

Prisons Research Centre

Annual Report and Research Findings 2009

The Prisons Research Centre is now in its ninth year, under the Directorship of Professor Alison Liebling. The Centre has received funding from the Prison Service, the Nuffield Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, the ESRC, The KPMG Foundation, the Home Office and UKDS (now Kalyx).

PRC Members include: Professor Alison Liebling, Dr Ben Crewe, Dr Sarah Tait, Ms Helen Arnold, Ms Clare McLean, Ms Vicky Gadd, Mr Guy Shefer, Dr Caroline Lansky, Dr Susie Hulley. Ms Ann Phillips is the Centre's Administrator (part-time). Ms Jennifer Cartwright is the Administrator (part-time) of the ESRC-funded Values Project. Associate Members include: Dr Adrian Grounds and Dr Joel Harvey.

RESEARCH FINDINGS 2009

VALUES, PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CORRECTIONS

In 2006, Professor Alison Liebling and Dr Ben Crewe successfully applied for a large, ESRC research grant for a project titled Values, Practices and Outcomes in Public and Private Corrections. The study was shaped by previous research by both investigators, and drew upon their expertise in the analysis of prison life and their excellent relationships with practitioners in both the public and private prison sectors. The fieldwork (now completed) included extensive data collection in two matched public and two matched private prisons, as well as in-depth interviews with over eighty senior managers about their values, backgrounds and motivations. Dr Susie Hulley and Ms Clare McLean worked as part of the research team. Ms Jennifer Cartwright is the project administrator. The team plan to present their findings and write up the study during 2009.

The findings are complex (and at present, tentative), but some general themes can be summarised as follows:

There are significant differences between staff cultures in the two sectors. Even in struggling private sector establishments, staff reported feeling relatively safe and expressed high levels of trust in their managers. Relative to the public sector, uniformed staff were more positive about their work and their employers, despite less preferable salaries and conditions.

Staff in the public sector prisons were more likely to adhere to a traditional culture, which can be related to negative consequences for prisoners, including feelings of unfairness and lack of care. There were more indications of adherence to a traditional culture among uniformed staff in the more established and higher-performing private sector establishments.

Positive sentiments about their work expressed by private sector staff did not necessarily translate into better outcomes for prisoners. The establishments in which staff quality of life scores were highest were those in which the prisoner quality of life scores were lowest, and vice-versa. The relationship between staff quality of life and prisoner quality of life is complex.

While results gleaned from earlier studies suggested that the private sector might outperform the public sector in areas such as 'decency', 'humanity' and 'trust', the findings from the main four-prison comparison reveal higher scores in the public sector prisons than in the private sector prisons on a large number of dimensions, including 'harmony' as well as 'security' dimensions. However, two of the private sector prisons added to the original study obtained generally higher prisoner quality of life scores than all four prisons in the main study.

Staff in private sector prisons struggled more than public sector prison staff with the use of authority. Although in some private sector prison staff appeared confident in using power, they sometimes had a tendency to under-use power or use it in rather arbitrary ways. There was a tendency for under-policing within the private sector establishments, even in those which were otherwise high-performing. In the two public sector prisons in the study, prisoners were more likely to describe power being used appropriately, although there were also indications that power was sometimes over-used.

A potential weakness of the private sector is staff knowledge and competence, particularly in training prisons. Prisoners in private sector establishments described staff as 'nice people' but felt that they lacked expertise on issues that mattered to them, particularly in relation to their sentence conditions.

Prisoners in the private sector prisons reported feeling more frustrated and stressed by their prison experiences. Those in the public sector reported stronger feelings of being punished by their prison experience.

These early findings will be explored in greater detail over the coming months.

