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Editorial

Dr Flora Fitzalan Howard is a Chartered and Registered Forensic Psychologist, founder of KTA Research and Consulting, and Co-Editor of the Prison Service Journal.

This general edition of the Prison Service Journal brings together a diverse range of content which will be of interest to our readers.

We start with an article, by **Dr Bronwen Frow-Jones**, which synthesises the literature on prison staff wrongdoing to understand the causes and correlates of such behaviour. After discussing factors which may increase vulnerability, developing a typology of wrongdoing and highlighting the barriers to reporting wrongdoing, Bronwen identifies five policy recommendations relating to recruitment and vetting, training, support for staff, and support for managers.

Next, **Dr Roisin Jack, Dr Louise Buchan, Julia Heeren**, and **Professor Tom McMillan** present their research findings relating to Scottish Prison Service prison officer knowledge about head injury, and the implications of this for staff training. They argue that the prevalence and potential consequences of brain injury amongst the prisoner population, alongside the insufficiency of staff knowledge about these, requires addressing.

Samantha Rouche, an architect in Melbourne, Australia, then discusses the increasing need for sustainable and climate resilient prison infrastructure to mitigate risk and providing humane and sustainable custodial care in the context of escalating extreme temperatures. Her work provide a secondary study of available literature and analysis by sustainable design specialists to establish the thermal context and performance of existing facilities, alongside anecdotal evidence on the risk of extreme temperatures to prisoner behaviour, staff well-being, and operating costs.

In our fourth study, **Dr Marion Vannier, Dr Helen Gair, Mercedes Lopez**, and **Harris Telford** discuss the impact of the early release scheme implemented in England and Wales in 2024 on prisoners who are not eligible (particularly life-sentenced individuals). Their research highlights the need for an equitable approach to early release policies, informed by meaningful consultations with prisoners, and which takes into account rehabilitation efforts and individual risk levels.

The importance of higher education for individuals in prison is then considered by **Omar Lobban**. Drawing on relevant literature, different international models, and his own experience, Omar's article examines the

transformative power of higher education in prison and argues for the establishment of higher education-focused prison facilities in England and Wales.

Next, the findings from a rapid evidence assessment of forensic and psychotherapy literature exploring the impact of the physical space on therapeutic processes are presented by **Rudi Singh**. This article highlights the scarcity of forensic research in this area, and offers several recommendations for simple and low-cost changes that can improve the space in which prison interventions are delivered.

Dr Karen Harrison, Rachael Mason, Dr Lauren Smith, Dr Chloe Wilson, and **Sydney Ward** shed light on the perimenopausal and menopausal experiences of women who hold senior prison governor positions. Despite menopause being a significant life transition that many people will experience, it remains a topic shrouded in silence, particularly in the workplace.

The next article is derived from a presentation given at the 2025 Perrie Lectures and features **Alice Dawnay's** call for the justice reform sector to reconnect with public sentiment on crime and justice. Drawing on her experience at Switchback and new research from the Common Ground Justice Project, Dawnay highlights the disconnect between justice professionals and society.

Our last article, by **Dr Sharon Shalev, Harry Lefferts**, and **Dr Toon Molleman** discusses the findings of a study to shed light on the use and necessity of isolation (segregation) in Dutch prisons, and the views of prison staff and management on the practice. The article charts the process of developing the study's findings and recommendations into a new policy on the use of isolation, which is now being implemented by the Dutch Prison Service.

Finally, we have four book reviews. The first is of *Ministry to the Incarcerated*, written by Dr Henry G. Covert and reviewed by **Ray Taylor**. This book takes a Christian theological approach to the work of prisons and of prison chaplains. Ray concludes that this work is likely to be of most interest to prison religious ministers, rather than to prison staff in general; in particular, those of the various Christian denominations and perhaps those committed to a ministry outside of prison. Our

second review is of *What are prisons for?*, written by Professor Hindpal Singh Bhui and reviewed by **Peter Dawson**, which includes considerations about, amongst others, who is sent to prison and why, modern penal history and its impact on policies, different prison systems from across the world, and different schools of thought about what the future of prisons ought to be. The third book, *Work, Culture, and Wellbeing Among Prison Governors in England and Wales* written by Professor Karen Harrison, Rachael Mason, Dr Helen Nichols and Dr Lauren Smith, is reviewed by **Dr Jamie Bennett**. This draws on interviews with 63 prison managers in the UK, focussing on the wellbeing of prison managers, describing how and why they experience stress and distress, how they cope with the demands of their work and how the culture and institution ameliorate or

exacerbate harmful effects. Finally, *Prisoner Leaders: Leadership as Experience and Institution*, edited by Dr Marion Vannier and Paula Harriot, is also reviewed by **Dr Jamie Bennett**. He describes this as an innovative book which explores the nature of prisoner leadership; both the exercise of power and influence within the informal prison culture, as well as more formal roles such as peer support and representation. This book will be of value to prison practitioners, researchers, and those interested in leadership, prison cultures and the potential of lived experience.

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Prison staff wrongdoing: A synthesis of the literature

Dr Bronwen Frow-Jones volunteered as a member of the Independent Monitoring Board for 10 years and is now a prison researcher at Cardiff University.

In August 2019 the Ministry of Justice announced a government investment of £100 million to reduce crime in prisons.¹ This became known as the Security Investment Programme (SIP). There were four aims of SIP: to reduce the trafficking of illicit items into prisons via visitors, prisoners and prison staff; to stop mobile phones obtained by prisoners from working; to strengthen staff resilience to corruption, and to increase target disruptions against high harm Serious Organised Crime and corrupt staff. In September 2024, three evaluation reports into SIP were published.² This article is not an assessment of whether or not the SIP aims were achieved. Instead, it argues that to some extent HMPPS have 'put the cart before the horse' as it is first necessary to understand the reasons why staff engage in wrongdoing. The article is based on a literature review for the only independent empirical research on this subject in England and Wales. The starting point is to expand on Barrington, Silverman and Hutton's 2021 review of research into prison staff corruption and to consider the wider literature which can assist in understanding the causes and correlates of staff wrongdoing.³

Prison staff wrongdoing

Prison staff exercise significant power over prisoners. They are entrusted with maintaining security

and control but they also have the responsibility of looking after prisoners and supervising them. To a certain extent prison staff, particularly officers, are seen as a role model for prisoners. The influence of prison staff on the prison environment and prisoners is considerable, and, as Liebling has argued, the moral quality of prison life is 'enacted and embodied by the attitudes and conduct of prison officers' (p.485).⁴ Consequently staff wrongdoing can undermine institutional authority as well as the safe and secure operations within a prison.⁵ So what is staff wrongdoing and how is it defined?

Staff wrongdoing is behaviour which violates ethical, moral and formally established rules. It can range from ignoring rules not to accept gifts (however small) from prisoners, to selling confidential information and the trafficking of contraband.⁶ The term 'wrongdoing' therefore encompasses corruption as well as behaviours including inappropriate relationships and assaults on prisoners. Although these are the types of staff behaviours which first come to mind, more minor forms of wrongdoing such as favouritism and the inconsistent application of rules are also types of wrongdoing which have the potential to create chaotic and unstable work environments. Staff wrongdoing can also contribute to a culture of unprofessional behaviour, destroy trust between staff and prisoners and erode public trust in the legitimacy of prisons to hold offenders in a safe and secure place.⁷

1. Ministry of Justice. (2019). £100 million to crackdown on crime in prison. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/100-million-crackdown-on-crime-in-prison>
2. Kerr, J., Sharrock, S., Kersting, F., McDonough, T., Roberts, E., Hudson, N., David, M., & Li, J. (2024). *Security investment programme: process evaluation report*. The National Centre for Social Research; Ramzan, A., Harries, H., Taylor, J., & Musimbe, S. (2024). *Security investment programme: overview and outcome study*. Ministry of Justice; Craston, M., Bierman, R., Baker, C., Ceresco, I., & Akhurst, E. (2024). *Process evaluation of the multi-agency response to serious organised crime (MARSOC) early adopter phase: final evaluation report*. Ipos UK
3. Barrington, R., Silverman, J., & Hutton, M. (2021). Corruption in UK prisons: A critical evaluation of the evidence base. *The Prison Service Journal*, 252, 46-57.
4. Liebling, A. (2011). Distinctions and distinctiveness in the work of prison officers: Legitimacy and authority revisited. *European Journal of Criminology*, 8(6), 484-499.
5. Taylor-McCune, K. (2020). *Correctional officers' perspectives on cellphone contraband introduction by fellow officers* [PhD Thesis]. Walden University.
6. Rule 70 of the Prison Rules (1999) prohibits (without authority) the conveying of any article into a prison by any person. Although the term 'contraband' is often used to refer to drugs, alcohol, mobile phones, cigarettes and weapons, it also covers items listed in the Prisons Act 1952 which includes articles such as chewing gum and clothing.
7. Ross, J. (2013). Deconstructing correctional officer deviance: Toward typologies of actions and controls. *Criminal Justice Review*, 38(1), 10-126; Ross, J., Tewksbury, R., & Rolfe, S. (2016). Inmate responses to correctional officer deviance: A model of its dynamic nature. *Corrections*, 1(2), 139-153; Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013). Games guards play: A self-report study of institutional deviance within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 26(1), 115-132; Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016). The economics of crossing over: Examining the link between correctional officer pay and guard-inmate boundary violations. *Deviant Behaviour*, 37(1), 16-29; Kelly, D., & Potter, J. (2023). Professional boundary violations in prisons: A scoping review of the literature. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 13(3), 190-208.

In England and Wales prison staff wrongdoing is defined by HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) Counter Corruption (CC) Policy 2022 as:

'Any behaviour that falls short of the professional standards of staff. Wrongdoing is a broad category and can be intentional or unintentional. It can encompass staff behaviours such as inadvertently overstepping professional boundaries with prisoners ... bullying and harassment, and the inappropriate use of force as well as corruption' (p. 6).⁸

One of the problems with this definition is that it includes terms which are not themselves defined in the CC policy. Instead, it is necessary to refer to the Conduct and Discipline Policy (PSI 06/2010), the Professional Standards of Behaviour (PSB) guidance and the Civil Service Code to find out what HMPPS means by 'professional boundaries' and 'professional standards.' The PSI and the PSB set out 'values' which staff are expected to act in accordance with. These include general instructions to carry out duties loyally, conscientiously, honestly and with integrity as well as guidance on how to deal with prisoners. Staff are instructed to exercise care to ensure that their dealing with prisoners should not be open to abuse or exploitation on either side while staff relationships with prisoners should be professional. The PSI states that staff should not:

- ❑ Provoke, use unnecessary or unlawful force or assault a prisoner.
- ❑ Use offensive language to a prisoner.
- ❑ Have any sexual involvement with a prisoner.
- ❑ Give prisoners or ex-prisoners personal or other information about staff, prisoners or their friends and relatives which is held in confidence.
- ❑ Have any contact in or outside work with prisoners or ex-prisoners that is not authorised.

Staff wrongdoing is behaviour which violates ethical, moral and formally established rules.

- ❑ Accept any approaches by prisoners for unauthorised information or favours and must report any such incidents.

There is also a short section informing staff that corruption is not acceptable. The more recent PSB (issued in 2024), instructs staff to report wrongdoing and gives further examples of unprofessional behaviour. These include physical and verbal aggression, gaslighting, bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination and victimisation.

These additional examples in the PSB are no doubt helpful in identifying types of wrongdoing. However, there is no explanation of what 'boundary violations' means in the PSI, the PSB or in the CC policy. It is therefore necessary to consider how this term has been defined by prison researchers. The definition most

widely adopted in prison literature was formulated in 2001 by Marquart, Barnhill and Balshaw-Biddle as those behaviours which 'blur, minimise, or disrupt the professional distance' between prisoners and staff (p. 878).⁹ However, in practice, professional boundaries are not clear cut and part of the skill of being a good prison staff member is recognising where the boundary should be with prisoners, particularly as professional boundaries can vary according to the prisoner and the member of staff.¹⁰

Evidence base for prison staff wrongdoing

Although there is a paucity of academic research into prison staff wrongdoing in England and Wales, this is not to say it has failed to be formally recognised. In 2005, Penfold, Turnbull and Webster completed the first systematic study into prison drug markets. The presence of drugs in prisons was considered to be a major cause of violence, intimidation and corruption. The six main routes for drug importation into prisons identified through the study were social visits, mail, new prisoners, over the perimeter walls (known as 'throw-overs'), returning prisoners after court visits and prison staff.¹¹ A year later the leaked findings of a Metropolitan Police report on prison staff corruption in

8. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. (2022). *Counter Corruption and Reporting Wrongdoing Policy Framework*. HMPPS.

9. Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001). Fatal attraction: An analysis of employee boundary violations in a southern prison system 1995–1998. *Justice Quarterly*, 18(4), 877–910.

