

Taking stock; a review of the state of forensic psychology as revealed through an analysis of journal articles 2015-20

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A total of 3719 articles appearing in 5 key generalist Forensic Psychology Journals (N=1374) and 6 more specialist targeted forensically related journals (N=2345) between 2015-2020 were subject to a bibliometric analysis to reveal trends in research topics, populations studied, jurisdiction and research methods employed. Research on offenders dominated and over half of all the papers were located in North American jurisdictions. About a third of papers made explicit reference to diversity and two thirds of research designs employed quantitative methodologies. Discussion comments on changing trends over time from forensic psychology's initial narrow focus on witness testimony to its current broader remit, and the different coverage between targeted and generalist journals. The conclusion offers some reflections for future forensic psychology.

Keywords: Forensic Psychology; Research Trends; Forensic Psychology Journals; Research methods; Diversity

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to map the past contours and current research trends in forensic psychology by means of a count of articles appearing in discipline relevant journals. Providing such a count is not a straightforward task because as Brown and Horvath (2021) point out, whilst recognized as a sub-discipline in psychology, forensic psychology has somewhat blurred boundaries. In part this is because of confusions between forensic psychology as an area of professional practice and the knowledge based academic discipline, fragmentation of the area into smaller sub disciplines and also because of variations in scope between broadly based or more narrowly focused definitions. Within its academic knowledge remit some scholars may self-identify as forensic psychologists but it is also possible that others, having a forensic setting or

group of respondents as the focus of their research, claim a different disciplinary affiliation. As Neal (2018) says psychologists can retain their primary identities as clinical or social or developmental psychologists, even if they focus much of their work in forensic or correctional settings. Our way out of these difficulties is to firstly reflect the broader scope of forensic psychology adopting Brown and Horvath's (2021, p. 5) definition: "a disciplinary specialism applying methods and theories from the wider range of psychology's cognate disciplines to problems, processes and personnel across the spectrum of criminal and civil justice systems." Secondly, we widen the scope of journals to review by identifying both general forensic psychology and law periodicals and more targeted specialty forensic psychology related ones.

The counting and analysis of journal articles to measure subject disciplinary trends has been a consistently used tool (e.g. criminology, Barberet, 2007; police psychology, Snook et al., 2009; medical sociology Seale, 2008; gender studies Eagly et al., 2012). These authors identify key journals, using either indexing terms or create bespoke coding depending on the topic under review. Collectively known as bibliometrics, Narin (1976) defines this as techniques using citation and/or publication counts to measure productivity, eminence of researchers or creating a mosaic of scientific activity. Such an approach is not without problems. Whilst Narin et al., (1994) state that issues such as time lag in publication and as yet unpublished activity means that appearance in a journal is a reflection of surfaced activity rather than a complete account of the totality of activity. Gläser and Oltersdorf (2019) propose that users of bibliometric methods in social sciences and humanities have either ignored the problems inherent in the method, tried to extend the corpus beyond journal citations or used manual methods to assess coverage. As briefly discussed above forensic psychology has particular problems because of its different foci (i.e. law, clinical

forensic psychology and criminological psychology) which mean that those seeking publication outlets may target their own specialist journals or a more general forensic journal. We try and reflect both these strategies. Also as bibliometric methods have been adopted previously as a way to review the state of forensic psychology (Carter & Forsyth, 2007; Monahan & Loftus, 1982; Tapp, 1976; Slesinger & Pilpel, 1929;) trends identified by article coverage in relevant journals does provide a useful temporal comparison.

Developments in forensic psychology

Following from nineteenth century reform in criminal justice procedures and professionalization of defense barristers/attorneys, an emergent legal psychology focused on eyewitness credibility within the arena of expert testimony in court cases (Wolffram, 2020). Indeed the first key text was entitled *On the Witness Stand* (Munsterberg, 1908). Early definitions coupled psychology with law, e.g. Slesinger and Pilpel (1929, p. 678) defined legal psychology “as the behavior of people in situations created by the law, or the behavior of people in legal relations” and assessed the behavior of judges as important as the behavior of criminals. Their count of relevant articles appearing in journals found “twenty-eight psychiatric titles, forty-two sociological, forty-six legal and forty-eight psychological articles” (Slesinger & Pilpel, 1929, p. 678). So from its beginning forensic psychology cut across disciplinary boundaries. Of the articles appearing in psychology outlets, most were experimental accounts of deception and witness testimony, with a smaller number being correlation studies linking criminality with intelligence, gender or race.

Legal proceeding remained the focus of ‘legal’ psychology until the 1930s when the discipline appeared to stutter and there was a period of stagnation. Hans Toch brought together the terms *Legal and Criminal Psychology* in 1961 in an edited text in

which he argued for the discipline to be harnessed in the service of more rationale and humane practice in the administration of justice and a shift towards treatment of offenders (Toch, 1961). In the legal section, chapters discussed trial tactics and the psychology of jurors whilst the section on criminal psychology included topics such as causes of crime, psychopathy and an interesting treatise on mother daughter feuds as contributing to female juvenile crime.

Tapp (1976) in her review of the field still conceptualized law and psychology as distinct but collaborating disciplines. She suggested that during the 1960s and 70s there was a resurgence of interest in the field due to concerns about rights (and those who were “rights deprived”); rising crime rates especially violent crime; and the need to understand such behaviors. In her count of articles appearing in the Index to Legal Periodicals, 157 were located using the term psychology, 276 mental health and 252 psychiatry. She identified three broad themes: legal socialization, judicial processes, and criminal justice processes. Cross cultural and developmental trends were very much a feature of the first of these themes with research looking at differences between black and white adolescents using both open ended interview and survey methods to collect data. She draws attention the paucity of research on children’s rights and abusive experiences from the child’s perspective. Under her judicial processes theme, she commented upon the ubiquitousness of student samples in experimental studies examining influences on decision making and the need to conduct more ecologically valid studies on topics like eyewitness identification in police line ups and alternatives to the heavy reliance on mock juries to examine juror’s deliberations. In the last of her themes, she discusses the then debates between behaviorist approaches to interventions with incarcerated offenders and a more rights-oriented approaches in therapeutic rehabilitation or re-socialization regimes. She also distinguished between what she

termed system professionals and system challengers. This is a theme developed by Richards (1977) in his discussion of psychologists working in British prisons during the 1970s who were often engaged in researching problems that confronted prison staff and in assisting in the management of regime. As the problem of segregation of prisoners became an issue some research effort began looking at treatment interventions which challenged behaviorist approaches. Thus, we see an expansion of the purview of 'legal' psychology into concerns about offenders and their treatment as suggested by Toch (1961).