ALISON LIEBLING
BEN CREWE

THE PRISONER SOCIETY: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison, by Dr Ben Crewe, will be published by Oxford University Press in Autumn 2009, as part of its Clarendon Series in Criminology. The book is the end-product of several years of research and writing based on a study of HMP Wellingborough, a medium-security men's training prison. It explains how power is exercised by the modern prison, individualizing the

prisoner community and demanding particular forms of compliance and engagement. Drawing on prisoners' life stories, it supplies a detailed typology of adaptive styles, showing how different prisoners experience and respond to a new range of penal practices and frustrations. It then explains how the prisoner society – its norms, hierarchy and social relationships – is shaped both by these conditions of confinement and by the different backgrounds, values and identities that prisoners bring into the prison environment. The book therefore aims to provide an empirical snapshot of a modern prison – its aims and practices, the pains and pressures that it creates, and the distinctive forms of trade, friendship and culture that emerge within it.

Having completed this work, I have recently submitted a significant proposal to explore many of the same issues among different prisoner groups: female prisoners, sex-offenders and vulnerable prisoners, and prisoners serving extremely long sentences. Through a longitudinal study, I also hope to explore how the adaptations of both male and female prisoners change during their sentences.

BEN CREWE

DOING REHABILITATION WORK IN CONTEMPORARY PRISON – THE CASE OF THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITIES

This research studies different aspects of organization and culture in two models of prison-based Therapeutic Communities (TCs). The study aims to analyse, compare and explain the main dilemmas, forms of interaction and aspects of prison life in two therapeutic community wings.

Both TC programmes were located within mainstream prisons. One of them followed the Democratic model and the other followed the Addictions model. Both models are based on some level of prisoner self management and self-discipline. Both involve working on offending behaviour issues in small groups.

The central dilemma that both TCs

faced was how to maintain the integrity of their programme while sustaining a reasonable retention rate. This dilemma was intensified by population pressures and the requirement to accommodate prisoners who did not participate in the programme in order to ease population pressures within the host establishment. It was also intensified by the requirement to meet completion rate targets. Different audit requirements and management perceptions led to different strategies in each of the programmes. The staff and management of TC 'A' adhered to a highly selective admissions approach, rigorous enforcement of the rules and extensive use of the dismissal sanction. The staff and management of TC 'B' maintained a less selective admission process and enforced the rules less rigorously. The differences between the strategies resulted in TC 'A' having a lower completion rate and having more non-TC members on the wing ('lodgers') than TC 'B'. However TC 'A' appeared to be able to maintain a higher degree of programme integrity.

The study reveals some of the difficulties involved in running a TC within a mainstream prison. The TC wings were relatively isolated from and unpopular with both staff and prisoners on other wings. They also found it hard to extend any aspect of their alternative and more cooperative culture to the other wings of the hosting prison.

Publications

Shefer, G. and Liebling, A. (2008) 'Prison Privatization: In Search of a Business-like Atmosphere?' *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 8(3) 261-278.

Shefer, G. (submitted) 'A quantitative perspective of staff and prisoners' quality of life', in E. Sullivan, and R. Shaker (eds) *HMP Grendon and Beyond: Studying Therapeutic Communities in Prison*, Devon: Willan Publishing.

GUY SHEFER

CARE IN PRISON

This research aimed to describe the lived experience of care in prison from prisoner and officer standpoints. The project combined a phenomenological approach with ethnographic fieldwork and quantitative measures to understand the shape and impact of care in one men's and one women's prison.

Prisoners described caring interactions as founded on respectful, fair and sociable relationships with officers. Relationships built trust which enabled prisoners to disclose emotional or practical problems. Caring interactions were characterised by affective presence, which included the expression of institutional and emotional empathy, reassurance and encouragement, practical help, and caring intent. Officer care could mitigate feelings of powerlessness, isolation, and worthlessness engendered by the prison environment. Care improved well-being, compliance, and hope for the future. The structure of care was consistent between men and women, and between distressed and coping prisoners, although some important differences were found. Distressed prisoners found it harder to access care; while caring helped them to cope and even survive their imprisonment, more positive effects were limited. Distressed and female prisoners desired greater affective depth of caring, while male prisoners emphasised the validating effect of sociability. Uncaring interactions affected distressed prisoners most, colouring their trust in officers as a group.