10. Liebling, A., Arnold, H., & Straub, C. (2011). *An exploration of staff-prisoner relationships at HMP Whitemoor: 12 years on. Revised final report*. Cambridge Institute of Criminology.

11. Penfold, C., Turnbull, P., & Webster, R. (2005). *Tackling prison drug markets: An exploratory qualitative study*. Institute for Criminal Policy Research and Home Office.

England and Wales claimed there were at least 1,000 corrupt prison staff and more than 500 inappropriate relationships between staff and prisoners.¹² In the same year Ben Crewe published his ethnographic study on prison drug dealing.¹³ Crewe identified the same methods of drug importation as Penfold and colleagues before concluding that the route which permitted the smuggling of the largest quantities of drugs was through staff corruption.

In early 2008 David Blakey, a former Inspector of Constabulary, was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice to conduct a review into the strategies used by the Prison Service to prevent drugs from entering prisons. Although Blakey did not focus on staff corruption, he confirmed staff corruption was one of the main ways drugs were conveyed into prisons and reported that staff corruption was an ongoing problem for the Prison Service.¹⁴ Soon after this report was published the government created the Prisons Corruption Prevention Unit (CPU) to work alongside the police. Although under-resourced, the CPU formulated policies for identifying corruptors and began to identify staff vulnerabilities to corruption. Unfortunately, due to financial cutbacks the CPU was disbanded in 2011. In the same year Transparency International reported on corruption in the United Kingdom, noting that 'Previous research has indicated that corruption in prisons is both more widespread and deep-rooted than is officially acknowledged' (p. 26).¹⁵ Transparency International went on to conclude that prison corruption had been consistently overlooked by policy makers at the highest level. Despite these warnings, the Prison Service remained in denial for the next five years about the extent of corruption even though prisons were the perfect environment for corruption to flourish.¹⁶

In 2016, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) launched their CC policy which ran alongside their Reporting Wrongdoing Policy which had been implemented in 2013. The CC policy included a definition of corruption and gave examples of types of corrupt behaviour. A year later NOMS was replaced by

HMPPS which continued to develop the CC Policy based on the 'four Ps' approach drawn from what, at that time, was the Government's Countering Terrorism and the Serious Organised Crime Strategy. This reformulated policy focussed on: protecting against corruption; preventing staff from engaging in corruption; pursuing those involved in corruption and preparing for the consequences of corrupt behaviour. The four Ps approach formed the basis of the Counter Corruption and Reporting Wrongdoing policy Framework issued on 15 April 2019 (reissued 2022). In the same year a specialist task force to tackle staff corruption in prisons was established and funding was released for the Security Investment Programme.

Independent academic research

Research directly addressing prison staff wrongdoing is sparse.

One of the first prison studies which recognised the 'dark side' of prison officers and the challenges of maintaining professional boundaries with prisoners was Sykes's *The Society of Captives* published in 1958. Sykes argued that one of the reasons the authority of prison officers is vulnerable to

corruption is due to their role which necessitated (and still necessitates in most prisons) close contact with prisoners. This can lead to friendship and inappropriate relationships, while the management pressure to achieve a smooth-running prison can lead to reciprocity whereby officers' buy prisoner compliance or obedience at the cost of tolerating disobedience elsewhere. The need to exercise discretion to facilitate the orderly running of the prison cannot, according to Sykes, be avoided. However, such behaviour could be sufficiently serious to render staff vulnerable to blackmail by prisoners.¹⁷

Research directly addressing prison staff wrongdoing is sparse.¹⁸ McCarthy's American research conducted in 1981 remains the only empirical study focussed on prison staff corruption, while McIlwain's Australian research in 2005 is the only study on misconduct between non-custodial prison staff and prisoners.¹⁹ Nevertheless, certain types of wrongdoing

12. BBC News. (2006, 31 July). Many jail staff corrupt – report. *BBC News*.

13. Crewe, B. (2006). Prison drug dealing and the ethnographic lens. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 347-368.

14. Blakey, D. (2008). *Disrupting the supply of illicit drugs into prisons: A report for the Director General of National Offender Management Service*. Ministry of Justice.

15. Transparency International. (2011). *Corruption in the UK part two: Assessment of key sectors*. Transparency International UK.

16. Podmore, J. (2012). *Out of sight, out of mind: Why Britain's prisons are failing*. Biteback Publishing.

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

18. See footnote 7: Ross, J. (2013); Goldsmith, A., Halsey, M., & Groves, A. (2016). *Tackling Correctional Corruption: An Integrity Promoting Approach*. Palgrave Macmillan.

19. McCarthy, B. (1981). *An exploratory study of corruption in corrections*. PhD Thesis, The Florida State University; McIlwain, G. (2005). *Professional misconduct between non-custodial staff and inmates: A study of Queensland's correctional centres*. PhD Thesis, Griffith University, Queensland.

have attracted some academic interest, in particular the problem of staff boundary violations and inappropriate relationships between staff and prisoners.²⁰ There have also been studies on excessive force and/or violence by prison officers.²¹ Other scholars have explored the links between corruption and contributory factors such as low pay, feeling unsupported or uncared for within the organisation and high levels of work stress.^{22 23 24}

Although this literature provides pieces of a jigsaw to assist in understanding different types of staff behaviour, it is necessary to also consider the specific demands and challenges faced by prison staff which may increase staff propensity to wrongdoing.

Staff-prisoner relationships: The balancing act

Staff behaviour and staff-prisoner relationships have a significant impact on the quality of a prison regime and on prisoners themselves. However, there is a lack of clarity about what the 'right' relationship might be and staff-prisoner relationships can go wrong in different ways as they can be too close, too flexible, too distant and/or too rigid.²⁵ Part of the challenge for prison staff in maintaining the 'right' relationship with prisoners is due to their conflicting roles. Prison staff, particularly officers, have to maintain security and order but also be caring and supportive. In short, they have to be both 'turnkeys'

and 'care bears'.²⁶ Although non-custodial staff do not have the responsibility of 'turnkey', they face the same challenges as custodial staff in setting boundaries with prisoners. Indeed, due to the nature of non-custodial work, McIlwain argues that maintaining professional boundaries can be more challenging for non-custodial staff than it is for officers.²⁷ Consequently all prison staff experience tensions between maintaining good prisoner-staff relationships while also maintaining security, justice and order.²⁸ As Van Dijk, Maesschalck and Daems (2023) concluded:

'[The] everlasting attempt to find a middle ground between being too soft and too harsh ...navigating relationships through the use of discretion, authority and power makes prison work a complex endeavour.' (p. 72).²⁹

Staff behaviour and staff-prisoner relationships have a significant impact on the quality of a prison regime and on the prisoners themselves.

In trying to conceptualise the need to balance the conflicting roles of care and control, Hamilton formulated the Boundary Seesaw Model.³⁰ This model visualises the dynamic nature of boundary management as a seesaw with the care and control roles straddling the pivot. Moving too far away from the pivot 'tips' the seesaw into boundary crossings. At the ends of the seesaw are the extreme roles of excessive control or excessive care which represent boundary violations. In Hamilton's model,

20. Calhoun, A., & Coleman, H. (2002). Female inmates' perspectives on sexual abuse by correctional personnel: an exploratory study. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 13(2-3), 101-124; Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003). Prison guard predators: An analysis of inmates who established inappropriate relationships with prison staff, 1995-1998. *Deviant Behaviour: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 24(2), 174-194; Cheeseman Dial, K., & Worley R. (2008). Crossing the line: a quantitative analysis of inmate boundary violators in a southern prison system. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33(1), 69-84; Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2011). Guards gone wild: a self-report study of correctional officer misconduct and the effect of institutional deviance on 'care' within the Texas prison system. *Deviant Behaviour*, 32, 293-319; Blackburn, A., Fowler, S., Mullings, J., & Marquart, J. (2011). When boundaries are broken: Inmate perception of correctional staff boundary violations. *Deviant Behaviour*, 32(4), 351-378; see footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); Jones, S. (2013). *A portrait of boundary violations: former female employees of corrections who have established a relationship with an inmate* [PhD Thesis]. University of Colorado.
21. Marquart, J. (1986). Prison guards and the use of physical coercion as a mechanism of prisoner control. *Criminology*, 24(2), 347-366; Hemmens, C., & Stohr, M. (2001). Correctional staff attitudes regarding the use of force in corrections. *Corrections Management Quarterly*, 5(2), 27-40.
22. See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013).
23. Souryal, S. (2009.) Deterring corruption by prison personnel: A principle-based perspective. *The Prison Journal*, 89(1), 21-45; See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016).
24. Mahfood, V., Pollock, W., & Longmire, D. (2013). Leave it at the gate: job stress and satisfaction in correctional staff. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 26(3), 308-325; See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016); Worley, R., Worley, V., & Hsu, H. (2018). Can I trust my co-worker? Examining correction officers' perceptions of staff-inmate inappropriate relationships within a southern penitentiary system. *Deviant Behaviour*, 39(3), 332-346.
25. Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012). *The Prison Officer* (2nd ed). Routledge.
26. Tait, S. (2008). Care and the prison officer: Beyond 'turnkeys' and 'care bears'. *Prison Service Journal*, 180, 30-11.
27. See footnote 19: McIlwain, G. (2005).
28. Liebling, A., & Arnold, H. (2004). *Prisons and Their Moral Performance*. Oxford University Press.
29. Van Dijk, M., Maesschalck, J., & Daems, T. (2023). Beyond custody versus care: understanding the ethical dilemmas of prison officers in Belgium. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 29, 71-89.
30. Hamilton, L. (2010). The boundary seesaw model: good fences make for good neighbours. In A. Tennant, & K. Howells (Eds.), *Using time, not doing time*. Wiley-Blackwell.

there are boundary shifts such as treating a prisoner differently by relaxing the rules for them, using nicknames or familiar terms. There are also boundary crossings whereby a prisoner is singled out for special attention (punishment or care) and boundary violations which involve inappropriate relationships, trafficking, breaching physical and procedural security, exploiting and/or abusing the prisoner. In the context of a prison, maintaining a position on the seesaw pivot of care and control can be challenging, not only are there no clearly defined boundaries but even a minor boundary violation has the potential to lead to more serious wrongdoing.³¹

Managing the contradiction between 'turnkey and care bear' tests the skill of prison staff to maintain their position on the seesaw pivot while the consequences of boundary shifts can be significant. For example, sharing food with a colleague would not generally violate any normal work rules but sharing food with a prisoner can have serious repercussions.³² Not only can the sharing of food cause jealousy between different prisoner groups because of perceived favouritism, it can also compromise the staff member's position if sharing food with a prisoner is against prison policy.³³ Consequently this simple act which could be motivated by 'good' reasons, might lead to a friendship which can have the effect of blurring the professional boundaries and be a gateway to boundary violations or be a way in which a prisoner is able to blackmail a staff member by threatening to report the rule breaking.³⁴

Even a minor
boundary violation
has the potential to
lead to more serious
wrongdoing.

Boundary violations and inappropriate relationships

Boundary violations require special attention in prisons due to the power imbalances in the relationship between prisoners and staff.³⁵ One key problem for prison staff is that not only are there no clearly defined boundaries in prisons, but static boundaries do not exist, and this ambiguity may lead to boundary blurring.³⁶

There has been no research in England and Wales focussed on prisoner/staff boundary violations but there have been studies in the United States examining the factors which facilitate boundary violations and how they can lead to serious wrongdoing.³⁷ Many of these studies were based on the same data set obtained from

Texan prisons and either authored or co-authored by Robert Worley, so their findings might not be generalisable but they are, nevertheless, still relevant.