When Monahan and Loftus' (1982) review appeared, there was a change of emphasis to psychology 'of' rather than 'and' law and their interest was in psychology's contribution to understanding and predicting legal phenomena (p. 443). They noted too the appearance of the term forensic as in the creation of an American Board of Forensic Psychology. Haward (1981) had just published a text entitled "forensic psychology" in which his definition of the discipline was "that branch of applied psychology ...concerned with the collection, examination and preparation of evidence for judicial purposes" (p. 21). Monahan and Loftus observed that work on offender rehabilitation was maturing whilst research into deterrence was still in its infancy. Psychologists were moving into areas such as competence as well as retaining their attention on juries and eyewitness evidence which was the most theoretically developed topic (p. 450). They noted a gap between the rhetoric of greater autonomy for those with mental health conditions and the reality of those experiencing mental health institutions. They too observed a divide between those researchers seeking experimental testing of theory and those seeking more ecologically valid real-world settings. Moore and Finn (1986) focused on methodologies used in forensic psychology research and of the 87 articles in their database they found only 15 empirical articles with most reporting correlational or

describing analyses. Snook et al., (2009) examining police related articles in forensic psychology journals indicated that experimental methods were the most frequently used.

By the late 1980s more textbooks were being published with the term forensic psychology appearing in their titles (e.g. Handbook of Forensic Psychology by Weiner & Hess, 1987). This collection addressed the omission identified by Monahan and Loftus (1982) on civil proceedings as well as widening areas of interest such as police, prisons, mentally disordered offenders and interventions with victims and survivors. In this edited collection (Hess 1987, p13) was noting a “strain” between the law and psychology pointing to differences between them such as the conservatism of the law and contemporary nature of psychology with the latter looking for generalizations whilst the former demands absolutes. Ten years later, Hess (1996, p244) expressed this divergence more strongly opining that forensic psychology seemed the most apt term to describe the discipline and although there were still likely to be confusion, he thought over time the usage would become clearer. He predicted that as well as its continuing work in assessment and treatment of offenders, forensic psychology would become more concerned with public policy and operate within the political arena and methodologically develop ethnographic and narrative analyses to complement the experimental.

As concerns were being raised about disparities in provision of mental health services available to ethnic minorities groups compared to white counterparts, professional issues around culturally competent practice began to emerge. Carter and Forsyth (2007) examined 12 correctional psychology textbooks to find only 2 offered any chapters on multiculturalism with forensic populations and concluded there was little analysis available on treatment of race. In their review of seven relevant journals

from 1998-2003 they disappointingly only found 9% of papers examined race and ethnicity in any depth out of a total of 493 articles. Similarly, Eagly et al., (2012) found fewer than 5% of articles within the category of Forensic Psychology (from 1960-2009) covering sex differences, gender and women.

A major reassessment of interventions with offenders took place in the 1990s with replacement of the earlier pessimistic “nothing works” (Martinson, 1974) towards a more optimistic belief that some treatments were more effective than originally thought. This led to a stream of research developing the Risk Needs Responsivity (RNR) approach (Polaschek, 2012) and the Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward & Stewart, 2003) of treatment which resonated with earlier discussions of individual autonomy and rights (Tapp, 1976) and the search for more humane interventions (Toch, 1961).

Broadly speaking by the 2000s Forensic Psychology was accepted as a specialist discipline by the American Psychological Society (2013). Slightly earlier, 1999, the British Psychological Society’s specialist Division changed its name to Division of Forensic Psychology (Brown & Campbell, 2010). There had been developments in accreditation and credentialling of practitioners and a mushrooming of journals in which research and reviews appeared (Otto and Heilbrun, 2002). They note an increase in therapeutic services in forensic settings and correspondingly developments in forensic psychological assessments. Although they argue this interest had not migrated to delivery of treatment programs.

Contemporary context

In the last decade a number of external factors are discernible that potentially impact the forensic psychology environment, notably austerity, evidence-based practice movements, environmental campaigns such as Extinction Rebellion, and

attention being brought to discriminatory behaviors exemplified by movements such as #MeToo, #Sayhername and Black Lives Matter as well as increasing concerns over radicalization and terrorism (Brown & Horvath, 2021).

The banking collapse and its austerity aftermath have had a profound effect on Governments' budgets especially in the criminal justice arena. For example, Aviram (2014) argues that cost savings in corrections in the United States included privatization, out-of-state incarceration, prison closures, bartering with other states, jurisdictional shifts as indicative that it is not time for the punitive pendulum to swing in the other direction. Ismail (2019) indicated in the United Kingdom (UK) funding for Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service was reduced by 22%, from £3.48 billion in 2009/2010 to £2.71 billion in 2016/17, leading to a 30% reduction in prison staff between 2009 and 2017. Reflecting on the impact of seven years of austerity, Ismail concluded there was impeded access to prison healthcare and productive activities as well as lengthy confinement within locked, overcrowded, and poorly maintained cells.

Zinger (2016, p. 610) reported on the Canadian Conservative government's enactment of legislation to make prison conditions more austere; imposition of lengthier incarceration periods; significant expansion of the scope of mandatory minimum penalties; and reduction in opportunities for conditional release, parole, and alternatives to incarceration. Not only has there been a significant influx of indigenous and black prisoners, but also the number of women prisoners, especially indigenous women (now representing 37% of the women inmate population), has also dramatically increased. Zinger concludes the impact of this law-and-order agenda has resulted in further inequities amongst already disadvantaged.

In terms of advances in forensic psychology, Seto (2021) suggests that there have been improvements in risk assessments, especially with respect to predicting

violence and aggression, although there is a rather more mixed picture with respect to risk management. He celebrates the worldwide influence of the risk, needs, responsibility framework whereas six years earlier Crighton and Towl (2015) argued that less progress has been made with respect to dangerous and severe personality disorder. Seto (2021) notes the considerable gaps in work on women and indigenous offenders. Moreover, there are serious concerns about sexual violence. In the UK since 2016 there has been a 42.5% rise in the report of rape allegations to the police and a 22.6% decline in the number of rape cases charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (George & Ferguson, 2021; Ministry of Justice, 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2021). Similar trends are observable in the United States (Casteel, Wolfe & Ngugen, 2018) and Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Racial inequalities alluded to earlier within the prison population was further highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement. Barnes (2015) demonstrates how the U.S. criminal justice system operates in a manner where identity-group membership affects disparate outcomes concluding that Governmental policies, state actors, and individual citizen-participants contribute to a criminal justice system where difference most often equals disadvantage.