I developed a typology of officer approaches to care by comparing officer views and practice with the ideal described by prisoners. Approach to care was related to views on prisoners as a group, personal security and confidence, and experience of trauma. True Carers held a prisoner-led philosophy and practice of care and experienced the most reward in their work. Limited Carers and Old School officers offered a pragmatic form of care and limited their use of authority and affective involvement. Conflicted officers expended considerable energy on a deserving few, but their caring was conditional, and often

conflated with control. A further group of officers were identified as 'damaged'. These officers had minimal involvement in caring largely due to sustained trauma in their work; some avoided work, while others were aggressive towards prisoners. Conflicted and 'damaged' officers were the most alienated, and struggled to make sense of their experiences and emotions. Contrary to most conceptualisations of prison officers, which tend to divide officers into 'security' or 'human service' orientations, this research found that care was meaningful for all officers, although it was operationalised in distinct ways.

Publications

Tait, S. (2008) 'Care and the prison officer: beyond 'turn-keys' and 'care bears'.' *The Prison Service Journal*, 180: 3-11.

Tait, S. (in progress) 'A typology of prison officer approaches to caring for prisoners'.

Tait, S. (in progress) Care in prison.
SARAH TAIT

IDENTIFYING THE HIGH PERFORMING PRISON OFFICER

This PhD research explores two central questions concerning the individual performance of main grade prison officers: what makes a good prison officer and how can they be identified? It seeks to examine what the key characteristics, qualities, skills and abilities are that define an effective or high performing officer. The main aim of the research is to develop a theoretical model, or typology, of prison officer performance. A further objective is to explore the role of emotions and their management in the work and performance of officers and to consider the relevance of the concept of 'emotional intelligence' within the prison context and, in particular, in staff-prisoner relationships.

The research consists of two linked studies: 1. a participant observation study of the new entrant prison officer training course in 2002 and 2. a multi-method, single-site, cross-sectional study of officers, and their work, in 2005. This second study

included focus group discussions with staff and prisoners; the shadowing of officers identified as high performing; periods of unstructured observation; and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In addition a self completion questionnaire was distributed to all main grade prison officers within the prison which consisted of four pre-existing and standardised measures of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and custody orientation.

Some significant themes and findings have emerged from the research. There is consensus in the qualities and attitudes used to define the 'best' officers: the list of personal characteristics identified by staff and prisoners (including integrity, confidence, fairness, consistency, professionalism and reflexivity) is exhaustive and impossible to constantly fulfil. There is no one 'ideal' type of officer and there are different concepts of high performance. A key ability of good officers, and a central component of effective performance, is selecting the right skill at the right time; in metaphorical terms, picking the right tool from a tool-bag of skills. Good officers are also capable of achieving the right (and delicate) balance of skills; too much or too little of some of the identified qualities can hinder effective performance, for example, in terms of empathy and associated levels of involvement and detachment. The core 'traits' identified are considered to be part of a good officer's underlying character that have to exist before an individual can 'become' high performing: it is a common belief that to be a good prison officer 'takes a certain kind of personality'. The importance of officers managing their own feelings and those of the prisoners they deal with was a recurring theme: resilience, empathy and emotional intelligence are significant inter-related elements of good officer work. There are clear, identifiable cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects of prison work that are primarily related to aspects of adaptation and survival. Other themes included the construction and

redefinition of meaning within the job; the transition from new to experienced officer; the existence of elements of the prison officer sub-culture as a coping strategy; and the way in which the emphasis on security and Control and Restraint during the initial training course reflected critical occupational values and embodied much of trainee officers' occupational socialisation.

Publications:

Arnold, H. (2005) 'The Effects of Prison Work', in A. Liebling and S. Maruna (eds) *The Effects of Imprisonment*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

Arnold, H. (2008) 'The Experience of Prison Officer Training', in J. Bennett, B. Crewe and A. Wahidin (eds) *Prison Staff*. Collumpton: Willan Publishing.

Arnold, H. (in progress) 'Prison Officers: Thought, Talk, Action and Emotion'.

