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~~LIAR~~  
~~JUNKIE~~  
~~CRIMINAL~~  
~~DRUGGIE~~  
~~FAILURE~~  
~~SMACK HEAD~~  
~~OFFENDER~~

HOW ABOUT:

**HUMAN**

*Special Edition*

# Recovery in Prison

# The Illicit Economy and Recovery

## What we need to understand

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### Introduction: A New Illicit Economy

**In the last decade, the drug economy has transformed, from one based on ‘hard drugs’,<sup>1</sup> to one based on new psychoactive substances. In 2010, there were as few as 15 recorded seizures of new psychoactive substances (PS) in prisons across England and Wales; by 2018, this had risen to 4,667 recorded seizures: more than a three hundred-fold increase.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the use of heroin, cocaine, cannabis, anabolic steroids, and prescription medication continues, it does so on a much smaller scale and it is the use of PS that typifies drug misuse in most prisons. This is not the only change to alter the illicit economy; the availability of internet enabled mobile telephones within prison and the ability to make online financial transactions has diversified forms of prison currency. No longer limited to items available within the prison—such as canteen, personal property and prescription medication—or the use of postal orders to add money to ‘private spends’, ‘cash amounts’ can now be demanded and financed through bank transfers in the community. Such trading is increasingly sophisticated, organised, and connected to wider familial and criminal networks. It is also becoming a more global affair, with the use of social media, crypto-currencies and the ‘dark’ or ‘hidden’ web creating alternative methods of generating and exchanging money. Thus, the prison wall is more**

**porous and permeable than ever before, and the changing nature of criminal behaviour both within and beyond the prison requires a different approach to policing, intelligence gathering and analysis, and multi-agency working.**

In response to these challenges, the Government has emphasised the importance of supply reduction strategies, law enforcement measures and punitive responses.<sup>3</sup> A new HMPPS financial investigation unit has been created to supplement the work of the Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU).<sup>4</sup> Commitments have also been made to introduce: body X-Ray scanners; mobile phone detection, blocking and interrogation technology; newly trained drug dogs; a new digital tool to categorise prisoners based on wider factors other than index offence; and, improved mandatory drug testing to detect a wider range of substances (including various PS and diverted medication). Rory Stewart, the Government Minister responsible for prisons, probation and sentencing, has also pledged an additional £10 million to resource the ten prisons experiencing the most ‘acute’ problems, and committed to resign should he fail to reduce levels of violence and drug misuse.<sup>5</sup> Set against this background, however, is a wider focus on rehabilitation<sup>6</sup> and recovery, with HMP Holme House becoming the first drug recovery prison in England and Wales.<sup>7</sup> There is, then, a need to understand how it might be possible to pursue the twin aims of supply reduction and demand reduction in a way that encourages, rather than impedes, opportunities for rehabilitation and recovery.

1. Crewe, B. (2005) Prisoner society in an era of hard drugs. *Punishment and Society* 7(4): 457-481.
2. Ministry of Justice (2018) Annual HM Prison and Probation Service Digest 2017-2018. London. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-hm-prison-and-probation-service-digest-2017-to-2018>.
3. Ministry of Justice (2015) New Crackdown on Dangerous Legal Highs in Prison. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-crackdown-on-dangerous-legal-highs-in-prison>. Accessed: 25 January 2015; Ministry of Justice (2016) Prison Safety and Reform. Cm 9350 London: HM Stationery Office; Ministry of Justice (2018) Prison Reform Speech. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prisons-reform-speech>. Accessed: 28 October 2018.
4. Ministry of Justice (2018) Specialist financial crime unit to crack down on prison gangs. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/specialist-financial-crime-unit-to-crack-down-on-prison-gangs>. Accessed: 28 October 2018
5. Ministry of Justice (2018) Ministers announces ‘10 Prison Project’ to develop new model of excellence. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-announces-10-prisons-project-to-develop-new-model-of-excellence>. Accessed: 28 October 2018; BBC News (2018) Prisons Minister Rory Stewart: I’ll resign if drugs and violence don’t come down. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45214414>. Accessed: 28 October 2018.
6. Ministry of Justice (2018) Prison Reform Speech. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prisons-reform-speech>. Accessed: 28 October 2018. For an overview of rehabilitative culture in prisons, see Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F. and Tew, J. (2017) What is Rehabilitative Prison Culture? *Prison Service Journal* 235: 3-9.
7. Ministry of Justice (2018) Blitz on Drugs in Prison Underway. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/blitz-on-drugs-in-prison-underway>. Accessed: 28 October 2018.