The intersection of identity politics and environmental justice has been elucidated by Pellow (2016) who extends notions of social justice not only to encompass intersectionality i.e. consideration of the interaction of being more than a unitary social category but also considers distribution of environmental resources.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) has over the last decade been marked in its influence within diverse fields such as health, education, social welfare and criminal justice (Fielding, Bullock & Holdaway, 2020). EBP approaches enlist evidence to inform policy making and professional practice. In part EBP was a manifestation of

skepticism towards the judgement of professionals, the increased availability of data sets and furthering attempts to obtain value for money in public projects. One of the consequences has been an increase in the preference for quantitative methodologies most notable Randomised Control Trials (RCT) as the gold standard of acceptable evidence (Brown, 2020).

The current study seeks to identify the main topics of interest as reflected in publications in both general forensic psychology journals and more targeted specialty journals over the last five years. González-Sala et al. (2017) listed 16 subject specific journals and found the most frequently mentioned method was meta-analysis, whilst crime, behavior and women reporting sexual and gendered based violence were amongst the most frequent themes. The present analysis looks at preferred methods, forensic samples used in empirical studies and the jurisdictions of origin. For the sake of clarity, the paper presents three separate studies: the first is an analysis of the generalist forensic psychology journals; the second analyses the targeted specialist journal; and the third is a comparison of coverage between the two.

Study one

Methods

Five journals were selected from the 16 identified by González-Sala et al., (2017) pertaining to criminology, penology, law and psychology. These were chosen as representing generalist outlets for forensic psychology covering North America, Australia, and the UK: Legal and Criminological Psychology (LCP) and Psychology Crime and Law (PCL) has a British editorial team; Law & Human Behavior (LHB) and Behavioral Sciences & the Law (BSL) with a US team and Psychiatry Psychology & Law (PPL) with an Australian editorial board. All articles appearing in issues for the years 2015 to 2020 were inspected.

A coding scheme was developed as follows:

1. Name of the journal in which the article appeared.
2. The research design employed
 - a. quantitative which included questionnaires, surveys, experimental studies and randomized control trials;
 - b. qualitative which included interviews, diary studies;
 - c. mixed methods incorporating quantitative and qualitative elements
 - d. secondary analyses where researchers accessed court or police records or undertook further analyses on already collected quantitative data;
 - e. desk studies e.g literature reviews, systematic reviews or meta analyses;
3. The forensic population who were the subject of the paper, which included criminal justice professionals, witnesses, suspects/defendants/offenders/prisoners/ex-prisoners; victims. This category also included students as research participants, the general public and mock jurors;
4. whether diversity (i.e. age, sexuality, religion, gender, ethnicity or disability) was an explicit focus of the study or not;
5. the broad topic covered, including mental health issues, risk, treatment evaluation, personality, consent and capacity, fear of crime, credibility assessments, deception, interviewing and investigation techniques, victimology, professional issues; and
6. the jurisdiction where the article originated.

In all 1374 articles were coded. For each Journal a random issue was chosen and subject to an inter-rater reliability check representing 54 articles. The overall correspondence between coders was 91%.

Results

Overall, the total number of articles appearing in the reviewed journals was 1374 with numbers generally decreasing year on year as shown in Figure One.

Figure 1 about here

There were no statistically significant differences in the number of articles appearing annually in the five Journals. Most studies (83%) across all the papers were empirical: 70% used quantitative methods, 4.5% qualitative, 4% mixed methods. Overall, 17% were reviews or theoretical papers. There was a statistically significant difference in methods of empirical papers between the journals (Chi square (16)=214.756 p=0.000). PPL was the most likely to publish qualitative research papers (10%) and BSL theoretical or review papers (39%). LCP, PCL and LHB published the highest percentage of quantitative studies, 85%, 77% and 84% respectively. Overall, only 4.5% of published studies used mixed methods. There was a modest increase in qualitative studies over time and these methods were most likely employed when interviewing criminal justice practitioners (48%) followed by suspects/defendants/prisoners (21%). The topic where qualitative methods were used included prisoner management (23%) and interviewing/investigative techniques (18%).

The dominant topic of the papers was that concerning prisoner management/service needs and treatment (including mental health) and evaluation of interventions and assessment tools used with offenders. Memory and witness testimony and interviewing and investigative techniques came next (see Figure Two). Within these two topics areas, 69% of papers related to prisoners were empirical and 31% theoretical or conceptual; 89% of memory and eyewitness papers were empirical and 11% more theoretically/conceptually oriented.

Figure 2 about here

Diversity featured in about a third of papers (n=489) and was mostly a feature of studies on crime particularly stalking and harassment where 59% mentioned this. Thereafter diversity featured in articles on capacity and credibility (49%) and attitudinal studies (45%). Figure Two shows results for all topic areas and the differences were statistically significant (Chi-square (11) =48.862 p=0.000). It is striking that attitudes, crime focus and risk were amongst the less frequent topics yet were more likely to have an explicit reference to diversity.

In terms of the population studied the largest category were suspects/defendants/prisoners (30%). Thereafter the General Public (16%) and criminal justice practitioners (13%). Least studied were victims (3%). Witness research were amongst the lower percent (8.3%). Figure Three shows the percentage of a diversity category within studies where a particular population was the subject. The distribution of diversity as a feature of the study was statistically significant (Chi square (7) =110.030 p=0.000)

Figure 3 about here

In terms of jurisdiction reflected in the published papers the field is dominated by work focusing on North America i.e. the USA and Canada (46%) followed by Australia/New Zealand (17%), Continental European countries (15%), Asia or Latin America (11%) and the UK (10%). Papers hailing from the USA/Canada dominate in BSL (74%) and LHB (82%). Most Australian/New Zealand papers appear in PPL. The jurisdiction profile for LCP and PCL differed in that the highest percentage (32%) of the former published UK based papers whereas PCL were more likely to publish North American based papers (32%). For

papers emanating outside these main jurisdictions, (i.e. Asia or Latin America) then PCL published the greatest percentage (59%) followed by BSL (25%).

Study two

Methods

Six of the 16 journals in legal psychology identified by González-Sala et al., (2017) were chosen as representing the more specialized targeted journals: Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling (JIPOPP); Psychology, Public Policy and Law (PPL); Criminal Justice and Behavior (CJB); Aggression and Violent Behavior (AVB); International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology (IJOTCC); Sex Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment (SA). In the Gonzales-Sala et al., study, our target specialist journals were the ones listed by eight key forensic psychologists who featured on editorial boards. As in Study one all articles were inspected for the years 2015-2020 utilizing a slightly expanded coding frame i.e. diversity categories were individually coded rather than scored dichotomously as present or absence as a general category. An inter-rater reliability check utilized a random selection of one issue from the six journals, totaling 57 articles. The correspondence between raters was 90%.