HELEN ARNOLD

'CHANGING PRISONS? MUSLIM PRISONER EXPERIENCES POST-9/11' is a literature review commissioned by the Race and Equalities Action Group (REAG) of HMPS, and will figure in their forthcoming Muslim Prisoner Scoping Study. The paper examines the common themes that academic literature has exposed on the needs and experiences of Muslim prisoners in light of a changing prison context due to increasing population size and shifting composition.

Among the problems explored are REAG's "six themes" - treatment of prisoners, complaints and investigations, staff, management and leadership, prisoner access to facilities and services, and general prison atmosphere (REAG, 2008) - related to the differential treatment of BME and especially Muslim prisoners. The paper includes a discussion of literature on the benefits of religious involvement in the prison context, and the role religion, and chaplains, can play in the lives of offenders. The central theme of the paper relates to the centrality of relationships in prisoners experiences of the prison context.

As the 1998 Whitemoor study showed, staff-prisoner relationships affect treatment, use of discretion, feelings of safety and security and perceptions of treatment. The paper suggests that factors such as the international preoccupation with the dangers and realities of violent extremism, as well as a rapidly changing religious and ethnic composition of the current prisoner population may inadvertently contribute to an environment in which prison staff and Muslim offenders feel uncertain as to how to behave towards one another. This uncertainty can result in distant staff-prisoner relationships, which if unchecked, may contribute to negative experiences on the part of offenders and staff. The paper concludes with suggestions for areas of future research in the area of the experience of Muslim offenders, and broader topics related to the interaction between religion and the prison.

DEBORAH KANT

INSIDE OUT: A STUDY ON LEAVING PRISON WITH FAITH

This research project was born of a desire to get behind the much debated statistics on the effects of faith based prison programs on re-offending rates. In order to tell the tale behind the 'tally', I spent eighteen months in the USA following the progress of 48 men released from a faith-based unit between March and August 2007. Only three of those released between these dates did not participate in this study. The research aimed to be as ethnographic as possible. I spent two months in the prison with the men prior to their release and then aimed to meet up with them as much as possible according to their availability once released. As a minimum, the short term longitudinal research plan involved one interview and questionnaire prior to release, one interview and questionnaire within two weeks of release and one interview and questionnaire at least six months after release. I lost touch with three participants immediately after release, but managed to stay in touch with all other participants (n=45), interviewing 36 of them on a third occasion.

The ethnographic nature of the research allowed me to get to know some of the participants well, to attend church services with them, to meet their family and friends, to hear of the struggles they were facing on a day to day basis, their achievements and their disappointments. My initial aim was to build up a realistic picture of the role that faith communities play in the lives of those released from faith-based programs, and how these communities help them to deal with the struggles of life on the outside. However, the fieldwork revealed that while men leaving prison were very keen to join faith communities, this desire and practice disintegrated rapidly once they hit the streets. Very few participants remained involved in faith communities by the time of the third interview. This was not due to the individuals concerned losing their faith. I am currently analyzing the data in an attempt to understand the problems which prevented the men in my study from engaging in these communities, and the differences present for those who did manage to connect to faith groups in the free world. Also of interest is the role of the inner faith of the participants in their approach to the struggles they faced and how these attitudes related to their experience of life outside and in some cases, back inside.

RUTH ARMSTRONG

POWER RELATIONS IN PRISON: THE STUDY OF CONTRAST

Power is central to prison operation and underlies most aspects of prison life. This study involved extensive periods of observation, informal conversations and formal interviews with prisoners, frontline staff and prison managers in a local Category B prison for men in London and a medium-security correctional colony for convicted men in the capital region of Ukraine in 2007-2008. The project aimed to explore the modes of power used by various prison groups, such as lay staff, prison managers and prisoners,

and to examine how power was mediated and affected by various institutional and personal factors.

By contrasting the penal institutions in England and Ukraine, whose general societies and prison communities differ significantly in many respects, the role of people's agency in deploying and resisting penal power came to the fore. Furthermore, the difference in national history, in the role of and attitudes towards the government and towards legal norms, as well as in the organisational, legal and material milieu of England and Ukraine help explain the difference in the forms and amount of power used in the prison systems of these two countries.