Boundary violations include behaviours such as physical or sexual abuse of prisoners and bringing contraband into the prison, but they can also include ignoring minor inmate violations or ignoring prisoners altogether.³⁸

They range from letting prisoners break rules, to contacting prisoners' families on their behalf, to trafficking contraband and entering into sexual relationships.^{39 40 41 42} Researchers have suggested that poor supervision, low hiring standards, lack of training and the stressful nature of prison work contribute to an increased prevalence of boundary violations.⁴³

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31. See footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); Cheeseman, K., & Worley, R. (2006). Women on the wing: inmate perceptions about female correction officer job competency in a Southern prison system. *Southwest Journal of Criminal Justice*, 3(2), 86-106; See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013).
32. See footnote 20: Jones, S. (2013).
33. In the Category B local prisons in which the author's research was conducted, sharing food with a prisoner was against policy. However, this policy may differ across the prison estate.
34. See footnote 20: Blackburn, A., Fowler, S., Mullings, J., & Marquart, J. (2011).
35. Cooke, B., Ryan, M., Hall, W., Hatters Friedman, S., Abhishek, J., & Wagoner, R. (2019). Professional boundaries in corrections. *American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 47(1), 1-8.
36. See footnote 20: Blackburn, A., Fowler, S., Mullings, J., & Marquart, J. (2011).
37. For example: see footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); See footnote 20: Calhoun, A., & Coleman, H. (2002); See footnote 20: Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003); Worley, R., & Cheeseman, K. (2006) Guards as embezzlers: the consequences of 'nonshareable problems; in prison settings. *Deviant Behaviour*, 27, 203-222; See footnote 20: Jones, S. (2013); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016).
38. See footnote 20: Blackburn, A., Fowler, S., Mullings, J., & Marquart, J. (2011).
39. See footnote 20: Blackburn, A., Fowler, S., Mullings, J., & Marquart, J. (2011).
40. See footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); See footnote 20: Cheeseman Dial, K., & Worley R. (2008).
41. Peterson, B., Deuk Kim, K., & Shukla, R. (2024). The sociology of contraband: examining the correlates of illicit drugs, cellphones and weapons in U.S. prisons. *The Prison Journal*, 104(3), 365-389; Peterson, B., & Kim, K. (2024). Staff as a conduit for contraband: developing and testing key assumptions of professional boundary violations in prison. *Deviant Behaviour*, (online).
42. See footnote 20: Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003); See footnote 18: Jones, S. (2013); See footnote 24: Worley, R., Worley, V., & Hsu, H. (2018).
43. See footnote 7: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009). Problems at work: Exploring the correlates of role stress among correctional staff. *The Prison Journal*, 89(4), 460-481; See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); See footnote 22: Mahfood, V., Pollock, W., & Longmire, D. (2013).

One type of boundary violation which has been researched more widely than others are inappropriate relationships.⁴⁴ Inappropriate relationships have been defined as:

‘Personal relationships between employees and inmates/clients or with family members of inmates/clients. This behaviour is usually sexual or economic in nature and has the potential to jeopardize the security of a prison institution or compromise the integrity of a correctional employee.’ (p.179).⁴⁵

The risk of inappropriate relationships between staff and prisoners, particularly female prison officers with male prisoners has also been the subject of media interest.⁴⁶ Although some research suggests female officers may have a calming effect on male prisoners and be more successful than men in diffusing confrontational situations, others have argued that the presence of female officers in male prisons and male officers in female prisons increases opportunities for inappropriate behaviours.^{47 48} Researchers who analysed demographic factors in studies on prison staff wrongdoing found the staff most at risk were female, single, younger, less educated and inexperienced.⁴⁹

Replies from the Ministry of Justice to Freedom of Information requests made by the writer reveal that the number of prison officers (including Officer Support Grades) investigated for inappropriate relationships with prisoners has increased from 43 in 2019/20 to 49 in 2023/24. It is a reasonable assumption that these

figures are just the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and do not truly represent the extent of inappropriate relationships between prison staff and prisoners in England and Wales. Whether inappropriate prisoner relationships are with custodial or non-custodial staff, they blur professional boundaries and can often be the starting point for various forms of prison staff corruption.⁵⁰ Additional research on this aspect of staff wrongdoing is sorely needed.

One grey area: The use of discretion

As Sykes and Liebling, Price and Shefer note it would be impossible for all prison rules to be enforced all of the time.^{51 52} Prison staff therefore have the power to use discretion to judge situations and to allow for flexibility around rule enforcement. Consequently the rigidity of professional boundaries and rules are often bent in an effort to be more efficient and to make life easier for the staff.⁵³ This can lead to uncertainty around professional boundaries particularly in the implementation of prison policies and procedures.⁵⁴

This discretion means that prison staff can, on a daily basis, ignore minor rule infractions, give some prisoners more favourable treatment than others, determine privilege levels and contribute to reports on prisoners. Crewe describes this ‘soft power’ (p. 455) as working through psychological as well as physical means and gripping as tightly as coercive or authoritarian power.⁵⁵ However, whilst the under-enforcement of rules can facilitate the smooth running of the prison, it can also result in a lack of clear

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44. See footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); See footnote 20: Calhoun, A., & Coleman, H. (2002); See footnote 20: Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003); See footnote 20: Cheeseman Dial, K., & Worley R. (2008); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013).
45. See footnote 20: Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003).
46. For example, see: Bazararaa, D. (2020, 7 September). Female prison guard arrested after being ‘caught having sex with rapist inmate’. *The Mirror*; Lavery, M. (2021, 16 January). Prison officer who sent sexual images of herself to teenage inmates and smuggled in parcels is jailed. *Yorkshire Evening Post*; Gibson, S. (2022, 20 May). Woman prison officer caught in relationship with killer inmate – who stabbed his wife 58 times. *Leicester Mercury*; Rogers, J. (2023 3 January). Forbidden romance. *The Sun*.
47. See footnote 31: Cheeseman, K., & Worley, R. (2006).
48. See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016).
49. See footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); Worley, R., Lambert, E., & Worley, V. (2019). I can’t get no satisfaction! An examination of correctional officers’ perceptions of staff-inmate boundary violations and willingness to follow institutional rules within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. *Deviant Behaviour*, 40(8), 1007-1019; Boateng, F., & Hsie, M. L. (2019). Misconduct withing the ‘four walls’: does organisational justice matter in explaining prison officers’ misconduct and job stress? *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(2), 289-308; Worley, R., Worley, V., & Lambert, E. (2021). Deepening the guard-inmate divide: an exploratory analysis of the relationship between staff-inmate boundary violations and officer attitudes regarding the mistreatment of prisoners. *Deviant Behaviour*, 42(4), 503-517.
50. See footnote 9: Marquart, J., Barnhill, M., & Balshaw-Biddle, K. (2001); See footnote 20: Worley, R., Marquart, J., & Mullings, J. (2003); See footnote 31: Cheeseman, K., & Worley, R. (2006); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); Goldsmith, A., & Halsey, M. (2018). *Literature review: correctional corruption*. Flinders University: Centre for Crime and Policy Research.
51. See footnote 17: Sykes, G. (1958).
52. See footnote 25: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012).
53. Crawley, E. (2000). *The social world of the English prison officer: a study in occupational culture* [PhD Thesis]. Keele University.
54. McCarthy, B. (1984). Keeping an eye on the keeper: Prison corruption and its control. *The Prison Journal*, 64, 113-125; McCarthy, B. (1984). Patterns of prison corruption. *Corrections Today*, 46, 88-108; See footnote 53: Crawley, E. (2000.); Liebling, A. (2000). Prison officers, policing and the use of discretion. *Theoretical Criminology*, 4(3), 333-357; Stohr, M., Hemmens, C., Marsh, R., Barrier, G., & Palhegyi, D. (2000). Can’t scale this? The ethical parameters of correctional work. *The Prison Journal*, 80(1), 56-79; See footnote 25: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012); Liebling, A., & Kant, D. (2016). The two cultures: Correctional officers and key differences in institutional climate. In: J. Wooldredge & P. Smith (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Prison and Imprisonment*.
55. Crewe, B., Liebling, A., & Hulley, S. (2011). Staff culture, use of authority and prisoner quality of life in public and private sector prisons. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 44(1), 94-115.

professional boundaries. There is also the risk that where staff underuse their power to maintain good relationships, they can be perceived as too friendly, and this can come at the expense of safety and control.⁵⁶ So 'the underuse of power can be as treacherous in its outcomes as the overuse of power' (p. 25).⁵⁷

This discretionary power means there are ample incentives and opportunities for wrongdoing. As a result, discretion can function for or against legitimacy, where 'legitimacy' is a perception that the arrangements, procedures and processes a person is subject to are appropriate and fair.^{58 59} Where discretion is unfettered or the prevailing culture of a prison is punitive or indifferent, staff may misuse their discretion.⁶⁰ The question therefore arises as to what are the 'right reasons' for prison staff to exercise their discretion and to 'bend' the rules? Liebling and colleagues conclude that decisions are informed by individual interpretation, knowledge, values, experience and relationships.⁶¹ In the absence of clear guidance, discretion should not be exercised in an arbitrary way and it is for senior managers to provide guidance as to the values and principles on which the exercise of discretion should be based.⁶²

Staff stress

Prison staff work in environments which are challenging, stressful and dangerous with a high risk of physical assault and verbal abuse from prisoners.⁶³ A growing body of literature over the past forty years has

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found that various factors such as role overload, poor supervision, a lack of organisational support and a lack of input into decision making are related to job stress and low job satisfaction among prison staff.⁶⁴ The need to comply with numerous policies and procedures, (which, if not followed could result in serious repercussions), and a feeling of being undervalued by the prison management and colleagues all contribute to high stress levels in a prison workforce.⁶⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that prison officers have lower rates of physical and mental health compared to their counterparts working elsewhere in criminal justice and security occupations.⁶⁶ These factors have an impact on levels of staff wrongdoing. There have been a number of studies which have established that high levels of job

stress are associated with inappropriate relationships with prisoners, high turnover of staff, high absenteeism, low staff morale and lower organisational commitment.⁶⁷ Furthermore, if poor management permits organisational wrongdoing to exist within a prison, it can become normalised to the point that prison staff are more likely to engage in wrongdoing.⁶⁸

Within institutions, the concepts of justice, fairness and equity are essential components of organisational justice and are the basis of institutional effectiveness.⁶⁹ If staff perceive that salary, promotion,

recognition and evaluation reflects the work input and that work processes are transparent and fair, they are less likely to experience work stress and be more rule compliant.⁷⁰ In their empirical study, Boateng and Hsieh

56. Crewe, B., Liebling, A., & Hulley, S. (2015). Staff-prisoner relationships, staff professionalism and the use of authority in public and private sector prisons. *Law and Social Inquiry*, 40(2), 309-344.
57. See footnote 54: Liebling, A., & Kant, D. (2016).
58. Liebling, A. (2000). Prison officers, policing and the use of discretion. *Theoretical Criminology*, 4(3), 333-357.
59. Franke, D., Bierie, D., & Mackenzie, D. (2010.) Legitimacy in corrections. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 9(1), 89-117.
60. Crewe, B. (2008). Concluding comments on the social world of prison staff. In J. Bennett, B. Crewe, & A. Wahidin (Eds.), *Understanding prison staff*. Willan Publishing.
61. See footnote 25: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012).
62. See footnote 25: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012).
63. Armstrong, G. & Griffin, M. (2004). Does doing the job matter? Comparing correlates of stress among treatment and correctional staff in prisons. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 32(6), 577-592; See footnote 43: Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009); Garland, B., Hogan N., & Lambert, E. (2012). Antecedents of role stress among correctional staff: A replication and expansion. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 24(5), 527-550; Kinman, G., Clements, A., & Hart, J. (2016). Work-related wellbeing in UK prison officers: A benchmarking approach. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 9(3), 290-307; Clements, A., & Kinman, G. (2021). Job demands, organisational justice and emotional exhaustion in prison officers. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 34(4), 441-458.
64. See footnote 63: Armstrong, G., & Griffin, M. (2004); See footnote 43: Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009).
65. See footnote 63: Armstrong, G., & Griffin, M. (2004); Lambert, E. (2004). The impact of job characteristics on correctional staff members. *The Prison Journal*, 84, 208-227; See footnote 43: Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009); See footnote 63: Clements, A., & Kinman, G. (2021).
66. Clements, A., & Kinman, G. (2023). Wellbeing in UK prison officers: Key factors. *Prison Service Journal*, 268, 17-22.
67. See footnote 63: Armstrong, G., & Griffin, M. (2004); See footnote 43: Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009); See footnote 24: Mahfood, V., Pollock, W., & Longmire, D. (2013); See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016); See footnote 24: Worley, R., Worley, V., & Hsu, H. (2018).
68. See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013).
69. See footnote 49: Boateng, F., & Hsie, M. L. (2019).

(2019) observed the significant impact which organisational justice, job satisfaction and organisational commitment had on prison officers' wrongdoing. They found that perceptions of low organisational justice, low job satisfaction and low job commitment were all predictive of a greater potential to engage in wrongdoing.⁷¹

There are also individual factors which have been identified as increasing vulnerability to wrongdoing. Studies have found that a lack of support from peers, and/or family as well as managers is positively correlated with higher levels of wrongdoing and a perception that other colleagues are engaged in wrongdoing.^{72 73} Individual problems such as financial difficulties and relationship breakdowns also increase the risk of staff wrongdoing.⁷⁴ However, these factors do not affect everyone equally; some individuals will respond to them by engaging in wrongdoing and others will resist. Prior life experience and perception of how likely the wrongdoing will be discovered will also influence decision making. The difference for prison staff is that, due to the closed environment of a prison, those staff experiencing stress, financial and/or personal difficulties are more likely to be noticed by prisoners who have ample time to observe staff behaviour, thereby enabling them to target vulnerable staff. This can, in turn, lead to manipulation by prisoners and staff corruption.⁷⁵

Conclusions

Any attempt to reduce prison staff wrongdoing, particularly serious wrongdoing, should not be based on the assumption that removing or deterring the 'rotten apples' will solve the problem. This review has drawn together some of the wider literature which can assist in understanding why some staff engage in wrongdoing. Although it can be argued that prison staff are individuals who decide whether or not to engage in wrongdoing, it cannot be assumed they are 'rational offenders' who make decisions solely on a cost:benefit analysis or that individuals make decisions solely due to their personal circumstances. Instead, it is essential to also take into consideration organisational and societal factors which may increase staff vulnerability to engage in wrongdoing.