Drawing on ethnographic and qualitative research, this article focuses on the relationship between the illicit economy, drug consumption and supply, and the recovery of those who use drugs in prison. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding about how to minimise—rather than incentivise—reliance on the illicit and drug economy in prisons, and how to promote—rather than discourage—recovery. It is argued that to establish a recovery culture, the following foundations are necessary: humane conditions; adequate access to clothes, toiletries and bedding; willing, capable and legitimate governance; effective investigations into incidents of self-harm, violence or unexplained injury, intelligence (and intelligent) analysis and preventative action; and, constructive approaches that support recovery rather than punish in ways that encourage continued drug consumption. The desire to disrupt supply can amount to a series of ‘cat and mouse’ games with varying degrees of success. However, it will always be a ‘losing game’ if the wider factors that cause the illicit economy to flourish, and generate demand for drug supply and the profits that flow from it, remain unaddressed.

### Researching Drug Consumption and Supply

Our interest in prison drug consumption and supply arose from a broader research project focusing on prison violence. During the period October 2014–October 2017, we conducted ethnographic and qualitative research in three prisons: a young offender institution, a Category B local prison and a Category C prison accommodating men convicted of sex offences. The aim of the research was to understand why prison violence was a frequent occurrence in two of the sites, but low (and almost absent) in another. It was quickly apparent that drug consumption and supply was both directly and indirectly a driver of violence, underpinned by a buoyant illicit economy and maintained by men who gained power, status and reputation by controlling the illicit and drug economy. As this research concluded, a new study began. Our interest in the illicit economy continued and we sought to better understand our emerging findings that the illicit economy and associated activity was in some cases linked to organised crime and criminal activity occurring

both within the prison and in the community. This work remains ongoing, and we draw on both of these studies in this article. What follows are six key findings regarding the relationship between the illicit economy, drug use and recovery.

### 1. Prison Conditions and the Illicit Economy: Understanding the Survival Mind-set

Sykes describes the prison as ‘depriving in the extreme,’<sup>8</sup> and argues that the deprivation of material goods constitutes one of the central pains of imprisonment. Such ‘material deprivation’ can, however, be more severe in some prisons than others. Wide disparities exist in terms of the quality of living accommodation, the state of repair or disrepair, the size of the living accommodation, access to in-cell sanitation

and showers, and access to in-cell telephony, laptops or kiosks. In some prisons, there has been a notable and lamentable decline in prison conditions, created and compounded by factors such as overcrowding, old and decaying buildings, reduced numbers of staff, austerity measures, and strained contractual arrangements regarding prison maintenance, causing Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons to publish a critical thematic review in November 2017 of living conditions across the prison estate.<sup>9</sup> Whilst there is now a growing investment in the

recruitment of new prison officers<sup>10</sup> and, to some extent, the prison environment, it is undoubtedly true that the notable decline in prison conditions combined with impoverished prison regimes has, in some prisons, driven demand for drugs, but also provided the fertile conditions for the illicit economy to take root and more entrepreneurial-minded prisoners to occupy positions of authority and leadership.

When confronted with difficulties accessing basic ‘kit’—such as bedding, mattresses, clothing, and toiletries—prisoners often feel they have no alternative but to turn to the black market simply as a way of achieving some degree of warmth and comfort, particularly in the depths of winter. Not only does the illicit economy flourish in poor conditions, but market prices increase, more items are commodified, and

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8. Sykes, G. (1958) *The Society of Captives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.63.

9. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (2017) *Life in Prison: Living Conditions*. London: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons.

10. Ministry of Justice (2018) Government hits target of 2,500 new officers 7 months ahead of schedule. Available Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-hits-target-of-2500-new-prison-officers-7-months-ahead-of-schedule>. Accessed: 28 October 2018.

prisoners are far more willing to steal from, assault, and/or exploit others:

*There's different situations that arise and everything's sensitised in here a lot more. It's more magnetised. It sounds dumb, but one of the maddest things I've seen is someone pulled a frigging knife out over socks and boxers. It sounds dumb. It does sound dumb when you say it out loud but, in jail, say you haven't got much money or your family haven't got much money outside or whatever, and that person put his washing in the washing machine, whatever, dried it, put it on the side, obviously, he'd to go bang-up. So, the next day when he come down, his boxers and socks were missing. Now, he's got no boxers and socks now. Then he found out who stole his boxers and socks. (Nathan, Category B)*

In poor prison conditions, prisoners quickly (and understandably) become preoccupied with survival and the ability to access and retain basic necessities takes on a disproportionate significance. The atmosphere becomes 'charged' and prisoners recognise that their responses to the loss of personal items is extreme, as in the example above, but feel unable to effectively change or alter them. Those with few financial resources and/or who cannot rely on financial support from family members may find themselves quickly indebted to others, and for large sums of money.

It is not only poor prison conditions that drives the illicit and drug economy, but poor regimes. Faced with little to do, prisoners use drugs as an antidote to boredom, even if they have never used PS before, and have no intention of doing so on release. Thus, PS is very much seen as a 'prison drug' and a particular response to imprisonment. A recurring theme of our interviews with prisoners is that the use of PS has created a way to 'have your day out of prison' without the stigma associated with heroin use. Whilst drug use has always been

seen as a way to manage the time problem,<sup>11</sup> such effects are particularly exaggerated with PS and its use for such purposes is normalised:

*I don't think anybody would argue, it's a head changer, it takes them away. So, I'd be very simple in saying that there are people who need head changes and who need to switch off to what they're living through. Shaun, Category C)*

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Whilst PS is often seen as a hazardous, dangerous and risky drug with unpredictable and potentially life-threatening symptoms, the temporal relief was seen to outweigh the potential risks. Even after experiencing cardiac arrest, unconsciousness or seizures, prisoners were undeterred from future use, simply stating that it 'melts the bars away' and 'time flies'. There is a clear correlation between how painful and depriving the regime is perceived to be, and how hopeless people feel, and their willingness to experiment with, or regularly use, drugs in response. Attempting

recovery in an environment where there is little to do, when basic items are difficult to access, where the prison is crumbling and facilities are broken or damaged, is challenging. Supply reduction techniques and efforts to engage prisoners in recovery must be matched with an equal—if not greater—commitment to accommodate prisoners in humane conditions, provide adequate clothing, bedding and toiletries, and ensure that people are busy during the working day.

## 2. It's 'big business': Understanding the Profit Motives

Explanations for the popularity of PS in prison are multi-faceted, but it is undoubtedly true that the low cost and ease of distribution and consumption has maintained demand and supply post-prohibition.<sup>12</sup> PS are largely synthesised in a laboratory (although there is a burgeoning small-scale home production industry)

11. Cope, N. (2003) 'It's No Time or High Time': Young Offenders' Experiences of Time and Drug Use in Prison. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 42(2): 158-172. Crewe, B. (2005) Prisoner society in an era of hard drugs. *Punishment and Society* 7(4): 457-481; Wheatley, M. (2016) Drugs in Prison. In: Jewkes, Y., Crewe, B., and Bennett, J. (eds) *Handbook on Prison*. 2nd Edn, Routledge.