One of the findings relates power and resistance to the expectations of both the people who employ it and those at whom it is directed. The Ukrainian prison personnel are divided into four major groups (patrolling, social-psychological, security and guards departments), which seems to partially alleviate the prominent role conflict experienced by many prison officers in England and Wales. Due to such role specialisation, Ukrainian prison personnel were at ease with specific roles of 'bad guys' (patrolling staff), 'good guys' (officers from the social-psychological department) or 'in-charge-of-everything guys' (security officers). Ukrainian prisoners rarely had open confrontation with prison staff, given that they were clear of what to expect from different grades of the prison force. Nevertheless, despite the fact that various staff groups favoured different modes of power, coercion was the dominant form of power used to maintain orderliness in the Ukrainian prison. This may partially explain why the prison for 900 men, most of whom had already served at least one custodial sentence, routinely operated with fewer than 50 staff present within the prison compound, with virtually no electronic surveillance. Second, unlike in England, the prisoner community in Ukraine was organised into a rigid informal system of stratification, which ironically was instrumental in extending the pervasive system of formal coercion.

In turn, order was much more a result of negotiation between prisoners and the authorities than was the case in the English prison. This was largely based on the principle, 'we cannot provide them with what is guaranteed by the law, hence we cannot demand a strict adherence by them to the prison rules', and respectively 'they tolerate this because they do not, and often cannot, follow the rules themselves'. However, such a balance was always implicitly sanctioned by the governor, and both prisoners and staff were aware that the prison authorities could withdraw from this unwritten pact should they feel that prisoners were pushing the limits, given the fact that such traditional authoritarian forms of power such as transfers to more notorious prisons or bringing in special forces into the prison, were always available.

ANTON SYMKOVYCH

CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SECTOR PRISON SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Despite management practices arguably being one of the most important factors influencing the quality and environment of a prison, very little is currently known about prison management and its impacts, both on the establishment and the individuals within it. 'Studies of prison management are few and far between' and this is an area "in need of much further empirical study" (Liebling, 2004:376). Of those studies that have been conducted, few have focussed on the British penal system, and to date no systematic empirical study has considered senior management teams in any detail. This is a vitally important area of study, as Bryans (2000) states 'it is only when we understand how prisons are governed and by whom that we will have a better insight into life behind bars' (pp.15).

This study employed appreciative ethnographic methods (shadowing, observation and interview) and quantitative data collection (Staff Quality of Life [SQL] Surveys and psychometric assessments for managers) in order to investigate the main research question: how does a

good senior management team look, talk, act and think. The synthesis of both observational and interview data in this study was crucial, as Bryans (2000) notes that 'research based solely on managers' accounts of what they do is necessary but not sufficient. There is a need to analyse how they act, through, for example, participant observation and future researchers should consider such a methodological approach' (p. 186). Data collection took place at two distinct sites: HMP Guys Marsh and HMP Wandsworth. Observational fieldwork began in August 2007 and was completed in May 2008.

I am currently analysing my qualitative data. Emerging themes include: The 'emotional' leadership of governors; levels of senior management optimism and resilience; senior managers' expressions of care and authenticity; the difference between 'talk' and 'action' and their relationship to 'backstage' and 'frontstage' times and places, and impacts of communication and language. This study is due for submission in December 2009.

Publications

Tait, S., Gadd, V., Shefer, G., McLean, C. and Liebling, A. (2009) 'Measuring Prison Staff Quality of Life' (in progress).

VICTORIA GADD

WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR PRISONS

This ERSC funded research (CASE studentship) aims to explore the relationships between prison quality, prisoner well-being and distress, whilst adding to the under-researched area of public-private sector comparisons at a time when major policy decisions are being taken without sufficient knowledge.