The literature reviewed in this paper underpinned research which explored the reasons why prison staff engage in wrongdoing, identified the factors which the staff themselves thought increased vulnerability,

developed a typology of wrongdoing and highlighted the barriers to reporting wrongdoing. Apart from highlighting the need for additional research, the following policy recommendations were made to HMPPS:

1. Improve recruitment and vetting to ensure suitable people are appointed and increase the minimum age of prison staff to 21, so more staff have the life skills, personal confidence and maturity required to deal with the adverse conditions and challenging prisoners they will encounter.
2. Improve training. Staff need to know what the rules are and understand why they are important. They also need to have a greater understanding of the risks and potential harm of wrongdoing, and how even minor infractions can undermine legitimacy.
3. Increase staff support. Prison staff need to feel valued, appreciated and understood — by their managers and society. They need to be supported through having a sufficient number of colleagues and managers so they feel safe in their work, to have greater staffing experience on the wings to offer guidance and they need to be suitably reimbursed.
4. Increase manager support. Strong ethical leadership is essential in any organisation. Leaders need to display integrity, communicate and emphasise ethical standards and be trusted. However, prison managers (including uniformed managers) are the 'squeezed middle' so they too need to be given additional support.
5. Focus on reducing all types of wrongdoing. Situational crime prevention methods for both prison staff and visitors give a clear message that trafficking of contraband is being 'dealt with' and may increase accountability but it can also send the message that prison staff cannot be trusted and create further divisions. Instead, a more strategic approach should focus on reducing all types of wrongdoing so that early indicators of wrongdoing can be addressed to reduce the risk of minor wrongdoing progressing to more serious wrongdoing.

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70. See footnote 43: Lambert, E., Hogan N., & Tucker, K. (2009).

71. See footnote 49: Boateng, F., & Hsie, M. L. (2019).

72. See footnote 7: Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2013); Worley, R., & Worley, V. (2016).

73. See footnote 49: Worley, R., Worley, V., & Lambert, E. (2021).

74. See footnote 37: Worley, R., & Cheeseman, K. (2006).

75. Allen, B., & Bosta, D. (1981). *Games criminals play: How you can profit by knowing them*. Rae John Publishers; Elliott, W. (2006). Power and control tactics employed by prison inmates: A case study. *Federal Probation*, 70(1), 45–48; See footnote 37: Worley, R., & Cheeseman, K. (2006); Cornelius, G. (2009). *The art of the con: avoiding offender manipulation* (2nd ed). American Correctional Association.

Knowledge about head injury in prison officers and implications for training

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There is growing interest in the relationships between the neurobehavioural effects of head injury and offending, including evidence for associations with violent and more serious crime leading to imprisonment.^{1,2} A head injury can cause significant traumatic brain injury, but with no obvious physical signs. Damage most commonly arises from diffuse brain injury that results from rapid acceleration or deceleration of the brain with shearing forces causing neuronal damage. The most common causes are falls, assault and motor vehicle accidents.³ On casual acquaintance, an individual can seem to talk and act normally after traumatic brain injury, but there can be important emotional, cognitive and behavioural changes that can lead to poorer self-control and judgement, a lower threshold for anger and violence and greater likelihood of acting impulsively.⁴ People with a history of significant head injury who are in prison are likely to be more difficult to manage and have more recorded prison incidents, yet staff are often

not aware of this and have little knowledge of this. There are also indications that these prisoners receive little or no support for the effects of their head injury while they are in prison.^{5,6,7} Meta-analyses suggest that more than half of people in prison have a life history of head injury, and arguably there is a compelling need for staff to have knowledge about this to best manage them and support their needs.⁸

Few studies have considered knowledge about head injury held by professionals who work in the Criminal Justice System (CJS), and none concern prison officers.⁹ This paucity of studies persists despite long standing concerns by professionals who work with people with head injury over misperceptions about the effects on sufferers.^{10,11,12} This seems especially relevant in settings where head injury risk and rates are higher than elsewhere, such as in prison settings compared with the general population.¹³

The few studies examining knowledge about head injury that have been published report a need for

1. Williams, W. H., Chitsabesan, P., Fazel, S., McMillan, T., Hughes, N., Parsonage, M., & Tonks, J. (2018). Traumatic Brain Injury: A potential cause of violent crime? *Lancet Psychiatry*, 5, 836-844
2. McMillan, T. M. (2021). Head Injury and Offending. In J. M. Brown & M. A. H. Horvath (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Forensic Psychology* (pp. 573-570). Cambridge University Press.
3. Faul, M., & Coronado, V. (2015). Epidemiology of traumatic brain injury. *Handbook of Clinical Neurology*, 127, 3-13.
4. Wood, R. L., & Worthington, A. (2017). Neurobehavioral Abnormalities Associated with Executive Dysfunction after Traumatic Brain Injury. *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience*, 11, 195.
5. Shiroma, E. J., Pickelsimer, E. E., Ferguson, P. L., Gebregziabher, M., Lattimore, P. K., Nicholas, J. S., Dukes, T., & Hunt, K. J. (2010). Association of medically attended traumatic brain injury and in-prison behavioral infractions: A statewide longitudinal study. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 16(4), 273-286
6. Matheson, F. I., Mclsaac, K. E., Fung, K., Stewart, L. A., Wilton, G., Keown, L. A., Nathens, A. B., Colantonio, A., & Moineddin, R. (2020). Association between traumatic brain injury and prison charges: A population-based cohort study. *Brain Injury*, 34(6), 757-765.
7. McMillan, T. M., Aslam, H., Crowe, E., Seddon, E. & Barry, S. J. E. (2021). Associations between significant head injury and persisting disability and violent crime in women in prison in Scotland, UK: A cross-sectional study. *Lancet Psychiatry*, 8, 512-20
8. Hunter, S., Kois, L. E., Peck A. T., Elbogen E. B., & LaDuke, C. (2023). The prevalence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) among people impacted by the criminal legal system: An updated meta-analysis and subgroup analyses. *Law Human Behaviour*, 47, 539-565.
9. McMillan, T.,M. (2021). Head Injury and Offending. In J. M. Brown & M. A. H. Horvath (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Forensic Psychology* (pp. 573-570). Cambridge University Press.
10. Gouvier, W. D., Prestholdt, P. H., & Warner, M. S. (1988). A survey of common misconceptions about head injury and recovery. *Archives Clinical Neuropsychology*, 3(4), 331-43.
11. Hux, K., Schram, C. D., & Goeken, T. (2006). Misconceptions about brain injury: A survey replication study. *Brain Injury*, 20, 547-553
12. Swift, T. L., & Wilson, S. L. (2001). Misconceptions about brain injury among the general public and non-expert health professionals: An exploratory study. *Brain Injury*, 15, 149-165
13. McMillan, T. M., Graham, L., Pell, J. P., McConnachie, A., & Mackay, D. F. (2019). The lifetime prevalence of hospitalised head injury in Scottish prisons: A population study. *PLoS ONE*, 14(1), e0210427

additional staff training. For example a survey of healthcare professionals in US correctional facilities showed that two thirds felt they did not have sufficient training to work with incarcerated individuals with head injury,¹⁴ and a need for further training was also evident in a study on professionals in the Probation Service in Northern Ireland.¹⁵ Participants in these studies frequently held misconceptions about unconsciousness, memory and recovery after head injury, and demonstrated a lack of awareness of its effects.

In the present survey, prison officers in Scotland were asked about their training needs in relation to head injury, and associated with this, their knowledge about head injury was assessed. It is anticipated that the present survey will support and inform the development of educational resources for prison officers in the future. Linked to our findings, we provide specific examples of the practical utility of such training in the Discussion section. We use the term 'head injury' rather than 'traumatic brain injury' as the former is more cautious and does not assume that there has been damage to the brain when a knock to the head has been reported but is yet to be fully assessed.

Methods and setting

The survey took place at HMP and YOI Grampian in the north of Scotland between August 2022 and March 2023. The facility has capacity for about 550 prisoners. It holds a wide range of convicted and untried male and female adult prisoners, including people serving life sentences and who have breached community orders. To maximise the number of survey returns, two options for completion were offered: 1) paper copies were provided to staff to complete in prison reception, in the prison halls (similar to prison wings) or after Scottish Prison Service (SPS) officer training sessions (with return envelopes provided), and 2) an online link was emailed to all SPS officers at the prison. The survey took about 5-10 minutes to complete and all data were provided anonymously.

Members of the research team did not assist officers in completing the survey. In addition, we contacted the SPS to enquire about any training provided about head injury currently or in the past.

Ethics approval

Approval for the survey was obtained from the Deputy Governor of HMP and YOI Grampian. and the SPS Ethics Committee (12.07.23).

Measures

Years of experience and training needs

A brief form developed from that used in a similar study on police custody officers,¹⁶ asked about years of experience as a prison officer and knowledge about head injury (knowledge about head injury in the prison population, including mild head injuries that do not require hospital admission), experience with prisoners with head injury (experience of head injury at the prison, including mild head

injuries that did not require hospital admissions) and whether training about head injury in the prison population was needed.

Many prisoners have a history of head injury and staff need to know how to manage and support them.

Common misconceptions about traumatic brain injury questionnaire (CM-TBI)

The 20-item version of the CM-TBI, a modified version used previously with probation officers and police custody officers, categorises questions into four domains to examine respondents' misconceptions about recovery from traumatic brain injury (TBI; 8 items), sequelae (effects of TBI; 6 items), insight of someone with TBI into its effects (3 items) and hidden injury associated with TBI (3 items).^{17 18 19} After completion, respondents' answers are scored 1 if they answered the item correctly, and 0 if answered incorrectly (i.e., they hold a misconception). The questionnaire has good internal consistency (.84) and test-retest reliability (.82).

14. Yuhasz, J. E. (2013). Misconceptions about traumatic brain injury among correctional health care professionals. *Journal of Correctional Health Care, 19*, 135-143
15. O'Rourke, C., Linden, M., & Lohan, M. (2018). *Misconceptions about traumatic brain injury among probation services. Disability and Rehabilitation, 40*(10), 1119-1126.
16. McMillan, T. M. (2022). Knowledge about head injury in police custody staff and implications for training. *Forensic Science International: Mind and Law, 100*105.
17. Linden, M. A., Braiden, H. J., & Miller, S. (2013). Educational professionals' understanding of childhood traumatic brain injury. *Brain injury, 27*(1), 92-102.
18. O'Rourke, C., Linden, M., & Lohan, M. (2018). Misconceptions about traumatic brain injury among probation services. *Disability and Rehabilitation, 40*(10), 1119-1126.
19. See footnote 16: McMillan (2022).

Results

Ninety-nine people completed the survey out of a possible 240 SPS officers (a 41 per cent response rate).

Background and experience

All participants returned the Years of Experience and Training Needs form. The average number of years of service as a prison officer was 9.4 (SD 8.7; range 0-34). More than two thirds reported that they did not have knowledge about head injury (69 per cent), although almost half (42 per cent) indicated that they had experience of working with people with head injury in prisons. Two thirds reported that they would like to learn more about head injury (68 per cent).

Officers were also given opportunity to write comments or indicate relevant experiences they had. Of the 14 respondents who provided this additional information, five said they had personal experience of working with head injury in their previous employment, or with family or friends. Four reported having experience of working with head injury in a prison context. Five noted a need for training about head injury, feeling it was very relevant to their work. One had some knowledge about head injury from an undergraduate psychology course. No respondents reported receiving prior training on the topic of head injury.

Knowledge about head injury

On the CM-TBI there were missing data for only 10/1980 possible responses. These related to nine different questions and four participants. Given that there were no systematic omissions we interpreted this as uncertainty on behalf of the respondent and coded the missing data as errors. Scores on the CM-TBI questionnaire (Mdn 17; IQR 16, 19) ranged from 67 per cent to 100 per cent correct, with 83 per cent of participants making one or more error — i.e., answering a question incorrectly/demonstrating a misconception about TBI. The domain for each question has been included in Table 1 (below) for information (but was not present in the version given to participants). To enable comparisons between domains, which comprised differing numbers of questionnaire items, the total number of errors for all questions in each domain in the sample was divided by the number of questions in each domain. This provides the number of errors per question for each domain. There were 27.3 errors per question for insight, 15.7 for sequelae, 3.0 for hidden disability and 10.3 for recovery. Hence errors for insight were most common, and more than half of participants (55 per cent) made at least one error within this domain. Total scores on the CM-TBI were not associated with years of experience of prison work ($r = -.139$, $p = .171$).