12. Whilst psychoactive substances had been regarded as a "legal high", the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 prohibited the production, supply, importation and export of psychoactive substances. The Act also made specific provisions for the possession of psychoactive substances in custody – provisions that do not apply in the community.

dissolved in solvent, then sprayed onto plant material (such as dried rhubarb leaves) or paper, which is most commonly smoked. The possibility of spraying PS on domestic and legal mail not only creates a method of supply that poses far less risk than relying on drug mules, corrupt staff or drones, but the paper itself provides a means of consumption, and can be smoked or soaked into the fluid of e-cigarettes. The sale and supply of PS is lucrative, with even a 1cm<sup>3</sup> piece of paper fetching £25-£50. Since several pieces of paper can be sent in one delivery, vast amounts of money can be made from relatively small amounts of drug-soaked mail. Drones and throw-overs offer a way of 'getting the kilos sent in', particularly in prisons with a large number of broken or damaged windows where the possibility of creating lines to exchange goods, or fly a drone straight into the prison cell, is that much easier. Such packages may contain mobile phones and chargers, SIM cards, tobacco, drugs (including heroin, cocaine and cannabis), prescription medication, and alcohol. Items such as mobile phones are high value, attracting upwards of £300-£1000 depending on the make and model, and generating considerable profits. The illicit economy is more than a prison economy. The ability to make financial transactions online or via mobile phone apps means that individuals will often prefer to trade in 'cash' via bank accounts held in the community. Thus, many financial transactions will occur beyond the prison wall and in ways that are not easily observable, detectable or governable.

The drug economy represents something more than a way of managing confinement, but for entrepreneurial minded individuals, it is also a way to profiting from imprisonment and generating 'big money':

*Well, I know a lad who does nothing but little silly sentences. He'll go and do a stupid shoplifting just so he'll come in plugged up to make his money again, so he'll come back out and take the missus to the Bahamas and stupid holidays, so it's serious money. Well, one Kinder egg full of Spice can make you anything up to £4,000 or £5,000, so if you've*

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*got three of those inside you that's 15 grand.*  
(Anthony, Cat C)

The stakes are high; the control of the illicit and drug economy is something that prisoners are not only prepared to fight over, but even kill for.<sup>13</sup> Individuals can shore up profits that will maintain them during their custodial sentence and even assist their families whilst they are imprisoned:

*Right, I will put it this simple, [drug dealing] puts food on a lot of lads tables out there and in here, you get me? We need to keep earning, and there are ways to do that. Big money, as much money as can be earned on the out, on road [in the community]. Lads will do what they have to do on the outside, you get me, and they will do what they have to do on the inside too.* (Steven, Category B).

Such individuals essentially continue their criminal enterprises in prison: they know how to 'graft' (make money), and have learnt how to do so using a combination of threat, intimidation and strict repayment conditions. The 'business model' not only relies on the supply of items at an inflated price, but on the likelihood that some will be

unable to control their drug habit and/or become addicted, and quickly accumulate large amounts of debt (into the hundreds and thousands of pounds). Thus, the 'loan sharks' profit from the inability of some individuals to control their spending and take advantage of their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. It is, however, seen as legitimate financial trade—those who engage in the economy are seen to have accepted the 'terms and conditions' in ways that were seen to justify the penalty of violence, degradation or intimidation for non-repayment of debt.

The illicit economy is not all about the money. Those who benefit the most from the illicit economy are not only able to live in relative comfort, but they visibly display their masculine credentials to others. Lining their cells with vast quantities of canteen and

13. See for example the murder of Jamal Mahmoud at HMP Pentonville. BBC News (2017a) Pentonville Prison murder accused had "no reason to kill" 8 November. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-41920890>. Accessed: 28 October 2018.

other highly sought after commodities not only demonstrates that they can hold on to this possession and are not vulnerable to victimisation and exploitation, but also displays their power, control and status within the prison.