The substantive fieldwork took place between May 2006 and June 2007. Extended versions of the MQPL and SQL surveys were completed by prisoners and staff in four public and four private prisons. The prisoner surveys

included well-validated dimensions of well-being, perceived treatment, relationships, perceptions of safety, and several other key aspects of prison life. Staff quality of working life was surveyed using a reliable and valid generic version of the SQL, which was developed at the Prisons Research Centre in 2006. Following statistical analysis of the surveys, two public, and two private prisons with the highest and lowest levels of well-being were selected for the second phase of fieldwork which began in November 2006. During this stage, phenomenological and ethnographic methods of data collection were employed. This included informal observation in key areas and wings, and long, semi-structured interviews with 15 prisoners and 10 staff in each prison. The four prisons visited during this stage were Peterborough and Lowdham Grange (private) and Garth and Highdown (public).

Emerging findings have revealed that quality of life for both prisoners and staff differs between the sectors. Staff in the private sector held significantly more positive views towards senior management and prison company (as compared to public sector staffs' views towards the Prison Service), and felt significantly more involved in their work. In the public sector, staff rated their relationships with line management significantly more positively, and held less punitive views towards prisoners. Qualitative data supported the finding that staff in the private sector struggled with their use of appropriate authority.

Quality of life for prisoners was generally higher in private prisons. Scores were significantly higher on 14 (of 20) dimensions. The only dimension which received a significantly higher score in the public sector related to levels of order, control and discipline. Again, this is indicative of the more appropriate use of authority in public prisons. Although fewer differences remained when the relative performance of each prison was controlled for, it was clear that prison management exerted a strong influence on prison culture.

CLARE McLEAN

PROJECT CASCADE: AN EVALUATION OF A STAFF TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE IN TWO SECURE SETTINGS TO REDUCE RE-OFFENDING RATES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Project Cascade was a pilot training intervention run by the charity, Youth at Risk, for staff in Medway STC and Feltham A (under 18s). A group of staff from each institution attended a 2½ day residential course and subsequently 'cascaded' the training to their colleagues within the institutions. The programme ran from March 2007 to July 2009. It was funded by The KPMG Foundation who also commissioned a team from the Prisons Research Centre to describe and evaluate the impact of the training on staff, young people and on the quality of life in the institutions.

There were three complementary strands to the research design: a 'before and after' study, to allow the measurement of change over time; a 'process' or 'descriptive' study to describe the implementation of the training intervention (this included a longitudinal study of the staff attending the training); and an exploratory follow-up study of young people during their time in custody and on release. Two establishments were chosen as comparator sites: Rainsbrook STC and Huntercombe YOI. A mixed method approach was adopted combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The residential course was emotionally potent and evoked different reactions. Staff responded in distinct and identifiable ways: they became 'converts', they 'adapted' the training to suit and develop their existing approach, they selected parts of it but responded only a little to the training, or they reacted badly to it, and left or undermined its transition into establishments at a broader level. The cascading of the training initiative in the institutions made less impact than it might otherwise have done, for reasons relating to the complexities of each institution's life. Medway was the better implementer but neither establishment could be described as a full implementer. This had implications for the training's impact on each establishment's culture and

practices. We saw some positive change at Medway, where evaluations of the environment and of staff-young person relationships improved between Time 1 and Time 2. This was for several reasons, not all related to the training initiative.

Publications:

Lanskey, C., Liebling A., Drake D. and Harvey J. (under review) Project Cascade: An Evaluation of a Staff Transformation Initiative in Two Secure Settings to Reduce Re-Offending Rates of Children and Young People. Final Report.

CAROLINE LANSKEY

Dr Caroline Lanskey has been awarded an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship from July 2009 entitled: 'Student Voice and Participation in Secure Settings for Young People'. She will use the one year fellowship to develop her specialist interest in the education of young people in secure institutions. Her mentor will be Professor Alison Liebling.

Other relevant publications

Ross, M. W., Diamond, P., Liebling, A. and Saylor, W. G. (2008) 'Measurement of Prison Social Climate: A comparison of an inmate measure in England and the USA', *Punishment and Society*, 10(4): 449-476.

Liebling, A. (2009) 'Identifying and Measuring Prison Moral Climates', *The Correctional Psychologist*, IACFP quarterly newsletter, International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP).

Liebling, A (2008) 'Incentives and Earned Privileges Revisited: Fairness, Discretion, and the Quality of Prison Life', *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 9: 25-41.

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