Results

Apart from The International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology which has 16 issues annually the most of any selected, there is a reasonably stable number of articles over the period.

Figure 4 about here

About two thirds of the articles were empirical with the majority using quantitative methods (n=535). Only 6% employed qualitative and 3% mixed methods. A fifth were secondary analyses and 17% more conceptual or theoretical pieces. The Journals were statistically significantly different in the methodologies they published (Chi-square (20) =72.625 p<.000). Aggression and Violent Behavior was the least likely and IJOTCC most likely to publish articles using qualitative methods. Aggression and Violent Behavior were dominated by secondary analyses and more theoretically based studies. Overall, there was a decline in publication of conceptual/theoretical studies (28% in 2015 and 17% in 2020) and an increase in quantitative methodologies (44% in 2015 to 53% in 2020). Studies of memory, deception and interviewing predominantly utilized quantitative methods. Studies of risk and capacity were the most likely to reflect conceptual or theoretical papers. Where qualitative methods were utilized, these were most likely found in studies of prison management and service needs.

Figure 5 about here

Overall diversity was a feature of 54% of papers. There was an overall statistically significant difference in topic by specific mention of diversity (Chi-square (10) =116.8 p<.000). This was mostly in respect of juveniles or children which was mentioned in 21% of papers and intersectionality was a feature of 14% of submissions. With respect to young people, where diversity was featured papers were mostly concerned with incarceration or delinquency (67%) which was the case for intersectionality (59%). For risk related papers where diversity was a feature this most likely was in relation to age (20%), sexuality (12%) or ethnicity (8%).

Where particular sample groups were featured in papers, then over half (52%) were prisoners, ex-prisoners or convicted offenders, defendants or suspects. General public samples comprised 13% and students made up 9% of samples.

Figure 6 about here

A specific crime featured in 43% of papers. Where a crime was the topic then 44% related to sexual crime, 15% domestic violence, 9% violent crime, 6% harassment or stalking, 4% computer base crime, and 2% acquisitive crime. With respect to sexual crime, 25% of children and 20% of women featured significantly as victims with 15% of cases utilizing the concept of intersectionality.

Origin of studies were dominantly USA/Canada (45%) followed by continental Europe (12%); Asia 9%, the UK (6%) and Australia/New Zealand 4%. There were just 14 (0.6%) of articles from Latin America.

Study three

Method

The aim of this study was to compare coverage between the 5 generalist and the 6 more targeted journals. We were interested in the differences in topics, samples and whether diversity was an explicit aspect of the paper. The two data bases were combined for the purposes of this analysis.

Results

Overall, the more targeted journals had the greater number of papers published, with those focusing on aggressive behavior and offenders having the greatest number. The more targeted journals between them had a total of 49 issues a year compared to 30 from the generalist FP journals.

Figure 7 about here

When looking at empirical papers the most likely samples recruited were prisoners (potential, actual and ex) which constituted half of the papers. Mock jurors and eyewitness comprised the least likely samples. For the conceptual and more theoretical papers, then the generalist forensic psychology journals focused on mental

health, risk and prisoner management issues. The specialty journals homed in on crime, measurement and assessment and professional issues.

Specialty journals were proportionally the most likely to utilize potential, actual or ex prisoner samples, 58% compared to the generalist forensic psychology journals (36%, Chi square (1) =150.32 $p < .00001$) and students (10% compared to 6% (chi-square (1) =20.16 $p < .00001$). The generalist journals were more likely to recruit from the general population (19% compared to 14%, chi square (1) =12.2 $p < .0004$); professional criminal justice practitioners (15% compared to 10%, chi square (1) =21.32 $p < .0001$); mock jurors (10% compared to 1%, Chi-square (1) =153.09 $p < .00001$) or eye witness (10% compared to less than 1%, Chi square (1) =166.64 $p < .00001$).

There was a statistically significant difference between the generalist and specialty journals in their publication of more theoretically oriented papers. The Generalist journals published 21% and the specialty journals 17% (Chi-square (1) =13.52 $p < .0002$). Similarly, there was also a statistically significant difference between the two in terms of explicit mention of diversity with the 54% specialty journals and 36% of the generalist discussing this (Chi square (1) =113.02 $p < .00001$). In terms of topics covered then there were differences in coverage as shown in Figure Eight.

Figure 8 about here

Both sets of journals are equally likely to take articles on attitudes or personality. Thereafter the differences on topic published is statistically significantly different. Thus generalist forensic journals are more likely to publish papers on eyewitnesses or other articles related to witnesses (Chi square (1) = 166.13 $p < .00001$); juries (Chi square (1) =206.00 $p < .00001$); professional issues (Chi square (1) = 6.78 $p < .009$); risk (Chi square (1) =6.01 $p < .01$); capacity and consent (Chi square (1) =17.90 $p < .00002$) and investigative techniques (Chi square (1) = 12.25 $p < .0004$). Specialty journals are more

likely to publish papers on offenders and prisoners (Chi square (1) =347.41 $p < .00001$); and crime (chi square (1) =27.42 $p < .00001$). The specialty journals are less likely to publish papers emanating from the UK or Australia and more likely to reflect research from Asia (Chi-square (4) =129.97 $p < .00001$).

Discussion

As originally conceived psychology's involvement in matters pertaining to the law were limited to witness testimony and credibility (Wolfram, 2020). Early years were characterized by a twin tack of psychology and law with a common interest in the analysis of human behavior and visions of justice (Carson, 2003, p.25). Slesinger and Pilpel's (1929) review found a strong link between psychiatry and legal psychology. This was still the case in Tapp's (1976) review establishing a link to mental health medicine as well as law. Crighton and Towl (2008, p.11) suggest that as a consequence of the needs of employing organizations (Health or Prison Services) in the UK a clinical sub specialism emerged out of mental health care needs and the forensic sub specialism emerged from the prison systems. Neal (2018) argues that in the United States forensic and correctional psychology diverged.

Monahan and Loftus' (1987) review found the focus of interest in juries and eyewitness testimony well established with new interest in competency and capability as well as links with mental health. Snook et al., (2009) showed an increase in journal outputs related to police psychology dealing with operational issues, often with experimental research designs and mostly originating from the United States.