### 3. Debt: Understanding Vulnerability

Initially, explanations for the rising levels of violence across the prison estate were attributed to the use of PS. However, as our research indicated, increased violence is a product of a variety of factors. Claims that PS was directly causing violent incidents were overstated. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that some individuals react in an aggressive and sometimes violent manner, much of the violence that was linked to PS was a consequence of indebtedness, rather than the use of PS itself. The prison illicit economy has always involved some form of borrowing and lending with extortionate levels of interest demanded by the ‘loan sharks.’ For example, ‘ticking’ and ‘double bubble’—where prisoners lend their possessions to others with the expectation that they are repaid twice as much in return, doubling each week until the debt is repaid—has been a common practice for many years. However, the ease of access to drugs and other contraband items, the ease with which they can be traded and trafficked, and the normalisation of PS use as an antidote to boredom, inactivity and hopelessness has meant that prisoners are quickly accruing large amounts of debt. Moreover, a history of poly-drug use in the community at an earlier life-stage and age has meant that some prisoners are simply accustomed to relying on family members to repay their, often very large, drug debts. Whilst in prison, however, financial resources can quickly ‘dry up’. If they are unemployed, on basic regime, have limited financial support from family, or have sold everything they own to maintain their drug use, individuals may find themselves unable to repay debts, and as interest accumulates, find that things are spiralling out of control. Escalating and unpaid debt does not go unnoticed or unpunished. Not only does it place someone at greater risk of a ‘hit being put on their head’ and being physically assaulted, but they may be pressured to hold contraband items (such as mobile telephones), assault a member of staff, ‘pot’ an officer or act as a ‘drug mule’ returning to custody with large amount of drugs:

The prison illicit economy has always involved some form of borrowing and lending with extortionate levels of interest demanded by the ‘loan sharks.’

*It is not that all of these recalls are earning money, if you look at who is getting recalled, they are muppets, sad cases, debtors, they are being put up to it. They are the well, the useless and hopeless sorts, they are not the ones making any money off of it, they are paying back the debts they have been driven into. It's a business model, they come back in to pay their debts. (Liam, Category C)*

Arranging assaults on staff, the ‘potting’ of an officer or the trafficking of drugs into the prison with those who are recalled to prison requires a degree of organisation, including contact with those in the community. Responses to such incidents by prison staff can, however, sometimes be unsophisticated, focusing on who perpetrated the incident or who is found in possession of contraband, rather than understanding the wider networks, connections or social dynamics to which such activity relates. Failing to investigate effectively, and ask questions regarding the nature of someone’s involvement, can limit opportunities to gather vital information about the various nefarious activities occurring within and beyond the prison, and the networks that support them. Such intelligence could, however, be used effectively to prevent future incidents from occurring.

Failing to understand the underlying causes, can also mean that the vulnerability of some individuals is ineffectively addressed, even if their behaviour escalates. For example, when faced with threats, intimidation or the possibility of assaults, individuals may believe that their only option is to ‘run for cover’:

*You get some lads, at first, they are paying their way and then after a bit their resources dry up. And then they are in a whole heap of trouble. Then you get lads hitting the back fences [moved off the wing] because they are debted up.’ (Nathan, Category B)*

In such circumstances, individuals might manipulate a move to the segregation block by assaulting staff, damaging (‘flat packing’) their cells, climbing onto the netting or railings, or engaging in other protest behaviour that they know will secure even

a temporary move to the segregation block. Prisoners know what gets attention from staff, and what will most likely secure a move or transfer, and will act to protect and insulate themselves even at the risk of seriously harming themselves or others. In response, staff may be tempted to focus purely and primarily on the presenting behaviour, and the initial explanations offered, but there is a greater need to consider the wider dynamics and a willingness to see even very serious incidents as symptomatic of vulnerability. Moreover, even after an incident, the threat may not disappear. Those who 'hit the back fences' and seek sanctuary and protection in another wing, segregation block or prison can find that debts follow them around the prison, or even to another prison. Prisoners communicate with each other across prisons and across the estate, and 'put hits on the heads' on those who owe debts. Moreover, their 'pad mates' might inherit the unpaid debt and be required to repay on their behalf. Such individuals can find themselves vulnerable to physical reprisals even if they have not engaged in the illicit economy themselves. Thus, preventative and proactive management of individuals is needed, rather than simply waiting for the threat to materialise and reacting to the subsequent assault or self-harm.