Table 1. Percentage of SPS participants making errors on CM-TBI questions ($n=99$). Domain of question has been added in brackets.

Item	Question	Participant errors (per cent)
1	A head injury can cause brain damage even if the individual is not knocked unconscious (hidden injury)	0
2	Whiplash injuries can cause brain damage even if there is no direct blow to the head (hidden injury)	8
3	It is common for people with brain injuries to be easily angered (sequelae)	25
4	It is common for personality to change after a brain injury (sequelae)	8
5	Problems with speech, coordination, and walking can be caused by brain damage (hidden injury)	2
6	Problems with irritability and difficulties controlling anger are common in people who had a brain injury (sequelae)	16
7	Most people with brain damage are not fully aware of its effect on their behaviour (sequelae)	20
8	People who have survived a brain injury usually show a good understanding of their problems because they experience them every day (insight)	33
9	Brain injuries often cause a person to feel depressed, sad, and hopeless (sequelae)	28

10	It is common for people to experience changes in behaviour after a brain injury (sequelae)	3
11	Sometimes a second blow to the head can help a person remember things that were forgotten (recovery)	15
12	Recovery from a brain injury is usually complete in about 5 months (recovery)	7
13	Once a person is able to walk again, his/her brain is almost fully recovered (recovery)	5
14	Once a person with a brain injury realizes their degree of impairment they will always be aware of this (insight)	19
15	A person who has a brain injury will be 'just like new' in several months (recovery)	2
16	Asking people who were brain injured about their progress is the most accurate, informative way to find out how they have progressed (insight)	33
17	It is good advice to remain completely inactive during recovery from a brain injury (recovery)	8
18	Once a person recovering from a brain injury feels 'back to normal,' the recovery process is complete (recovery)	5
19	How quickly a person recovers depends mainly on how hard they work at recovering (recovery)	17
20	The primary goal of brain injury rehabilitation is to increase physical abilities such as walking (recovery)	31

Discussion

The findings indicate that for this sample of SPS officers, who range in prison service employment from less than 1 year to more than 30, there is both a need and a desire for further knowledge about head injury. Although almost half of the prison officers indicated that they had experience of working with people with head injury in prisons, two thirds reported that they did not have knowledge or training about head injury, and two thirds reported that they would like to know more. The SPS indicated that there has not been any specific staff training provided on head injury beyond the actions required in an acute emergency and first aid training. Although there is little published research on training about head injury for criminal justice staff, the literature that does exist reflects similar themes. Two thirds of healthcare workers across a wider range of correctional institutes in the US reported a need for training about head injury,²⁰ and more than ninety percent of probation workers in Northern Ireland reported having no formal training on head injury.²¹ In

Scotland, shortfalls in training about head injury have been reported in police custody officers,²² and training needs for criminal justice social workers have been identified.²³

More specific needs for training are supported by the responses on the CM-TBI in our study. The pattern of responses suggest that there are important misconceptions amongst staff about the effects of head injury. Errors in the domain of insight were most common, with more than half of participants making one or more error. Of interest, police custody officers in Scotland were also found to have higher error rates on questions pertaining to similar issues (e.g., CM-TBI questions 8, 9, 16, and 20), and more than half made errors on questions pertaining to insight.²⁴ Misconceptions about insight were also highlighted as being most common in a similar study with probation workers.²⁵ A lack of insight as a result of head injury in people in prison means that there is poor awareness of the potential limitations and risks arising from such injury. This means that allowances cannot be made, alternative behaviours that could avoid a negative

20. See footnote 14: Yuhasz (2013).

21. See footnote 15: O'Rourke et al. (2018).

22. See footnote 16: McMillan (2022).

23. De Mora, H., McFarlane, J., & McMillan, T. M. (2024) Prevalence of head injury and associated disability in individuals undergoing pre-sentencing assessment by Criminal Justice Social Work. *Forensic Science International: Mind and Law*, 5, 100029.

24. See footnote 16: McMillan (2022).

25. See footnote 15: O'Rourke et al. (2018).

outcome may not be considered, others may be blamed for outcomes of events and 'insightless' behaviour is more likely to be repeated. An example could be an anger outburst leading to violence following misinterpretation of what someone has said. Here, there is a lack of awareness that the head injury has reduced the threshold for anger and possibly that errors in interpreting social cues and behaviour are more likely. With deficits in insight, simple strategies can be employed to detect and defuse irritability at an early stage and to check whether initial perceptions in a social situation are correct. There were also higher rates of misperceptions on questions about effects of head injury on anger and mood, and a view that rehabilitation primarily focusses on physical difficulties, whereas persisting disability after head injury largely results from cognitive and emotional difficulties. With further knowledge and training, a prison officer could support a prisoner with head injury by informing them about effects and simple strategies and/or directing them to education about head injury in prison.²⁶

In addition to emergency care, there are two main scenarios where knowledge about head injury in prisoners is necessary. The first pertains to recent head injury, for example after a hospital assessment and then return to the care of the prison or if the prisoner is behaving oddly and they may have had a knock to the head. In these situations, it is possible that the prisoner has post traumatic amnesia (PTA). Prisoners with PTA will often have normal physical function and be able to talk fluently and walk and carry out motor tasks such as eating and drinking. However they may be disoriented in time, place and person with amnesia for recent events. Often associated with this is confusion, and increased irritability with poor insight and awareness of such difficulties. They may not be able to recall recent events or give a reliable account. They may confabulate and/or present with increasing paranoid ideation. In this

Prison officers had misconceptions about head injury that could have an important impact on the management and support of prisoners.

state they can give a false account of events without the intention to deceive and which they believe to be true. During PTA they may not think they are in a prison and want to leave for work or think they are at work and become aggressive if thwarted in attempts to behave in ways they think is consistent with this perception. They may not recognise people known to them, or misrecognise strangers as friends or family. There can also be amnesia for memories prior to the head injury (retrograde amnesia). PTA is a transitory phenomenon and can last for seconds, minutes, hours or longer. The individual may remember nothing of their time in PTA or can have 'islands' of memory, which are isolated memories 'in a sea of amnesia'.²⁷ PTA is rarely assessed in hospitals in the UK, but clearly has

implications for management, and could easily lead to misperceptions of a person in prison as seeming to be deceitful, unreasonably aggressive, purposefully difficult or non-compliant. It should be routinely assessed in prison when a head injury has occurred recently. In fact hospital staff may expect that there will be monitoring of sequelae of the head injury on discharge back to the prison, but it is more likely that the prisoner will simply be returned to normal prison routines and any persisting effects including PTA may not be considered in the context of management or support. In the present study, the emphasis

prison officers appear to place on physical effects as the primary focus of rehabilitation, makes this more likely as physical effects may not be evident in people who are in PTA.

The second scenario pertains to people in prison who have a significant past history of head injury. This can result from having had a severe and disabling head injury or repeated mild head injuries over a period of time. More than half of people in prison are not only likely to have a history of head injury,²⁸ but also a history of repeated head injury.^{29 30 31} Prisoners with such histories are more likely to be involved in recorded

26. Buchan, L., & McMillan, T. M. (2022). Prisoner Knowledge about Head Injury is Improved by brief psychoeducation. *Brain Injury*, 36(3), 401-405.
27. McMillan, T. M. (2015). Post traumatic amnesia. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 636-639). Elsevier.
28. See footnote 8: Hunter et al. (2023).
29. Schofield, P. W., Butler, T. G., Hollis, S. J., Smith, N. E., Lee, S. J., & Kelso, W. M. (2006). Traumatic brain injury among Australian prisoners: Rates, recurrence and sequelae. *Brain Injury*, 20, 5, 499-506
30. Williams, W. H., Cordan, G., Mewse, A. J., Tonks, J., & Burgess, C. N. (2010). Self-reported traumatic brain injury in male young offenders: A risk factor for re-offending, poor mental health and violence? *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation*, 20(6), 801-812
31. See footnote 13: McMillan et al. (2019).

incidents in prison, can have more difficulty in settling into prison life and are more likely to reoffend.^{32 33 34} The limited awareness that prison officers have about the consequences of head injury, such as limited insight and emotional effects, would make it more difficult for them to support prisoners with a history of head injury, including the prisoner's personal officer who has a particular role here. Overall, this may result in the prisoner not adjusting as well to the prison regime and to them benefiting less from opportunities such as education or other activities.

There is a need for training with respect to both of the above scenarios. This alone would be useful for prison officers when someone with a history of recent or long standing head injury is identified by them or others. A systematic process of identification may be more difficult to achieve, particularly with respect to the second scenario. There are three main reasons for this. First, health history may not be passed through different stages in the CJS, hence identification of difficulties related to head injury may not be received by prison officers. Second, a significant proportion of people with significant head injury who are involved in the CJS do not attend hospital, hence there may be no NHS record to be found. Third, there is no routine question about history of head injury in the NHS reception interview in prisons. Finally, when identification of significant head injury occurs, there is also a need to facilitate information sharing between staff groups within stages of the CJS such as prisons.

The present study is primarily limited by the absence of data to enable an understanding of whether

the sample is representative of the wider prison officer workforce in Scotland. We also cannot determine whether there was any bias due to self-selection. The CM-TBI questionnaire was not specifically designed for a criminal justice setting, and this may be a limitation. It does though have the advantage of having been used with other relevant professional groups facilitating comparisons with these studies.

It is recommended that training on the effects of recent and historical head injury is developed for prison officers and that this includes coverage on effects relating to insight, emotion, cognition and behaviour. The training should be easily accessible and regularly updated. In relation to this, a training module about head injury for prison officers is currently being developed by the SPS in collaboration with the University of Glasgow. Four e-modules aimed at NHS staff, but relevant for other staff groups are now available on the NHS Education Scotland TURAS website.

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32. Shiroma, E. J., Pickelsimer, E. E., Ferguson, P. L., Gebregziabher, M., Lattimore, P. K., Nicholas, J. S., Dukes, T., & Hunt, K. J. (2010). Association of medically attended traumatic brain injury and in-prison behavioral infractions: A statewide longitudinal study. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 16(4), 273–286.
 33. See footnote 6: Matheson et al. (2020).
 34. McMillan, T. M., McVean, J., Aslam, H., & Barry, S. J. E. (2023). Associations between significant head injury in male juveniles in prison in Scotland UK and cognitive function, disability and crime: A cross sectional study. *PLOS ONE*, 18(7), e0287312.

Thermal performance: A catalyst for behavioural change

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When we consider the established negative impacts of extreme temperatures on those in a carceral environment, it follows that climate change poses an escalating risk to controlling and decreasing rates of recidivism in the prison system. Thermal discomfort is a widespread problem in Australian prisons because of the age and construction type of existing facilities, coupled with their extreme local climates. It risks negatively impacting criminality, social stability and state resources. Improving the thermal performance of new and existing prison buildings may provide a resourceful and practical small-scale solution to the negative effects of unrelenting climate change and the subsequent impacts on state and social fabric.

This study uses both secondary and empirical data in exploring solutions to climate change in the context of Australian prison infrastructure. A literature review of relevant published work, journals, conference reports, guides, and organisational and governmental publications will establish the extent of the issue and place it in the Australian context. Empirical analysis of proposed building fabric upgrades to an existing facility in central Australia will set out potential solutions applicable to both new and existing prison buildings.

This study examined the adverse physiological and psychological impacts of extreme temperatures on the human body and established why prisoners are considered an especially at-risk group and more vulnerable to temperature-related conditions than most. The paper explores how aged existing infrastructure provides inadequate protection from the elements and how overcrowding in several facilities compounds the heat and subsequent risk, resulting in climate-related unrest bringing the problem in Australia to the fore.

A final case-study, of empirical data will show how, in comparison to influencing operational models in the prison system, improving the thermal performance of the building fabric offers an immediately applicable solution without the socio-political complexities. A case-study of work on an existing facility will illustrate

how thermal performance and comfort can be vastly improved in cost-effective and efficient ways through a combination of medium and small-scale, microclimate-specific design interventions. It will establish how, with little interruption to daily operations, these mechanisms also stand to improve staff working conditions and mental health as well as ongoing operating costs.

With the threat of escalating extreme temperatures and the impact they have on peoples' physiological and psychological health, especially of those in carceral environments, capital investment in the thermal performance of prison infrastructure offers an effective first response to mitigate risk and provide humane and sustainable custodial care. Providing an architecture that targets superior thermal performance has the potential to substantially impact the effectiveness of the therapeutic model by providing a physical environment conducive to the well-being of both prisoners and staff in carceral environments.

Understanding the issue

Climate change in Australia

Climate change is driving extreme temperature and weather events around the world and creating inhospitable living conditions across Australia. These changes appear to be increasing in intensity and frequency and have an indelible impact on our lives and societies.