As more topics were incorporated the term forensic psychology was preferred to describe the discipline and signaled a shift from an accommodation between psychology and law towards recognition of a specialty within its own right (American Psychological Association, 2013). Forensic psychology became an umbrella term to

embrace research in an increasing range of interests exemplified by coverage in the many handbooks and textbooks published over the last decade that include aspects of prison, police, clinical and community applications and more lately on-line offending.

What is striking in the present analysis is the domination across the two sets of journals of concerns with prisoner management, assessment, treatment, mental health issues which present quite a shift from previous journal analyses. Published research on juries and eyewitnesses which dominated earlier journal reviews seems to have decreased somewhat. Cross referral to psych-lit lists also shows this trend. In the period 2015-2020 there were 121 entries using the search term juries compared to 131 in the 6 years from 2009-2014, and 140 in the period 2003 -2008. Between 2015 and 2020 there were 958 hits using the key word offender; between 2014 and 2009 there were 861 and between 2003 and 2008 the number was 619. Perhaps this is indicative of the pressures on the prison system noted by Ismail (2019), Zinger (2016) and Aviram (2014) mentioned earlier. It may also be an indication of the numbers of forensic psychologists who work within the prison system. In the UK there were around 2,590 chartered forensic psychologists (Brown, Shell & Cole, 2015) with about 500 working for the prison service i.e. around a fifth.¹ Needs (2015, p.321) observed that notwithstanding an expansion of psychology staff working within the UK's prisons service there was a narrowing of focus around delivering treatment programs and conducting risk assessment.

¹ [Psychologists in the prison service: finding the real story inside - Working in the Prison and Probation Service \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

In terms of coverage there is a bias towards empirical rather than more theoretically oriented studies which is a reversal of the trend reported in Moore and Finn (1986). They looked at publications cited in Psychological Abstracts and found the incidence of non-empirical studies to be much higher than empirical ones. Beech and Ward (2015, p.336) remind us that a vibrant theoretical research culture is necessary for the success of forensic psychology and theories are the essential tools to build our understanding of why certain problems occur, how they develop and unearth what are the causes that maintain them. Papers on professional issues have increased and this perhaps is a reflection of greater attention being paid to credentialing (O'Hare et al., 2022) and ethical practice (Ward & Wills, 2010). Also striking is that victims feature relatively little in topics and there also seems to be less reliance of student samples. Just under half of the papers explicitly factored diversity into the coverage within the article and this was most common with respect to age such as focus on juvenile delinquency (21% of papers in the specialty journals) of children as victims of crime. Some Journals now specify a in their instructions to authors that method must contain a detailed description of the study participants, including (but not limited to) : age; gender; ethnicity; nativity or immigration history; SES; clinical diagnoses and comorbidities (as appropriate); any other relevant demographics (e.g., sexual orientation).

There are differences between the two sets of journals in emphasis of topics covered, with the generalist forensic journals publishing a broader range than the specialty journals, which perhaps is to be expected in terms of the journals' remit. The generalist journals had a larger proportion of articles on eyewitnesses or other articles related to witnesses, juries, professional issues, risk capacity and consent and investigative techniques. Specialty journals are more likely to publish papers on offenders and prisoners and crimes of which sexual crime, domestic violence,

harassment and bullying was the most often featured. The focus on gendered crime may be a feature of the increased awareness given to violence against women and girls through the media and social platforms.

There is a preponderance of quantitative methodologies used as the preferred research method with the generalist journals likely to publish slightly more than the specialty journals. This trend was also observed in the earlier journal review by (Monahan & Loftus, 1982). Howitt (2011, p.154) argues that qualitative methods have not made significant inroads into forensic psychology research and advocates their use more widely than the tendency to use as an exploratory tool.

Limitations to this analysis is of course not all published articles related to forensic psychology are reflected in the 11 titles chosen. A google scholar search using the term forensic psychology for the years 20015-2020 yielded 14,100 hits so the present number of articles represents 26% of this output. We feel this is a sufficient quantum to reflect trends, if incomplete, and some of the shifts of focus observed.

Conclusions

Over the course of its history, reviews in the field show psychology and, of, in law moved towards an acceptance of forensic psychology as the preferred name for the discipline. (Brown and Horvath, 2021; Crighton and Towl 2008; Hess, 1987, 1996; Monahan and Loftus, 1982; Otto and Heilbrun, 2002; Seto, 2021; Tapp, 1976). Hess's (1996) initial hope that the term forensic psychology would lose its ambiguity over time has not been realized. Nor has the field undertaken much commentary on political and policy matters and he had predicted. There is little evidence of forensic psychology's contribution to understanding contemporary problems of discrimination and

victimization. Hess also thought the discipline would undertake more qualitative approaches in its research methodologies. This remains an aspiration as the present research output as reported here is skewed towards quantitative methods. The moves towards treatment and interventions with forensic populations discussed by Otto and Heilbrun (2002) have been realized as the emphasis on current published outputs testifies. The focus of research is very much the offender with significant omissions for research consideration of the victim experience. Intersectionality also remains under researched. Terrorism, acquisitive and internet based offending are amongst the least likely specific crimes to be researched. Furthermore, researchers who are most often published in the journals reviewed in this paper are almost exclusively from Westernized countries suggesting limited geographic reach of the discipline. Quantitative empirical research continues to dominate which is to the discipline's detriment as theoretical will provide much needed and richer more nuanced and explanatory frameworks.

Forensic Psychology's hundred year history has seen developments in its professionalization and protection limiting practice to those appropriately credentialed yet the boundaries of the academic component of discipline remain blurred and fragmented as smaller sub disciplines proliferate (Brown and Horvath, 2021). This makes studies like this incomplete and difficult to fully map the emerging trends and direction of travel. We hope by identifying research outputs in forensically relevant journals to stimulate future work to address the omission we note.