#### **4. Playing 'Cat and Mouse' Games: Understanding Unintended Consequences**

*'They're always going to find a way of getting stuff in, that's just what happens in jail.'*  
(Steven, Category C)

Whilst it is notoriously difficult to accurately assess the strength of any particular supply routes, at any one time, there will be several active supply routes within a prison typically including: visits, mail, drones, 'throw-overs', staff, new receptions (some of whom are 'drug mules') and to a lesser extent, prisoners leaving via hospital or court escort, or on ROTL (release on temporary license). There are different levels of risk associated with each of these supply routes, and the extent to which any one route is preferred may depend on the frequency, reliability and predictability of security tactics to intercept and interrupt supply. Such supply routes are agile, and prisoners adapt to changes in the risk and ease associated with particular supply routes. For example, photocopying letters may prevent drug-

soaked mail entering the prison, but prisoners quickly adapt and use books (including religious texts such as Bibles) or attempt to soak clothes in drugs<sup>14</sup> to circumvent the photocopying. Alternatively, if domestic visits become an increasingly more hazardous route for supply, prisoners may then turn to 'throw-overs' or drones to maintain the illicit and drug economy. It can amount to a series of 'cat and mouse' games: on one hand, prisoners seeking to circumvent staff and on the other, staff seeking to disrupt nefarious activity. However, disrupting supply has often unintended consequences that must be carefully considered.

Intercepting supply will always have wider and unintended consequences. It disrupts the social equilibrium, and there may be assaults, group disorder or self-harm as a result. For example, the interception of a throw-over in one prison led to disorder on the wing involving two rival groups in one prison. In another, the interception of a large supply of drugs and mobile phones led to the serious stabbing of a prisoner, and culminated in the self-inflicted death of another. Those who are in possession of contraband on behalf of others, are often held liable for the loss of such items if confiscated by security and physically assaulted as a result. Failure to warn others about the arrival of security search teams on

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the wing can also attract physical reprisals. For example, an assault of one individual by a group of other, more domineering young men functioned as 'punishment' for failing to warn them that the security search team had approached their wing—a search that resulted in the seizure of mobile phones, drugs and associated paraphernalia. Thus, successful interceptions can inadvertently instigate physical violence and increase vulnerability.

Scarcity can also elevate prices, and individuals can therefore find that they are accumulating much higher levels of debt since the demand has not necessarily reduced. The reality that some prisoners—although certainly not all—will seek to manipulate or exploit perceived weaknesses or vulnerabilities in prison security (either physical or procedural) can create a temptation to 'screw everything down' or an obsession with closing down any and all opportunities for passing, training or dealing. However, the supply reduction tactics can come at the expense of opportunities for activities that might promote recovery, hope, and meaningful family contact. For example, whilst domestic visits can be a popular supply route, creating

a very controlled, austere and punitive visits environment and experience may reduce supply partially, but it does not eliminate it, and will often come at the expense of promoting strong family relationships that may support, assist and encourage desistance, hope, rehabilitation and recovery. Thus, there is a careful balancing act, and a need to take defensible risks to promote positive outcomes and opportunities.