Every two years, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (ABOM) publish a *State of the Climate Report* that captures the major changes in climate trends across Australia and globally. The report published in 2022 reads ominously even after several improvements recorded during and after the Covid-19 global pandemic.¹ The following significant figures provide an overview of the current climate and the urgency of the issue.

Since Australian climate records began in 1910, the sea temperature has risen by 1°C and the air temperature by 1.4°C, with every decade since 1950 being warmer than the preceding one. The frequency

1. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation & Australian Bureau of Meteorology. (2022). *State of the Climate 2022*. The Bureau of Meteorology, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/2022/>

of very high monthly temperatures has increased 6-fold since 1960 across the country. Warming has increased both day and night average temperatures in all months of the year and the frequency of what's referred to as 'summer very hot days' (where the average national temperature exceeds 39°C) has increased at alarming rates in the past decade. The 2022 report identified 2019 as the hottest year on record with 33 summer very hot days. This figure exceeds the combined very hot days recorded in Australia in the 50 years before, where just 24 days were recorded as reaching a daily national average of 39°C or more.²

Global and local climate changes are trending toward increasing intensity, posing an ongoing and escalating risk to our current lifestyles and how we experience the thermal comfort of our physical surrounds. Once we understand the increasingly negative impact extreme temperatures have on bodies and minds, we may appreciate the need for an alternate approach to an infrastructural design that can control and mitigate poor thermal performance and foster all users' health and well-being.

The impacts of extreme heat

Extreme temperatures can negatively impact our mental and physical health and are exacerbated by the nature, location and micro-climate of the surrounding environment. The effect of extreme heat on the body and mind is well documented.

In Australia, deaths related to heatwaves outnumber all others from extreme weather incidents. Physically, extreme heat can cause dehydration and heat stroke, which can be fatal in nearly 50 per cent of cases.³ Extreme temperatures can compromise all major organ function and can exacerbate pre-existing and medicated conditions like diabetes and high-blood pressure. Psychologically, extreme temperatures may decrease cognitive function, increase aggression and anxiety, and exacerbate the symptoms of neurological diseases.⁴ Extreme heat, and even minor and consistent increases in ambient temperatures, have been seen to

correlate with lower levels of tolerance and increases in violent tendencies.⁵

If we consider then that increases in aggression, anxiety and violent tendencies brought on by extreme temperatures would only add to a tenuously stable environment, it stands that controlling these temperatures in prison buildings has the potential to catalyse the more stable and tolerant behaviour of both staff and prisoners in the carceral community.

Communities most vulnerable to extreme temperatures

Extreme temperatures do not affect all communities in the same way, some people are more at risk of adverse effects than others and require approaches to thermal regulation that are sensitive to their condition.

In extreme heat, some communities in our societies have the mental and physical ability to control their environment and mitigate the effects of extreme heat. They may change their clothing, drink cold water, move to a cooler space, change their behaviour and activity levels or turn on the air-conditioning. Studies show that some communities, due to impaired mental health, physical health, or social conditions, may experience

a more limited, if any, control over their own environment making them more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme temperatures than others.⁶ Studies have established that these groups include older people, young children, and those with mental and chronic physical health conditions for which they are medicated. Medication can interrupt the body's usual thermal responses and prevent it from self-regulating temperature as it normally would.

Each year the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) conducts a survey into the health and wellbeing of prisoners nationally. The 2022 survey established that of the 40,600 people incarcerated in Australia at the time, over half suffered from chronic physical health conditions, with a similar number reporting mental health conditions and over 60 per

Improving the thermal performance of the building fabric offers an immediately applicable solution without the socio-political complexities.

2. See footnote 1: Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation & Australian Bureau of Meteorology. (2022).
3. Hughes, L., Hanna, E., & Fenwick, J. (2016). *The Silent Killer: Climate Change and the Health Impacts of Extreme Heat*. Climate Council of Australia. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/silentkillerreport/>
4. See footnote 3: Hughes et al. (2016).
5. Mukherjee, A., & Sanders, N. (2021). *The Causal Effect of Heat on Violence: Social Implications of Unmitigated Heat Among the Incarcerated* (Working Paper 28987). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28987>
6. See footnote 3: Hughes et al. (2016).

cent reported to be on prescribed or illicit drugs.⁷ When we consider these conditions, the use of medications or illicit drugs and the inherent lack of control over their environment, it follows that prisoners are especially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of extreme temperatures.

The carceral community, with limited autonomy and managing physical and mental health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, need a specific and regulated approach to thermal control for the continued stability of an environment that may effectively minimise violent incidents and reduce recidivism.

The relationship of heat and violence

Numerous studies have established correlations between extreme heat and rates of criminal activity. A study into the specific relationship between violence within the carceral environment and the effects on staff, prisoners and state resources illustrates the urgent need for regulated thermal control in prison infrastructural design.

In their 2021 paper, Mukherjee and Sanders explore the relationship between heat and violence in facilities across Mississippi. It was found that average temperatures between just 27°C and 50°C saw a 20 per cent increase in the severity of violent incidents and an 18 per cent increase in the likelihood of their occurring. Heat was also seen to affect the number of officers on duty at any one time and the way they interacted with inmates. The study established those higher temperatures in carceral facilities often also resulted in a generally more aggressive atmosphere between staff and inmates.⁸

The cost of these increases in severity and the occurrence of violent incidents includes extensions to existing prison sentences, the injury or death of prisoners and staff and damage to existing property.

Reducing the economic cost of longer sentences and the inhumane subjection of prisoners and staff to extreme and dangerous living and working conditions should be considered a priority in the current context of climate change, and in some instances, escalating prisoner numbers.⁷ The thermally efficient design of prison infrastructure to meet the current and changing climate, provides a significant opportunity to achieve these outcomes and create environments that foster rehabilitation, reducing recidivism. This can be achieved through implementing tighter controls on the design of climate-responsive prison architecture that is required to adhere to specific temperature ranges through effective building fabric and mechanical systems design.

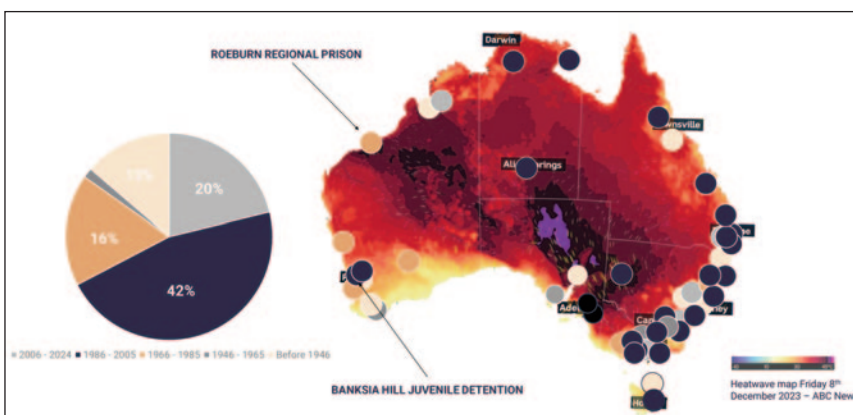
The Australian context

Australian building design regulations

In Australia, building design is controlled through regulations captured in the National Construction Code (NCC) and provide a best practice benchmark to which architects design prison facilities. There are significant gaps in how the NCC applies to custodial infrastructure with most developments sitting outside of the usual planning processes and resulting in few mechanisms for enforcing a minimum temperature range in prison construction.⁹ A critical element of the NCC introduced in 2006 and which represents a turning point in sustainable Australian building design is Section J, which focuses on energy efficiency and the limiting of greenhouse gas emissions in the construction industry. Section J also gives building practitioners and authorities a useful range of sustainable targets to measure designs against.

In evaluating the climate resilience of prison facilities nationally, let's consider the current stock of prisons around Australia as being built either before or after the introduction of this standard in 2006.

Figure 1. Locations of prison facilities across Australia by date of completion



7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023, 15 Nov). Adults in Prison. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/adults-in-prison>

8. See footnote 5: Mukherjee, A. & Sanders, N. (2021).

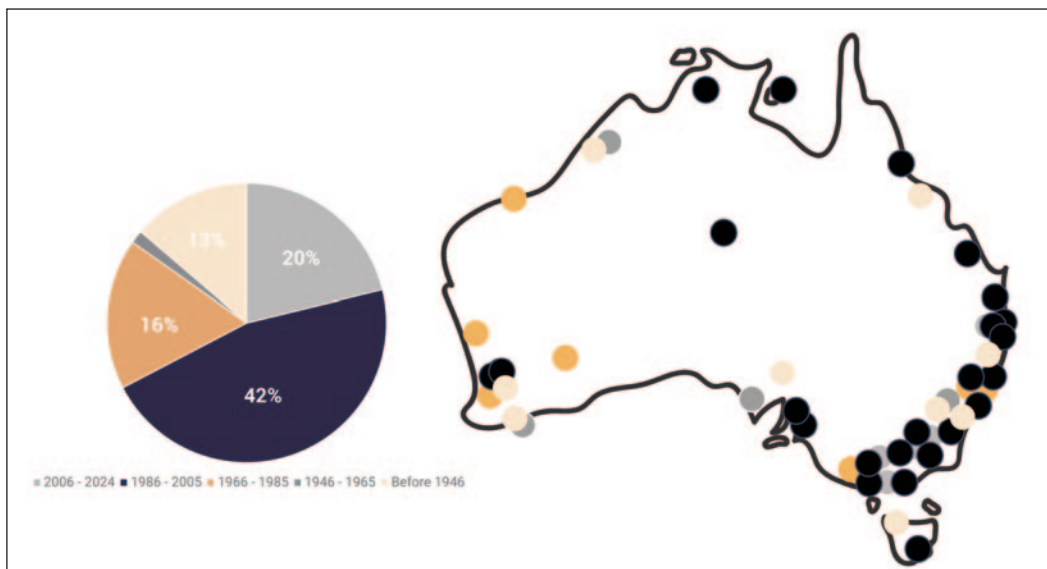
9. Grant, E. (2012). Design issues for prisoner health: Thermal conditions in Australian custodial environments. *World Health Design: Architecture, Culture, Technology*, 5(3), 80–85.

There are over 100 correctional facilities operating in Australia today.¹⁰ As illustrated in Figure 1, they are spread across all states and territories with concentrations in the more populated eastern states of New South Wales and Victoria. Approximately 80 per cent of prisons in Australia were already established by 2006 with close to half of those being built in the last 40 years. Based on the case study and professional experience across most jurisdictions, it can reasonably be inferred that older facilities have not adopted best thermal design practices, established and improved upon since 2006. By extension it may be reasonable to suggest that most prisoners and staff at facilities in their original state may be living and working in conditions that could endanger their mental and physical health, through exposure to extreme temperatures and a built environment not equipped to withstand them.

The climate conditions of prison buildings

Further to this, let's consider the location and age of facilities in relation to their local climate. Figure 2 overlays the temperature data from a heatwave in December 2023 with the current facilities across the country. The result describes the vulnerable position a significant number are in, when considering their age, existing infrastructure and the climates they are exposed to. A few facilities have been covered in the media in relation to extreme temperatures and an infrastructure unfit to accommodate them, including at Alice Springs Correctional Centre,¹¹ and Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.¹² Unrest and reports of torturous thermal conditions at these facilities describes an issue that threatens the effectiveness of the operational model in keeping staff and prisoners safe and reducing rates of recidivism.

Figure 2. Temperature map of December 2023 heatwave with prison locations overlaid by date facility was built



Western Australia study of thermal performance

Following several similar heat-related incidents across Western Australia, in 2015, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) reviewed the conditions of a number of correctional facilities, including the death of an Aboriginal elder in custody in 2008, and an inspection into conditions at Roeburne Regional Prison in 2013.¹³

The study Thermal Conditions of Prison Cells established that with a core body temperature of around 37°C, temperatures nearing or exceeding that

pose significant risk to our mental health and physical function. The study set up a hierarchy of risk levels based on temperature, ranging from 'Caution'-between 27°C and 32°C where fatigue was likely during physical activity-to 'Extreme Danger', where temperatures exceeded 54°C and heat stroke was highly likely. Consider also that half of the time heat stroke can be fatal. The study found Roeburne Regional Prison on Western Australia's mid-west coast was the country's hottest facility with average maximum temperatures ranging between 43°C and 45°C and up

10. See footnote 7: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023).
 11. Hayman, R., & Garrick, M. (2018, 31 December). *Call for air-conditioners in 'inhumane' cells after outback heatwave triggers prison riot*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-31/union-calls-for-alice-springs-prison-air-conditioning-after-riot/10675502>
 12. Maynard, S. (2019, 13 August). *Weaponised Weathers: Heat, Don Dale, and 'Everything-ist' Prison Abolition*. Right Now & Sydney Environment Institute. <https://rightnow.org.au/opinion/weaponised-weathers-heat-don-dale-everything-ist-prison-abolition/>
 13. Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (2015). *Thermal Conditions of Prison Cells*. Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, Government of Western Australia. <https://www.oics.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Thermal-conditions-review-final.pdf>

to and over 50°C in summer. Of course, the finding was that these extreme temperatures posed significant health risks to prisoners and staff in facilities across Western Australia.