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Figure 1: Number of articles appearing in generalist Forensic Psychology journals 2015-2020

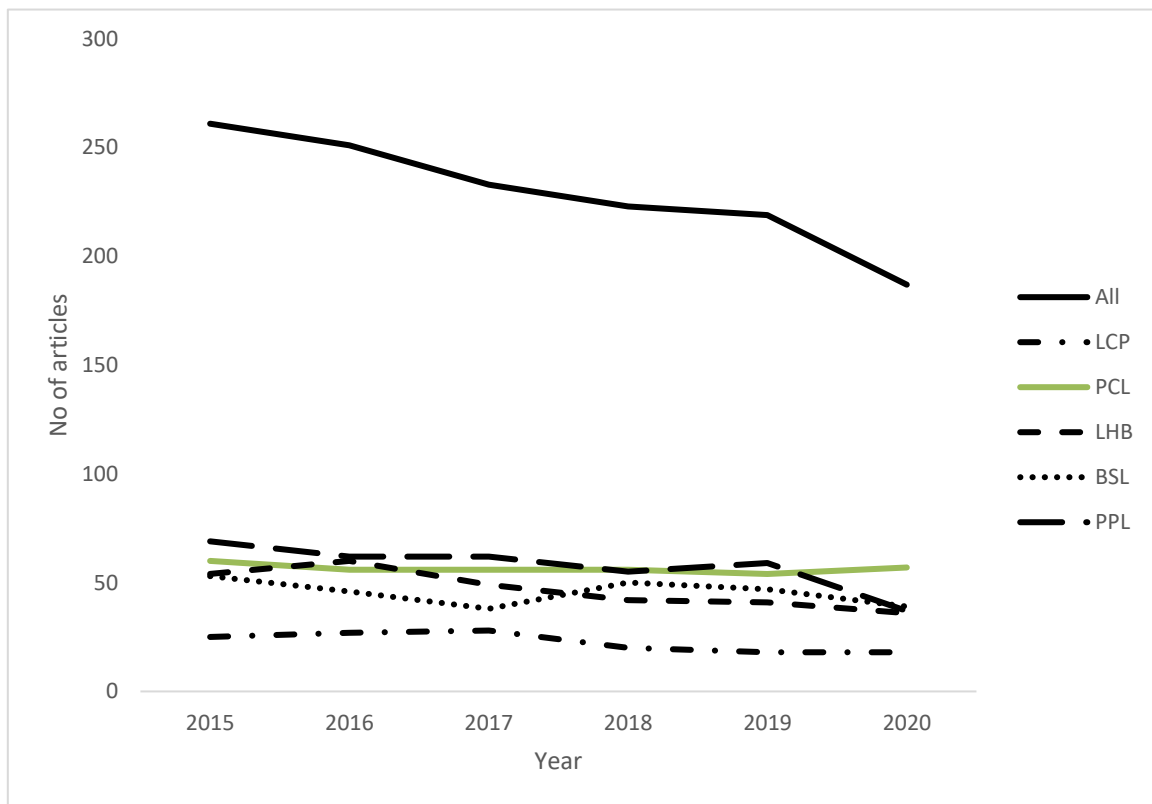


Figure 2: Frequency of Topics appearing in the generalist Forensic Psychology Journals and percent where diversity explicit

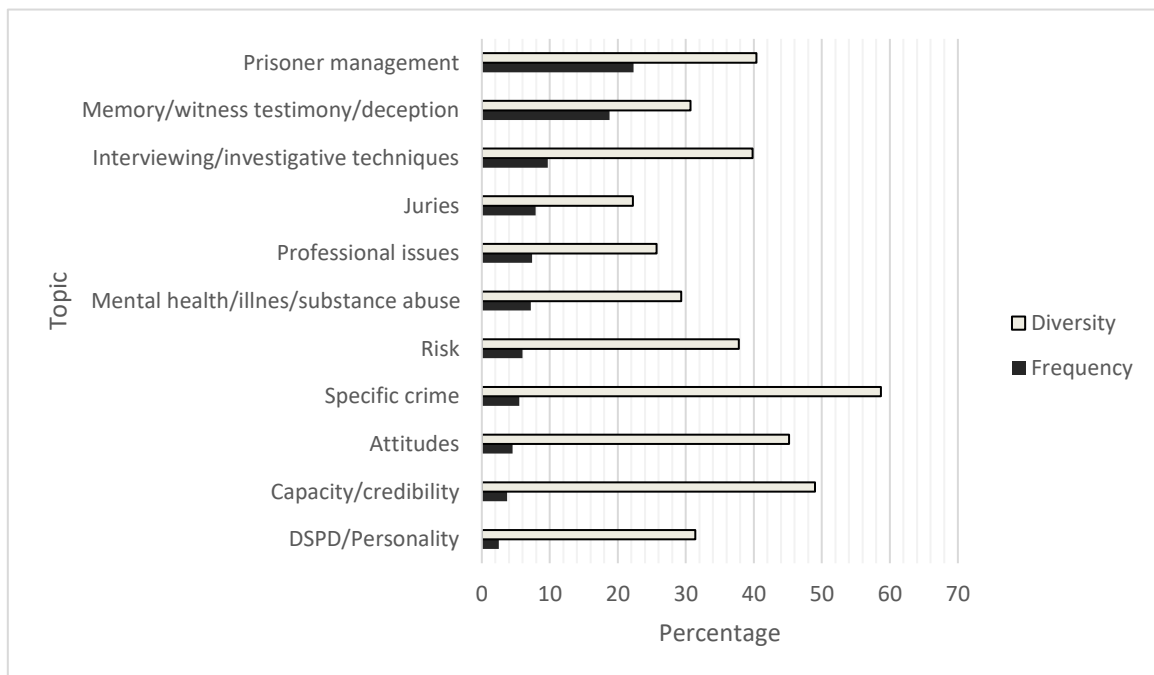


Figure 3: Percentage where particular demographic/Criminal Justice relevant characteristic features in studies in generalist Forensic Psychology journals

