

Provided by University of Derby

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