Design factors impacting thermal conditions

The OICS report made several recommendations for dealing with the soaring temperatures. These were both operational and design-centred solutions including addressing the widespread issue of overcrowding, installing mechanical cooling systems and improving the thermal performance of the existing building fabric. The recommendations aimed to attend to unrest and provide humane, climate-responsive and resilient facilities that are fit for purpose

Retrofitting the existing building fabric offers a unique opportunity to significantly improve the thermal performance of older infrastructure at a fraction of the cost of most other methods relative to their efficacy. The technical response escapes much of the socio-political nuances of addressing overcrowding and in Australia, providing air-conditioning to prisons where schools in the jurisdictions may not enjoy the same. Depending on the location of facilities, reworking the existing building fabric can normally be done quickly, using widely available materials and simple construction methods. This makes it an effective small and mid-scale technical solution to a prolific issue that has far-reaching negative impacts on the prison and wider local community.

The Current study

The incident

The empirical study is situated in central Australia, in a hot dry climate at a facility built before the introduction of Section J or the threat of escalating extreme temperatures was a reality. The CSIRO and ABoM 2022 State of the Climate Report in Australia established 2019 as the hottest year on record. The December of 2018 saw the extreme heat reaching unprecedented levels at a custodial facility in the Red Centre of the country. An arid desert location, aged and thermally inferior building infrastructure and overcrowded accommodation culminated in prisoners refusing to go back into their rooms to sleep at night

and ultimately to violent clashes with staff. The incident brought the relationship between humane custodial care and climate change to the mainstream media demanding a solution that would be socially and financially acceptable. The author was engaged to investigate an architectural response for controlling the extreme temperatures and providing that humane space.

The central desert location of the facility at once provided a challenging context to remedial building fabric upgrades. The single-skin masonry construction of the existing buildings exacerbated any thermal protection they may have provided, had they been insulated, shaded and ventilated appropriately for the local climate. As is customary in many older, secure environments, high thermal-mass materials like masonry and concrete offer a robust solution that relies heavily on other passive-design tools to function effectively in extreme temperatures. Without looking at the system holistically and singling out just one characteristic of a building material's function, like thermal mass, features that could augment a design can work against it if used in isolation or applied inappropriately for the location.

Thermal mass refers to a material's ability to store and release heat. Very broadly the higher the thermal mass, the slower it heats up and cools down. Concrete and masonry are traditional and widely used materials in prison design and have a high thermal mass, storing heat during the day and radiating it internally when temperatures drop off at night. While this can be a useful tool in the right conditions, it only exacerbated the extreme heat gain inside the already over-crowded cells to over 40°C some nights — putting sleep and rest out of reach for most and fraying an already tense environment.

It was critical the design approach offered a resourceful solution that could easily be fitted with minimal intrusion into secure prisoner-accessible areas and that offered immediate and effective relief from the heat. Staff and prisoner safety were priorities as how best to upgrade the building fabric to be resilient to current and future climate trends was explored. When looking in general at upgrading the existing buildings to meet climate challenges, the principles of efficient passive design, including amongst others thermal mass, sun-shading, insulation, glazing and mechanical systems, were initially considered.¹⁴ The existing

Controlling temperatures in prison buildings has the potential to catalyse the more stable and tolerant behaviour of both staff and prisoners in the carceral community.

14. DCCEEW. (2024, April). *Your Home*. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. <https://www.yourhome.gov.au/>

infrastructure was analysed in person for a firsthand impression of the working and living conditions of staff and prisoners and an understanding of the local climate to best implement thermal upgrades.

Analysis of the existing

The existing infrastructure was largely single-skin, high thermal mass concrete blockwork with no insulation to external walls. Windows were small, offering little cross ventilation and had no sun-shading. Cells were built with concrete lids, no insulation to the ceiling space, limited roof overhangs and there were no cooling systems installed. To compound the poor mechanics of the building fabric, the dorms were over-crowded with both staff and prisoners exhausted from the extreme summer heat.

Low-hanging fruit

In the conversations on how best to tackle thermal comfort in custodial care, architecture offers a relatively straight-forward solution that has no impact on the operational model, nor asks for the social and political buy-in that issues of over-crowding and controlling prisoner numbers often do. In the incidents at this particular facility, retrofitting the existing building skin presented a practical way out of an emotionally charged situation that stood to benefit all users of the facility and build resilience into the fabric that would protect it from ongoing social and climate change. The focus was on three key architectural interventions and one mechanical as a holistic approach to improving thermal performance.

Architectural interventions

Using the thermal performance criteria set out in Section J of the National Construction Code as the benchmark, the impacts on thermal control of insulation, sun-shading and glazing to the building fabric were investigated. The existing wall and roof construction provided just one tenth of the protection from the elements required by the Building Code and by extension provided an inhospitable living and working environment for users, especially those in need of mental and physical health care. It was imperative a resourceful solution that did not require extensive intrusion into secure spaces, risking prisoner and construction staff safety, was provided.

Recladding external walls and roofs with appropriately dense insulation and secure cladding systems provided the most substantial increase in thermal protection that exceeded the required national standards. As a composite cladding system, re-insulating the external skin also offered a relatively safe and accessible construction method and at the lowest cost per square meter of all interventions. A similar approach to improving the performance of existing

Perspex windows included 'insulating' those with a UV resistant film, which stood to improve performance and protect openings from further damage. Finally, the use of sun-shading devices over openings along the facades kept the arid desert sun off the external skin, minimising the workload on the insulation and protecting internal spaces from the harsh sun.

A holistic design approach

Ideally and if budget allows, building fabric upgrades and mechanical cooling systems should be used together in a holistic approach to temperature control. As a complete system, they enhance each other and ensure the longevity of the whole, while reducing overall life-cycle costs in the long term.

In comparison, the wall and roof insulation upgrades offered the greatest improvement to thermal performance in relation to their cost per square meter. Together with a mechanical cooling system, they offered the greatest and most cost-effective upgrade over the life of the facility to improve thermal performance and ensure the healthy living and working conditions of staff and inmates.

Conclusion

The impacts of climate change in Australia and globally are often felt more acutely by those most vulnerable to them and with the least control over their environment. This is true for many groups in our societies and especially for those incarcerated. The increase of extreme temperatures driven by climate change looks to continue and become more dangerous to society's mental and physical health, especially for those living and working in aged and unfit facilities in the prison system. With extreme temperatures negatively impacting the physiological and psychological health of staff and prisoners in this system and the sometimes-irreparable damage this causes to both people and property, it is becoming increasingly important to address the question of thermal performance in the carceral context. The design of prison architecture to meet the rigours of climate resilience offers a solution applicable to the construction of new facilities as well as the revitalisation of existing ones and without the emotional charge of rewiring operational or political models. Thermally high-performing prison infrastructure stands to provide humane environments conducive to rehabilitation and that foster the well-being of all users.

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The left behind: Early release scheme (SDS40) and life-sentenced prisoners

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On 29th July 2024, Parliament approved the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order that seeks to reduce the prison population in England and Wales. Under SDS40 people serving a Standard Determinate Sentence (SDS) will be automatically released after having served 40 per cent of their eligible sentence rather than 50 per cent. A SDS is the most common type of custodial sentence issued by the courts. These sentences are available for most crimes. For all such sentences, people convicted of crime serve a portion of their sentence in custody and the remainder on licence in the community. This new legislation changes the proportion of the sentence spent in prison, but the overall sentence length will remain unchanged.

The rules apply to all offence types unless explicitly excluded. There are 56 offences that are excluded from the scheme which include: sexual offences, domestic abuse offences and national security offences.¹ Certain sexual and violent offences, such as those with a maximum penalty of life or where the sentence is four years or more for which an SDS was imposed continue to be subject to a two-thirds release point. Indeterminate sentences are excluded from the scheme.

The new rules were introduced in two phases. Firstly, they were applied to people serving a sentence of under 4 years as from the 10th September 2024 and then introduced for anyone serving a sentence of four

years or more as from 22 October 2024. It was estimated there could be a reduction of total prison places between 4,900 and 6,200 places. So far there were 1,889 SDS40 'Tranche 1' prisoner releases on 10 September 2024 and 1,223 'Tranche 2' prisoner releases on 22 October 2024.² The rules are temporary and will be reviewed in 18 months.

The media surrounding both waves of the early release scheme has largely focused on the perceived risks of releasing prisoners early, most notably by voicing concerns over public safety. Sensationalised anecdotes of released prisoners going on to quickly reoffend and having been recalled have circulated in the news, stimulating a moral panic over the potential adverse impact on the local communities into which prisoners have been released.³ News outlets have speculated over the likelihood of a high number of recalls, caused in part by reoffending and the breaking of licence conditions but also due to a lack of provision in the community for those being released.⁴

⁵ While the statistics on recalls and reoffending rates for this period have yet to be released by the Ministry of Justice, data for July to September 2024 showed a significant rise in recalls from the same time last year, with it being noted that the majority of this increase involved people who were serving sentences of under 12 months.⁶ There has also been controversy over the terms of the scheme — especially in terms of what offences should, or rather, should not, in correspondents' opinions, render prisoners as eligible or 'deserving' of release.^{7 8 9}

1. Ministry of Justice. (2024). *Transparency Data: Standard Determinate Sentences 40% (SDS40) 'Tranche 1' and 'Tranche 2' Release Data, England and Wales*. Ministry of Justice.
2. See footnote 1: Ministry of Justice (2024).
3. Christie, O. (2024, October 19). Another 1,100 prisoners will be freed next week under Labour's early release scheme - after offenders started committing crime within hours when last batch were allowed out. *The Daily Mail*.
4. Elgot, J., & Syal, R. (2024, October 22). 1,100 more prisoners set for early release as minister admits recall rate 'very high'. *The Guardian*.
5. Hymnas, C. (2024, September 8). Prison early release scheme could be undermined by increase in recalls, justice sources fear. *The Telegraph*.
6. Ministry of Justice. (2024). *Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2024*. Ministry of Justice.
7. Burford, R. (2024, September 9). Domestic Abusers May Be among 1,700 Prisoners Released Early, Admits Minister. *The Standard*.
8. Maddox, D. (2024, October 21). Second Wave of Prisoners to Get Early Release despite Fears Sex Offenders Included. *The Independent*.
9. Menzies Willoughby, V. (2024, September 9). "It Can Be Overwhelming": What Happens When Prisoners Are Released. *The Times*.

Essentially, the message being communicated is that the scheme is flawed, as the problem of prison overcrowding can only be temporarily abated with the 'quick fix' of early release.^{10 11} Aside from the concerns over public safety, the main criticisms of the scheme have been how it does not address the causes of prison overcrowding, instead moving the problem into the hands of overstretched probation services. Despite the significant media interest in the SDS40 scheme and more widely, prison overcrowding, there has been a lack of discussion of the scheme's impact within prisons themselves, and on those prisoners who are not eligible for early release.

Researching the impact of the SDS40 scheme on prisoners who are not eligible for early release is crucial for several reasons. It ensures fairness and equity within the prison system, as the scheme creates a disparity between those who benefit from early release and those who do not, which can lead to resentment and tension among ineligible prisoners. Understanding the psychological and behavioural effects on these individuals is essential, as they may experience increased stress, frustration, or hopelessness, potentially leading to higher rates of violence, self-harm, or disciplinary issues. Additionally, while the scheme aims to reduce overcrowding, its benefits may not be evenly distributed, and ineligible prisoners, particularly those serving longer sentences for excluded offences, may still face poor living conditions. Researching their experiences can reveal whether the scheme has simply shifted the burden of overcrowding onto a specific subset of the prison population. Furthermore, ineligible prisoners may feel demotivated in their rehabilitation efforts, undermining their engagement with programmes designed to reduce reoffending. The scheme may also create additional challenges for prison staff, increasing their workloads and stress levels. By examining the impact on ineligible prisoners, policymakers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the scheme's effects, ensuring that future reforms are balanced and effective, and that the broader goals of justice, rehabilitation, and public protection are met.

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The evidence presented in this article has been collated by the authors from a combination of methods. The total data comprises nine in-depth interviews with prisoners serving life sentences who are ineligible for the scheme due to the length of their sentences and the nature of their offences, and an unstructured focus group which was held in a Category C prison with four of these participants. The combined research was conducted in two separate moments, prior and during the implementation of SDS40. All participants provided consent to participate in the study. As part of maintaining ethical rigour, although no risks were identified for those involved, participants were made aware of Listeners and chapel support services, should they need it. This ensured that any potential needs arising from participation could be addressed appropriately.

