THE INCIDENCE OF FEAR

A survey of officers and prisoners

'Fear is abstract but it's real. Fear in prison is when they bang the door. It can be so great that it sends you off your mind. After a while, you realise that they haven't thrown away the key, you accept privation. But, it's still unnatural so you come to terms with things. That's the position.'

Prisoner Participant.

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The research was carried out with the Prison Reform Trust while the author was reading for her M.Phil degree at the Cambridge Institute of criminology.

BACKGROUND

Last autumn, the Prison Service launched an anti-bullying campaign. The packs sent to prisons stated that levels of bullying and violence in gaol were not known. It is doubtful whether we can ever be sure of the actual levels that exist in a prison. The stigma of being marked as a 'grass' is very real and has tangible, often violent, repercussions. Those most at risk are also those who are least likely to articulate their fears to anyone connected with the prison service. Despite this, Walmsley, Howard and White (1992)[1] found that, when asked, eighteen per cent of prisoners said that they did not feel safe. Additional evidence of prisoner fears was obtained by Liebling and Krarup (1992)[2] as part of their suicide investigations. They found that two thirds of vulnerable prisoners (and 43 per cent of prisoners who were not classified as vulnerable) reported difficulties when interacting with other prisoners. They found that younger prisoners and those 'on Rule 43' experienced the most problems[3]. Over one quarter of suicide attempts were related to pressures from other prisoners.

A SURVEY OF FEAR

The current study was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the incidence of fear. It was not intended to be a definitive piece of research. For the purposes of this study, it was predicted that fear is affected by: the age or race of the prisoners; whether they have been sentenced or remanded; the classification or structure of the prison; the type of offence committed and the relationship between staff and prisoners. There are many other variables that could be addressed but it was not possible to control for all of them in the available time. For this reason, the study was limited to category B and C male prisons.

Over the summer of 1993, interviews were carried out on five wings in three prisons: a life sentence assessment centre at prison a. two wings at prison b: wing b.i. is a remand wing and wing b.ii. is made up of two spurs from a Vulnerable Prisoner Unit. Participants from prison c came from two wings. These wings are identical in structure but c.i. is for the most vulnerable prisoners and those who requested extra help in coping with imprisonment. (It is not officially classed as a Vulnerable Prisoner Unit.) Wing c.ii., is a category C prisoner

1 Walmsley, R.; Howard, E. and White, 5. (1992) *The National Prison Survey 1991: Main Findings.* London: HMSO.

2 Liebling, A. and Krarup, H. (1992) *Suicide Attempts in Male Prisons:* A report submitted to The Home Office.

3 For the purposes of this study, rule 43 prisoners are those prisoners who have had to be segregated for their own protection. They include sexual offenders, informers, ex police officers and ex prison officers.

wing but it has a higher than normal proportion of prisoners who could be classified as 'Rule 43'.

Over one hundred and fifty prisoners and fifty officers took part in the interviews. At least five officers (including one senior officer), fifteen prisoners under 30 and fifteen prisoners over 40 were interviewed on each wing. Thirty-two of the prisoners were on remand or were awaiting deportation. Twenty-seven of them were serving sentences of under 3.5 years. Sixty-three prisoners were serving sentences of between 3.5 and 17 years and forty-one were serving life sentences. The prisoner samples reflected the racial make up of each wing at each of the age groups. Of the officers, 4 were women and 49 were white. The time that they had been an officer ranged from 1 to 27 years but the most common length of service was about 18 months.

The first few questions in each interview were biographical but not necessarily contentious. (Questions about sentence length and type also served as a crude measure of validity as these could be checked from the prisoners' records.) The next section of the interviews included questions about daily interactions and then built up to questions about others' fears before dealing with the possible worries and then fears of the participant him/herself. The last section was designed to ensure that the participant was not left feeling uncomfortable by the matters under discussion.

