

Presentation title:

Argentina's unique women-led victim-centric police stations: A model of gender responsive policing

Speaker: Kerry Carrington (University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia)

Research about evidence-based initiatives in policing tends to focus on innovations derived from the Anglophone cities of the Global North. Framed by southern perspectives in criminology, our research reversed this notion, conducting three years of research on the victim-centred women-led police stations that emerged in Latin America in the 1980s. These unique stations employ multi-disciplinary teams of police, social workers, counsellors, and lawyers, to offer victims/survivors a gateway to a range of supports instead of just funnelling them into the criminal justice system. In the process, victims/survivors retain some of their autonomy from the state, sidestepping some of the serious unintended consequences of the criminalisation of domestic violence, such as the mis-identification of victims as perpetrators, siding with perpetrators, or not believing victims. As a by-product, police who work in these specialised stations in Latin America have access to rewarding careers in a predominantly women-led policing hierarchy that challenges, at its institutional roots, the masculinist culture of front-line policing. One in five police stations in the Province of Buenos Aires has a specialist police station designed only to receive survivors of gender violence. They employ 2300 employees and respond to around 250,000 reports of domestic violence and 7500 reports of sexual assault. Today Argentina shares the equal number one rank in the world for women's safety, has the one of lowest rates of femicide in the world, and women account for 41% of police. Our research team conducted surveys in Australia and Canada to assess which aspects of these specialised police stations had prospects for police reform elsewhere in the world.