### 5. Legitimate and Illegitimate Governance: Understanding the Role of Capable Staff

There has always been some degree of policing and governance provided by prisoners within the prisoner society. Prisoners enforce informal norms and codes, and demonstrate contempt for behaviour that they find unacceptable. Some will naturally rise to the apex of the social hierarchy, and operate positions of de-facto leadership. Such behaviour will occur in the context of effective, capable and legitimate governance by staff. Prisoners expect and want staff to provide confident leadership. Prisoners want staff to supervise effectively, and keep them safe from those who might pose a threat to them. There can however exist an uneasy, and quickly unsettled, equilibrium between officers and prisoners regarding the balance of power and control. Changes in either direction—whether officers are seen as being authoritarian, petty, or heavy handed in the use of power or indeed when officers are seen to ‘hold back’, retreat, be passive and ‘turn a blind eye’—has a discernible impact on order and control, on the atmosphere of the wing, and the extent to which the most vulnerable are exposed, unaided and desperate. In the latter case, officers can appear ‘ghost-like’, physically present but disengaged, either because they feel unwilling, unable, or afraid to challenge and exert authority and interact with prisoners. They can retreat to the offices, leaving large numbers of unlocked men to manage themselves. When this happens, prisoners fill the power vacuum that inevitably emerges, and occupy roles that would and should be the preserve of officers. In the worst cases, staff can become conditioned and find themselves in a position where they are only allowed as much power as prisoners will allow them to have. Too much ‘illegitimate and unofficial governance’ or, as Skarbek describes it, ‘extra-legal governance’,<sup>15</sup> is evident, and it contributes to a lawless society and one where

victimisation, exploitation and drug consumption and supply is visible and occurs with impunity:

*Their [the officers’] backbone has gone a little bit, but I don’t think they’ve got the staffing numbers to intervene sometimes.* (Nathan, Category B)

*Like I say, they can’t physically control that wing. So, it takes, like, the wiser inmates to, like, police it, the cleaners, the servery, they’re, the cleaners and the servery, that I’d say the wiser lot, that they wouldn’t be able to, they need more staff in here. That’s coming from an inmate. We do need more staff in here’.* (Mark, Category B)

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When prison staff relinquish some or all control to prisoners, either deliberately or inadvertently, the illicit economy flourishes, dealers can trade without impunity, prisoners use intimidation and violence to punish behaviour that they deem to be unacceptable, and the most vulnerable are exposed. Recovery in such a climate is challenging, largely because it is those who are most need of support who find themselves furthest from it.

To avoid the worst excesses of prisoner governance, prison staff need to be visible, be prepared to challenge inappropriate behaviour, and mindful of who is given key roles such as ‘cleaner’, ‘orderly’, listener, mentor or prisoners information desk worker. It is not atypical to find that those people chosen to perform such roles are chosen because they have a degree of ‘respect’ from their peers, have good relationships with staff and pose ‘no problem to staff’. But for some such men, their charisma, ability to simultaneously juggle both legitimate and nefarious activities (as some did in the community), their reputations for violence and custodial/criminal experience combined with the relative freedom that comes with orderly, cleanser and mentor job creates scope for them to engage more freely in the illicit economy, and or, organise ‘hits’, ‘trades’, and punishment beatings. Stabilising men may squash violence, or push it to backstage areas, but they do little to change the culture of violence and fear—rather, the atmosphere might feel ‘tense,’ ‘edgy’ ‘heavy’ and ‘dark. Thus, in order to promote recovery, prison officers need to operate with legitimate authority, be prepared to skilfully and intelligently apply the rules,

14. Prisoners believe that the drug-soaked clothes can be subsequently washed in their sinks and paper than soaked in the sink water. It is not clear, however, whether this is an effective way of supplying psychoactive substances.  
15. Skarbek, D. (2016) Covenants without the Sword? Comparing Prison Self-Governance Globally. *American Political Science Review*, 110(4): 845-860.



understand when a conversation will suffice and when a 'nicking' or change to IEP status is needed, and carefully discern who is genuinely performing supportive and responsible roles, and who is exploiting the opportunity for gain.