FINDINGS

When compared with the National Prison Survey, this study found a greater incidence of fear among prisoners and the fear was manifested in different ways. The National Prison Survey found that 18 per cent of prisoners were scared. This study found that 51 per cent of prisoners and 67 per cent of officers expressed fear. The results indicate that both prisoners and officers experienced problems with their peers and with each other. However, the results of this study show a lower incidence of prisoner - prisoner problems than that reported by Liebling and Krarup (1992). They found that 43 per cent of non-vulnerable prisoners reported difficulties interacting with other prisoners. In the current study, 20 per cent of prisoners reported problems with other prisoners and 26 per cent reported problems with staff. Twenty-six per cent of staff reported problems with their colleagues and 72 per cent reported problems with prisoners.

WHERE ARE PARTICIPANTS CONCERNED?

Some participants reported worries and or fears. When asked where they were worried and or scared, 25 per cent of such prisoners said that they thought that other prisoners would be scared in their cells; 14 per cent reported fear in recesses; 9 per cent of those who reported fear were scared to go in to the main prison (when they came from a Vulnerable Prisoner Unit) and 10 per cent were fearful whilst moving through the prison. This was largely an artefact of the unaccompanied movement that is standard for prisoners from both c wings. For example, prisoners on wing c.i. were tannoyed by the hospital for them to collect their medication. Such messages told the entire prison that people would be coming down isolated, enclosed walkways and would be ripe for muggings. It also became clear that officers did not feel safe in the same corridors that concerned the prisoners.

When taken as a whole, the study shows that there is some discrepancy between the areas identified by prisoners and those identified by staff. Forty-eight per cent of the officers and 6 per cent of prisoners who felt unsafe did not define their fear in spatial terms. Rather, they defined their fear in the context of specific situations such as when an alarm bell rang. Nine per cent of officers were scared when they were out of the sight of their colleagues and 3 per cent of prisoners were concerned when away from the officers. The place in which the most participants felt worried or fearful was prisoners' cells. It is worth noting that 23 per cent of officers interviewed felt that the prisoners would be worried or fearful in their cells. This is the area of concern for the most number of prisoners and it is that most consistently identified by the staff.

WHAT ARE THE PARTICIPANTS' CONCERNS?

Here too, there is a discrepancy between officer and prisoner worries and fears. Sixty-five per cent of officers and 9 per cent of prisoners were afraid of situations of which they felt they were not in control. Seventeen per-cent of the officers

and 4 per cent of the prisoners were worried about unpredictable or 'mental' cases. Overall, some officers were aware of some of the prisoners' concerns with one main qualification. Twenty-two per cent of officers thought that prisoners may be worried by bullying and 7 per cent thought that they may have problems with debt. None of the prisoners identified either bullying or debt as a problem although 7 per cent of prisoners feared assault.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Prisoners seemed to organise their routines in ways that attempted to avoid confrontation. For example a number of prisoners said that they had no problems because 'I don't mix' or 'I just talk to one or two people'. Also, the officers seemed to take precautions and organise their behaviour and that of prisoners in ways that attempted to avoid confrontation. For example in prison b, remand prisoners could only attend the gym if their name was called from a roster. As well as allocating scarce facilities efficiently, this should help to prevent intimidation from some prisoners keen to use the gym to the exclusion of others.

Neither pre-custodial experience, nor the age of the offender, nor the type of offence committed were related to the amount of prisoners who reported fear. The proportion of prisoners who were fearful did vary between prisons. The greatest number of fearful prisoners was found in Prison a (73 per cent), then in Prison c (54 per cent) and then in Prison b (37 per cent). Statistically significant differences were found between the different wings in each prison. On wing c.i., 70 per cent of prisoners reported fear while 40 per cent of prisoners on c.ii. wing said that they were scared. In b.i. wing, 45 per cent of prisoners reported fear and 30 per cent on b.ii.. The high incidence of fear on a wing may be explained by the nature of the offenders in that wing. They are at the beginning of long sentences, during a time of assessment and change. The wing profile itself has changed in recent years and there are increasing numbers of young, volatile 'lifers' who are incarcerated there.

The difference that is hardest to explain is that found between wings c.i. (70 per cent) and b.ii. (30 per cent). Both wings are for the most vulnerable prisoners. However, wing c.i. prides itself on not being an official 'VPU' and is not segregated from the rest of the prison. The aim is to integrate the prisoners more fully into normal routines. These findings suggest that, unpalatable and impracticable as it may seem, the prisoners would feel far more secure if they could be kept completely segregated.

Another finding that may be unpalatable is that there were racial differences in the proportion of prisoners who are concerned. This was tested at the broadest level of non white compared with white because of the size of the sample set. When tested on a wing basis, a statistically significant race effect was found. On b.i. (remand) wing, 5 per cent of the white prisoners were worried whereas 34 per cent of the non-white prisoners who were interviewed were worried. On the lifer unit, the effect was reversed. Thirty-six per cent of the whites reported worry but no non-whites reported feeling worried. When specifically asked about 'fear' rather than 'worry', significant racial differences showed up on wing b.ii., the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit. Seventeen per cent of the white prisoners interviewed reported fear whereas 71 per cent of the non-white prisoners interviewed reported fear.

The interviews raised another so called 'minority' issue, that of the role of female officers in male prisons. The issues surrounding both this and the 'race effects' are too complex to examine here but there are some points that should be made. It is hoped that with local recruiting, prisons will be more able to have a mix of staff that reflects the diversity in their catchment areas. Something that came through from the women in this study and from some interviewed in ongoing research at another prison, was that they found the paternalistic protection of their male colleagues to be oppressive and counter productive. At the same time, they found that the senior officers could be insensitive towards issues that can not be avoided. In one case, through trying to protect a female officer, the male officers did not tell their female colleague that a threat had been made against her. This meant that she walked into a situation unprepared and was assaulted.

Little seems to be known about how the officers feel about the way that they spend their day. One of the most common comments made by officers related to management's seeming disinterest in what they had to say or in what they felt. A

typical remark was 'I've been an officer 14 years and no one has ever asked me what I feel about the job...after riots, the only person I could talk to is my wife.' The introduction of post incident care teams for officers seems to be a good innovation. Unfortunately, some officers said that they were unwilling to take up the service as they felt that it was seen to count against them and they found the members of the team to be too distant from them.

It is an almost meaningless cliché to call for more research at the end of a paper. In this case, the research needs to be carried out not just by the professional inquirers but also by the managers of the prisons. Nearly all the officers and many prisoners felt that governors were out of touch with what went on on the wings. The results here suggest that not enough of the officers are aware of the problems faced by the prisoners. The prisoners and officers interviewed felt that their experiences were being neither listened to nor heard. If the prison service is serious about improving conditions in prisons and dealing with intimidation, then it has to commit itself to carrying out the kind of research that it suggested is needed in its bullying information pack. It also needs to take heed of the kinds and levels of fears that prisoners and officers have. Without improved communication between management and staff and prisoners, the situation on the wings will be hard to assess and even harder to change, where change is needed ■

DIRECT AND INDIRECT MEDIATION AT STOCKEN:

PRISONERS MEET WITH VICTIMS

Terry Green, Prison Officer and Alan Gray, Senior Probation Officer, HMP Stocken

In the past 12 months, Stocken Prison has had three separate encounters involving a total of 9 victims and 10 prisoners. Prison officer Terry Green and Senior Probation Officer Alan Gray have been the key figures in this pioneering scheme working closely with Leicester Victims of Crime Scheme.

The idea came initially from a prisoner serving four years for grievous bodily harm. When sentenced in court, he heard how the victim, who was seriously affected by the attack, was receiving counselling from her local victims of crime scheme. Many months after the event she was still very distressed, blamed herself, had suicidal thoughts and felt life was not worth living. Both expressed a wish for a meeting and this took place with Alan Gray the Deputy Director of the Victims of Crime Scheme present as facilitator.

Not surprisingly, it was a tense and anxious meeting. The prisoner's apology and reassurances were not acknowledged as he had hoped. However, the victim was eventually able to ventilate her anger and share the long-term consequences on her life.

What was achieved? The feedback many months later was that the victim was now finished with counselling, no longer blamed herself or feared for a repeat attack and was due to go to University. By chance, I met the prisoner in the middle of Leicester. He had completed his parole successfully, was working and living with his family. Whilst he was very disappointed not to have received any credit from the victim whatsoever, he recognised that helping her to move on positively in her life was reward in itself.

The second meeting focused principally on house burglary with five victims and four offenders present. They were not the actual victims.