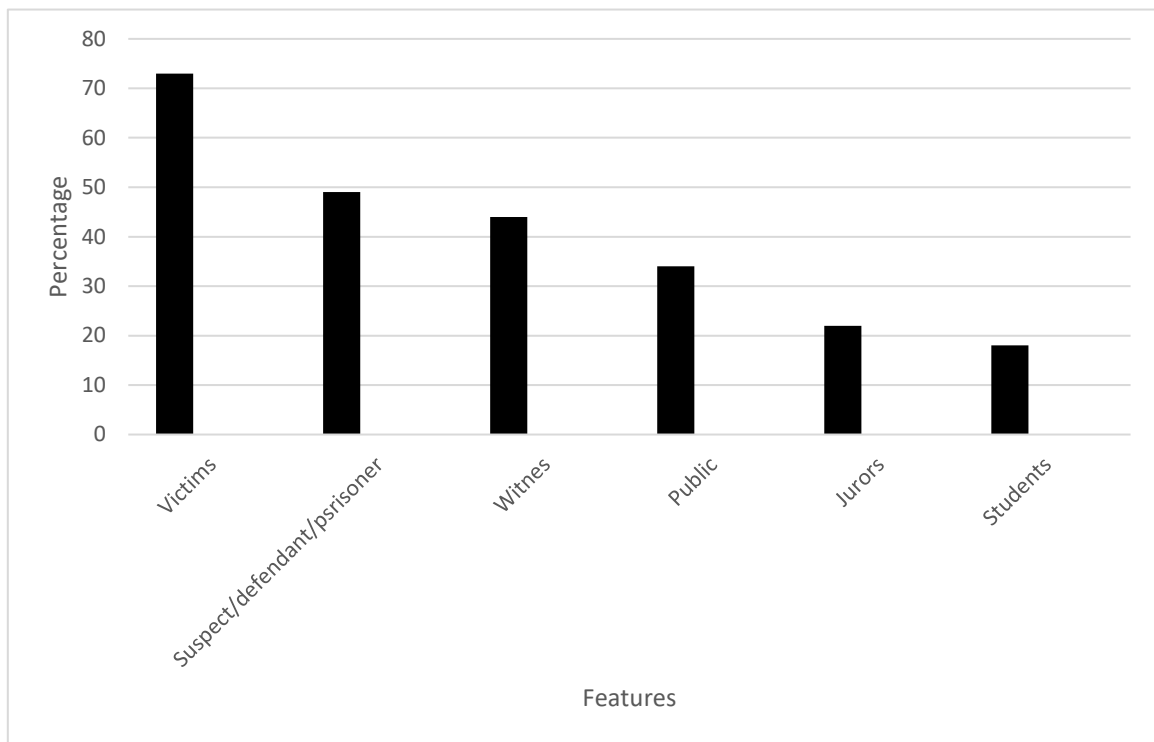


Figure 4: Number of articles appearing in targeted journals 2015-2020

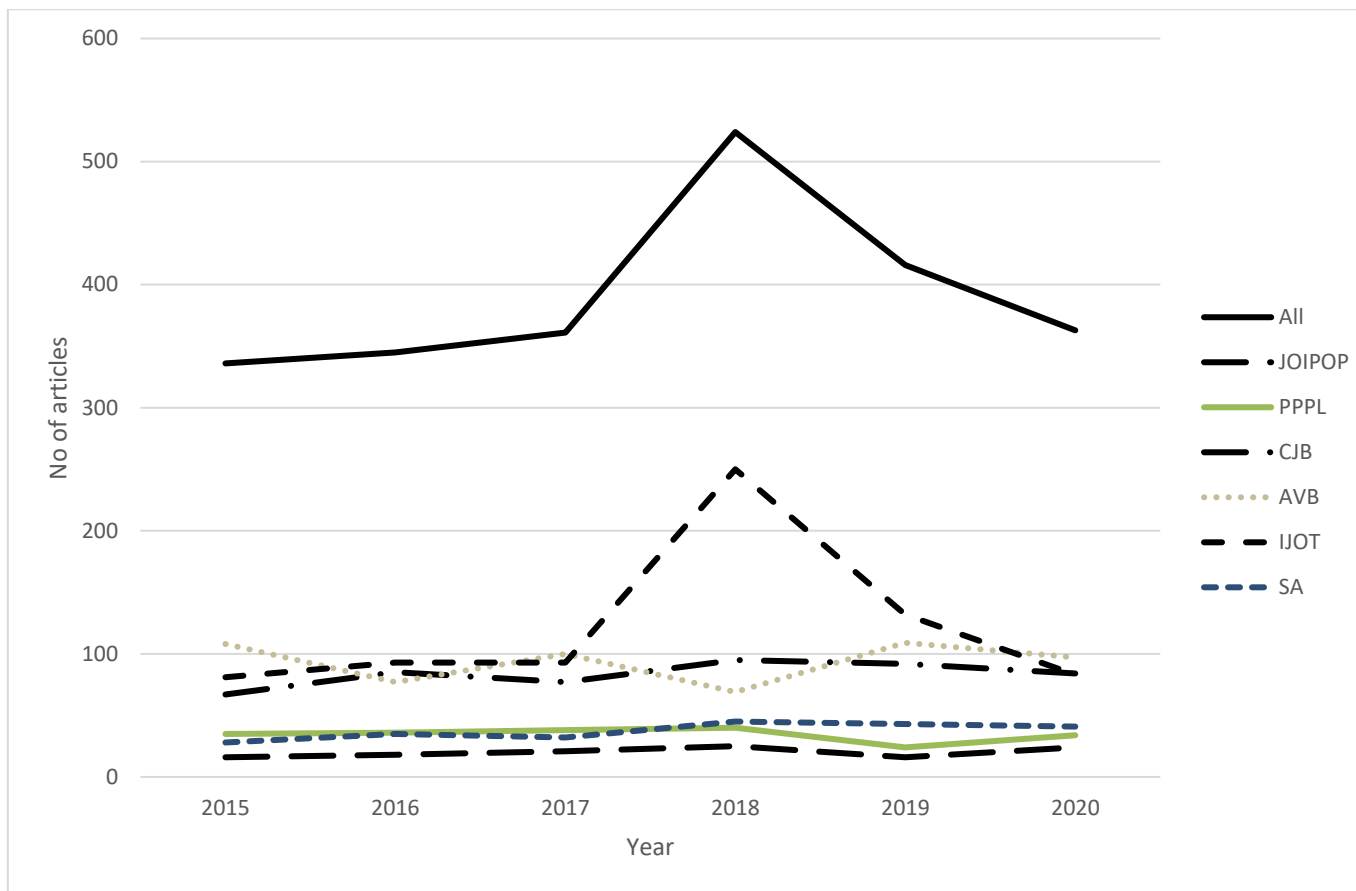


Figure 5: Frequency of Topics appearing in the reviewed targeted specialist Journals and percent where diversity explicit

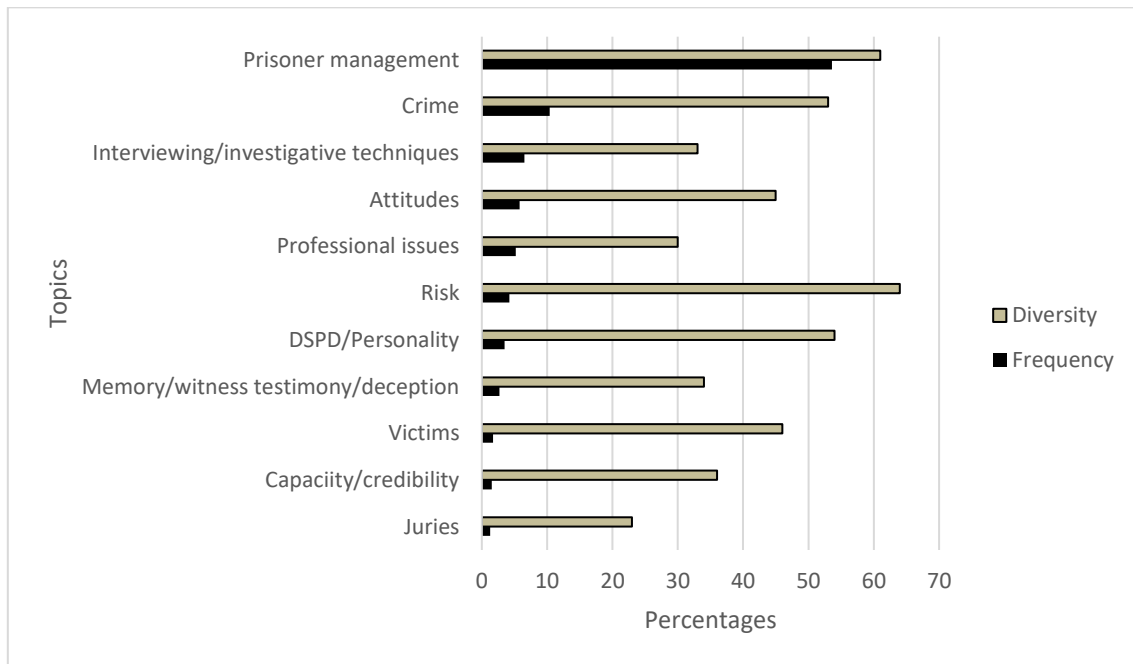


Figure 6: Percentage where particular samples features in studies in targeted specialist journals

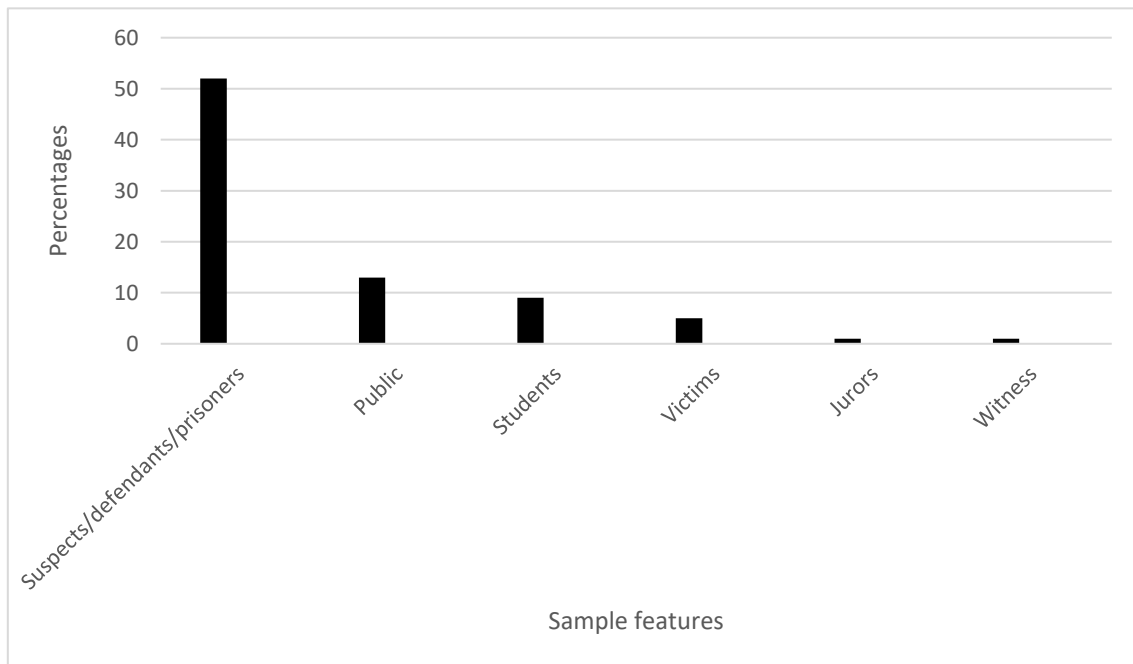


Figure 7: Percentage of articles appearing in generalist and specialist journals

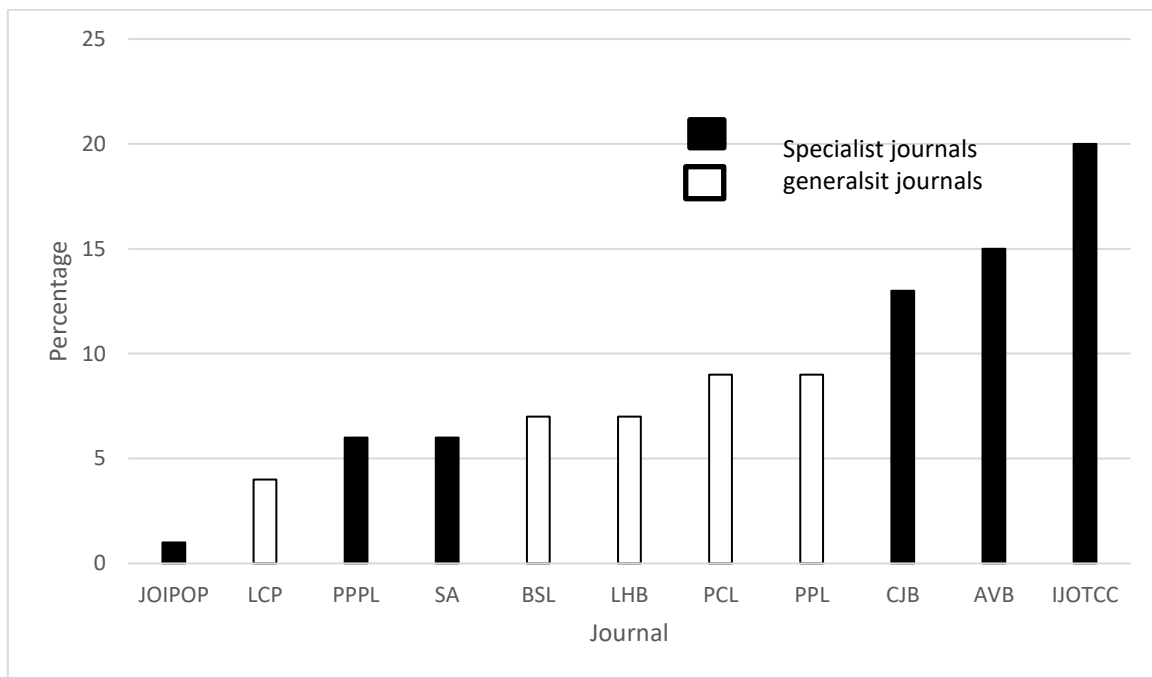


Figure 8: Percentage differences in topic coverage