This is not to say that prisoners should not be encouraged to undertake responsible roles. As articles in this volume attest, such roles can be vital in supporting recovery and rehabilitation, but empowering prisoners to undertake positions of responsibility and peer support, is skilful work. As Liebling notes, 'some trust must flow, and be placed 'intelligently'<sup>16</sup> and be a decision that is based on intelligence.

## 6. The Importance of Trust: Understanding how to support recovery

One of the most frequently cited injunctions within prisons is the 'no grassing' or 'snitching' rule. The maxim 'snitches get stitches' is often cited and offered as a rationalisation when prisoners decline to give the names of wrongdoers to staff and are instead inclined to settle disputes between themselves. However, when prisoners form relationships built on trust, when they find the 'good officer' who keeps their word, they will disclose vulnerability, report inappropriate or criminal behaviour by their peers, report staff corruption, or warn officers of planned assaults. Such trust is established and built in the small details. It is the willingness to simply retrieve a toilet roll or provide an extra phone call in the event of a family crisis or bereavement that sets apart the 'good' and 'trustworthy' officers from the others. Equally, trust can be lost as quickly as it can be gained. Failing to act when a prisoner passes a note, reports an incident or possible incidents, or discloses difficulties managing their drug use or self-harm, can quickly lead to the conclusion that officers cannot be trusted and are unreliable in the event of a crisis. If reports of drug use are then automatically accompanied with blanket punitive measures, individuals may feel disinclined and discouraged from seeking support from uniformed staff:

*People need help, certain people need help with drug addiction. Don't forget, certain lads don't want to chat to officers, they don't want to speak to officers about their drug issues, they don't want to speak to the healthcare staff, they'd rather speak to an inmate about their problems because it stays confidential [...] They don't want to get stitched up, basically, that's what they think, if you tell an officer something, it'll go on their file, so they feel wary, but when they tell an inmate something, they know it's staying between the inmate and themselves.* (Paul, Category C)

*They'd say, like, 'You've got a drug problem. We'll help you.' They just want to put them on basic and put them behind a door, and that.* (Matt, Category C)

Typical responses to discovering an individual in possession of drug paraphernalia or under the influence of drugs include: reducing to 'basic regime' (the lowest level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme); being placed on report and appearing before the Adjudicating Governor (a 'nicking') who might impose 'losses' of items such as canteen, 'spends', time out of cell; appearing before the Independent Adjudicator and added days being added. In some cases, these added days can amount to several extra months, not just weeks, in prison. In addition, an intelligence-led or 'suspicion' mandatory drug testing might be required, which may affect opportunities for release or parole. The net effect of these punitive measures is to decrease the time out of cell, reduce access to financial resources, and reduce access to items that might be used to repay debts (such as canteen). Thus, individuals are more impoverished—not only in terms of the quality of the regime, but also in terms of the resources available to them. This risks exacerbating the problem. Drug users have less to do—and are then more incentivised to continue their drug use—and the inability to repay their debts risks increasing the level of indebtedness and vulnerability. Thus, not only does the response discourage individuals from seeking support in the future, but it also makes recovery more difficult. There must be a fundamental change in the management of drug consumption and supply within the prison estate, and a more effective and co-ordinated multi-agency approach to support recovery.

## Concluding Thoughts

Understanding the relationship between the illicit economy, drug supply and recovery begins by recognising that the drug economy provides relief for both dealers and users. For both groups, it is an adaptive response, but one where there are clear winners and losers. Whilst supply reduction techniques and strategies have a role, they are both intended and unintended consequences that might exacerbate vulnerability, increase violence, self-harm, and even death. Not only do supply reduction techniques need to be proportionate, and avoid limiting opportunities that might promote rehabilitation, desistance and hope, but they have to be coupled with a commitment to effectively address the factors that promote demand. There must be a whole prison approach to supporting recovery, and one that provides human conditions, timely and appropriate access to basic, where staff govern willingly and competently, and where there is an emphasis on preventative, intelligence led efforts.

16. Liebling, A. Arnold, H. and Straub, C. (2011) An exploration of staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 year on. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology.