The law, legal services and the public

Pascoe Pleasence
Professor of Empirical Legal Studies, University College London
Head of the Legal Services Research Centre, Legal Services Commission

Nigel J Balmer
Principal Researcher, Legal Services Research Centre, Legal Services Commission
Reader in Law and Social Statistics, University College London

Stian Reimers
Department of Psychology, University College London
Legal revolutions, Professional evolutions

“It’s law Jim, but not as we know it” (or “but we don’t know it”)

• We live in a “law-thick” world (Hadfield 2010).

• Expansion has transformed the legal framework in which we live our lives as citizens, consumers, producers and in private (e.g. Goriely 1998, Howells and Weatherill 2005).

• As individuals, at least one third of people experience difficult to solve “justiciable” problems over a 3 year period (English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey).

• Traditional legal services have been transformed over the past half century, fuelled by a rapid rise in the provision of commercial law services, clustering of work in larger practices, and increasing diversity and size of intake.
Legal revolutions, Professional evolutions

“It’s law Jim, but not as we know it” (or “but we don’t know it”)

• The focus of private client work (or legal training) has not expanded as quickly as the law / does not reflect public experience of law.

• In the legal aid sphere, the “not-for-profit” sector (e.g. Citizens Advice) has been increasingly looked to for provision of social welfare law services.

• The public also look towards a broader array of advice services when facing social welfare problems.

• Whereas 43% of people seek advice from solicitors’ firms in respect of justiciable problems concerning the break-up of families, personal injury and home ownership, the figure is just 7% for other problems types (Pleasence 2006).
The Legal Services Sector

Horses for Courses

• The importance of the broader advice sector to the delivery of legal services is self-evident.

• The importance of service integration is self-evident. People frequently go in inappropriate directions in search of help for their problems.

• These patterns are likely to have resulted from a mixture of:
  • rational behaviour (on the part of both service users and providers);
  • different speeds of development of the law and legal services; and,
  • levels of public understanding about the nature of problems and services/processes that are available to assist problem resolution.

• Paper sets out beginnings of new research aiming to shed light on this.
To date, empirical inquiry into the factors that lead people to instruct lawyers has moved little further than the finding that “problem type tends to swamp other considerations” (Genn 1999).

But problem type is not a satisfactory explanation. What lies beneath?

As already indicated hypotheses have centred on:
- problem seriousness (cost-benefit)
- supply patterns
- public understanding.

New study indicates that the extent to which people characterise problems as ‘legal’ drives behaviour. This is the dominant factor.
Problem Characterisation

- Problem characterised as a legal problem:
  - Yes: 60% (Lawyer: 40%, Other: 20%, Advice sector: 20%)
  - No: 80% (Lawyer: 40%, Other: 40%)

- Source of advice:
  - Lawyer:
    - Yes: 40%
    - No: 40%
  - Other:
    - Yes: 20%
    - No: 40%
  - Advice sector:
    - Yes: 20%
    - No: 20%
Problem Characterisation

- Problems renting out housing
- Problems with children's education
- Homelessness (threat or actual)
- Neighbours problems
- Problems with benefits grants and pensions
- Child protection
- Faulty goods and services
- Problems with financial services
- Debt problems
- Problems lending money
- Assault by the police
- Employment problems
- Problems with owned housing
- Discrimination
- PI not caused by another
- Problems ancillary to relationship breakdown
- Problems with rented housing
- Divorce
- Clinical negligence
- Problems to do with nationality
- PI caused by another
- Problems with owned housing
- Problems with financial services
- Neighbours problems
- Homelessness (threat or actual)
- Problems with children's education
- Problems renting out housing

% characterised as 'legal'
Characterisation and Appropriateness of Legal Advice

- Neighbours problems
- Problems with benefits grants and pensions
- Problems with children's education
- Faulty goods and services
- Problems with financial services
- Homelessness (threat or actual)
- Employment problems
- Debt problems
- Problems lending money
- Problems with owned housing
- Problems renting out housing
- Problems to do with nationality
- Assault by the police
- Discrimination
- Child protection
- Problems with rented housing
- Problems ancillary to relationship breakdown
- PI not caused by another
- PI caused by another
- Clinical negligence
- Assualt by the police
- Problems ancillary to relationship breakdown
- Divorce
- Problems ancillary to relationship breakdown
- PI not caused by another
- PI caused by another
- Clinical negligence
- Not legal
- Legal

The chart illustrates the appropriateness of legal advice for various issues, with a scale ranging from 0 to 1.
… and Appropriateness of Advice Sector Advice

Problems with financial services
Employment problems
Homelessness (threat or actual)
Problems with benefits grants and pensions
Debt problems
Problems with rented housing
Faulty goods and services
Problems lending money
Discrimination
Problems with owned housing
Problems renting out housing
Problems to do with nationality
Clinical negligence
Problems with childrens education
Problems ancillary to relationship breakdown
Assault by the police
Child protection
PI caused by another
Divorce
Neighbours problems
PI not caused by another