In July and September 2024, the data on early release was collected during the UKRI funded and NRC approved research project carried out by Marion Vannier and Helen Gair, *In Search of Hope*, which examines the experiences of older life-sentenced prisoners across three prisons. When the early release scheme was introduced, we were actively conducting fieldwork in two Category D prisons. This provided a unique opportunity to gather insights from our participants—those closest to release—about their perspectives and experiences related to the scheme. Firstly, a Category D facility was observed during July and September 2024, including on the day of the first wave of releases (10 September 2024). Within the first prison, two life-sentenced participants were interviewed about their views on, and indirect experiences of, the early release scheme. A third life-sentenced prisoner, who had been transferred to a different Category D prison, was also interviewed. Our three participants were all over 60 years old. The analysis of these interviews was informed by the researchers' observations and conversations with staff in the prisons.

During fieldwork for the Hope project, we had the opportunity to meet with Recoop researchers who are

10. Kotecha S., & Casciani, D. (2024, October 22). More Prisoners Freed Early to Ease Overcrowding. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly6y67dkpzo>

11. Atkins, C. (2024, September 10). Early Release Robs Prisoners of Vital Time to Sort out Their Lives. *The Times*.

responsible for overseeing the charity's mentoring program, the Buddy scheme. It was through these interactions that we learned about Recoop's work and together we decided to collaborate on exploring the effects of the early release scheme on those who were not eligible to benefit from it. The Recoop research was also conducted prior to and during the implementation of SDS40 by Recoop researchers Mercedes Lopez and Harris Telford. Lopez and Telford collected data from a Category B and Category C prison within England in December 2024 after the first wave of releases under SDS40. Two of the men were in a Category B estate, and four of the men were in a Category C estate. The participants were aged between 28 to 60 years old, and all were serving life sentences. Two participants were serving a two-strike life sentence,¹² another two were serving an Imprisonment for Public Protection sentence, (IPP) and another two were serving indeterminate sentences.

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within the data. It revealed four primary themes: resource inequality, injustice, hope, and relationships. These themes provided a structured framework for evaluation of the complex emotional and social implications of the early release scheme for excluded individuals. Overall, our collaborative research approach allowed us to gather rich, firsthand insights into how the early release scheme was perceived by those excluded from its provisions.

Findings

Delayed progression

One of the key points that came up when speaking to life-sentenced prisoners about their perspectives on the early release scheme was that there was a strong sense that the scheme was causing delays to their own activities and sentence progression. Participants described how important occasions such as Release on Temporary Licence (ROTLs) had been cancelled due to a lack of space in approved premises (APs) or hostels.¹³ One participant described the scheme as 'Unfair as there's no home visits because hostels are full' (Focus Group participant, Category C) making it

clear that the effects were direct and immediate. It was apparent that in some participants' views, the removal of overnight visits had the potential knock-on effect of jeopardising their eligibility for parole, highlighted by one participant's (Participant 9, Category D Prison) response below.

I1: Do you think [the early release scheme] has an impact on you lifers or not so much?

P: Well, yeah, it does have an impact cause we can't get any APs. We can't get any overnights.

I2: Were you actually told verbatim you are not getting an AP because you're not the priority?

P: Yeah.

I2: Like these words were used, in writing or [orally]?

P: Well, it was just [redacted]. She said you're not getting on this because you know what's going on? Yeah. So I said well, so I'm probably not getting on the next one, or November and said, well, don't worry about it.

She said the Home Office, are aware of people, lifers not being able to get any overnights... I've done four lots of overnights now, so when I go to my parole next year and they turn around and say, well, how many overnight and I can say I've done four. Well, why

have you only done four? Well, it's down to you at the end of the day.

Additionally, it appears that SDS40 has had a further indirect impact on life-sentenced prisoners in terms of their relationship and contact with key staff. Several participants claimed that because of staff's added duties of processing the early releases, their own meetings with Prison Offender Managers (POMs), and even parole hearings, were being pushed back to later dates. Some noted that their Community Offender Manager (COM) had been changed as a direct result of the scheme, setting them back to square one in maintaining a positive relationship with probation staff. One participant told us 'It's had a big impact on probation, all the resources are to support the demand, people have had to change probation officers' (Focus Group participant, Category C). Another said of the

Life-sentenced prisoners have significantly lower reoffending rates compared to those serving shorter sentences.

12. A two-strike life sentence means that someone has been convicted of a serious crime twice, and under a "two-strikes" law, this second conviction automatically results in a life sentence in prison, even if the second offence itself might not typically warrant such a severe punishment; essentially, the second strike is considered so significant that it triggers a life sentence.

13. Approved premises or hostels are not offence-specific; they are not designated for individuals who have committed a particular type of crime. However, they are used to house individuals considered high-risk upon release from prison, regardless of the specific offence they committed, as long as their risk profile warrants the extra supervision provided by an approved premises.

scheme that '[the] only effect it has had is my COM which has changed' (Participant 1, Category C). Altogether, these effects created a strong sense of inequality and of being disregarded amongst life-sentenced prisoners that was clear in participants' responses. One participant expressed his feeling that prisoners on life sentences were deprioritised: '[there is] no fair share of resources. Nothing is getting fixed, and they don't care about two strike lifers. Probation is running after everyone who will just be back' (Participant 1, Category B). This feeling of being deprioritised was heightened by the fact that many participants were aware of their statistically lower risk of reoffending compared to those on shorter-term sentences. One referred to statistics which compounded their feeling that the release criteria was unfair and not thought through:

'All [I've] heard about recently in regard to early release was in [the] press — about 40 per cent sentence most of these people haven't addressed offending behaviour that is courses whereas lifers and IPPs have completed sentence plans and [are] more likely to succeed in community with correct support which has failed in recent years due to majority of recalls.' (Participant 2, Category C)

These sentiments around the criteria for early release correspond with ongoing discussions around procedural justice and its impact on prisoner engagement.^{14 15} There was an evident perception amongst participants that it did not matter how well they engaged with courses and the prison regime — they were nevertheless of least priority to staff and to government in terms of its policies.

Injustice

The sentiment of injustice pervades life-sentenced prisoners, giving them a sense of being 'left behind'. The participants described feeling victimised by a perceived, perpetuating systemic injustice that appears to neglect the principles of rehabilitation and fairness,

'They have prioritised the wrong people, lifers don't reoffend, these people have not done courses they are just going to come back' (Focus Group Participant, Category C), one person told us. Another was adamant that '99.9 per cent of all these getting out are just going to be offending' (Participant 8, Category D). The scheme raised questions amongst prisoners about the equitable application of justice and the potential for rehabilitation, with one prisoner suggesting that the 'high number [of prisoners released under this scheme] will get recalled, whereas lifers have done the work' (Participant 6, Category B).

Despite low levels of recidivism, individuals serving life sentences are subject to rigorous assessment and supervision before and after release. And they are expected to have engaged in varied programmes that

contribute to their rehabilitation during their imprisonment. Recent data indicates that these measures significantly contribute to relatively low reoffending rates among this group.¹⁶ A report by the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection found that only 2.2 per cent of life-sentenced prisoners released between 2001 and 2011 were reconvicted of a further serious offence.¹⁷ While the offending rate has fluctuated between 24.7 per cent and 31.8 per cent since 2008, the average (mean) reoffending rate across this period was 29.8 per cent for adults with convictions, compared to adults newly

released from prison who have a proven reoffending rate of 39 per cent.¹⁸

This exclusion has led many of the participants to feel as though they have been unjustly excluded, with some arguing that the blanket exclusion of life-sentenced prisoners disregards the nuances of individual cases, and the progress prisoners may have made towards rehabilitation. 'There's no incentive to carry on... Why should I engage with courses if people don't and get released?' (Focus Group Participant, Category C). The justice system is predicated on the belief that individuals are capable of change, many serving life sentences engage in educational and

Under the early release scheme, a clear bifurcation emerges, creating a divide between those deemed eligible and those who are not.

14. Baker, T., et al, (2021). Exploring the Association Between Procedural Justice in Jails and Incarcerated People's Commitment to Institutional Rules. *Corrections: Policy, Practice and Research*, 6, 189-202.
15. Campbell, C., Labrecque, R., Schaefer, R., Harvis, M., Zavita, K., Reddy, L., & Labranche, K. (2020). Do Perceptions of Legitimacy and Fairness Matter in Prison? Examining How Procedural and Distributive Justice Relate to Misconduct. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(12), 1630-1653.
16. Ministry of Justice. (2022). *Accredited Official Statistics: Proven Reoffending Statistics: January to March 2022*. Ministry of Justice.
17. HMI Probation and HMI Prisons, (2013). *A Joint Inspection of Life Sentence Prisoners*. HM Inspectorate of Probation.
18. Taylor, R. (2022). *Crime and Rehabilitation: An Overview*. House of Lords Library.

rehabilitative programmes with the hope of eventual reintegration into society. By categorically denying them consideration for early release, the scheme is being experienced by prisoners as unjust and may be undermining the ethos of rehabilitation and the broader goals of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the scheme has been widely criticised by the public for its lack of transparency and perceived arbitrary decision-making.^{19 20} The absence of a transparent framework may also raise concerns about the potential for discriminatory practices, whether intentional or systemic, in determining eligibility for early release. This sense of exclusion thus has had a multilayered impact on prisoners, the public, and prison staff.

Dashed hopes for change and release

SDS40 operates as a stark reminder that the future outside prison is uncertain and rather bleak for those serving long sentences. Hope is an open-ended notion that tends to be cast as something oriented towards the future; that has the effect of keeping people going and gives them purpose.^{21 22 23} Hope is located within the individual but is also deeply relational, made contingent by institutions, reforms, and external factors that offer the promise of a life beyond bars.²⁴ The early release scheme illustrates this relational dimension. Some of the people we spoke with told us 'I just feel like I'm floating around' and 'It is not helping the people like lifers who need light at the end of the road' (Focus Group Participants, Category C). While they stand on the doorstep of freedom when held in lower category prisons, their testimonies are evocative of feeling stuck, of not moving forward. This resonates with works on the 'deep freeze' that operates for those who cannot go through the normal life milestones due to the length of their sentence, such as getting a job, buying a house,

or getting married and having children.^{25 26} However, this stagnation occurs in contexts and moments where freedom feels closer than ever. In essence, the early scheme can inspire hope for some, while simultaneously taking away hope for others. Under the early release scheme, hope has a fixating and stalling effect.

Compounding matters, it seems that the issue is not so much about not being released but rather about the lack of opportunities where individuals can be acknowledged and recognised for the changes they have made. One person told us 'It feels like we are just getting pushed back and forgotten' (Focus Group Participant, Category C), reflecting the deep frustration of those serving long sentences, who see their efforts at

personal transformation go unnoticed. Under the early release scheme, a clear bifurcation emerges, creating a divide between those deemed eligible and those who are not. Those who meet the eligibility criteria are acknowledged and considered, while those who fall outside these parameters are relegated to the background. In effect, the scheme reinforces a hierarchy that values some individuals' progress while dismissing others entirely, leaving them without meaningful pathways for growth or

acknowledgment.

Some of the people claimed the scheme had no effect on them, stressing that they did not believe the policy would work, offering an important lens for understanding how prisoners develop techniques to shield themselves from progressive reforms. One participant held in a Category D prison from the Hope project who we asked about the scheme explained to us:

'Not really affected me. It's nothing to do with me... All I would say on that is... You've got it wrong... They've got it wrong. Short term

Hope is located
within the individual
but is also deeply
relational, made
contingent by
institutions, reforms,
and external factors.

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19. Rees, N. (2024, September 12). Reoffending Fears for Released Leeds Prisoners' Families. *BBC News*.
 20. Victims Commissioner (2024). 'Regrettable' Some Victims Not Told of Early Release of Offenders. Retrieved from: <https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/statement-sds40/>
 21. Gravlee, G. (2000). Aristotle on Hope. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 38(4), 461-477.
 22. Bobier, C. (2020). Aquinas on the Emotion of Hope: A Psychological or Theological Treatment? *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 94(3), 379-404.
 23. Pettit, P. (2004). Hope and Its Place in Mind. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 592, 152-165.
 24. Seeds, C. (2022). Hope and the Life Sentence. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 62(1), 234-250
 25. Jarman, J. (2020). Only One Way To Swim? The Offence and the Life Course in Accounts of Adaptation to Life Imprisonment. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 60(6), 1460- 1479.
 26. Crewe, B., Hulley S., & Wright, S. (2020). *Life Imprisonment from Young Adulthood: Adaptation, Identity and Time*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

offenders are the most prolific offenders and those are the ones who keep using the prison gate as a turnstile. Out, in, out, in. Whereas it's a clear statistic that people who have spent a long time, especially lifers, are less likely to commit further offences when they're release. So why on Earth would a government want to let out someone new in a 2 year or three years in prison sentence, whatever. When they know damn well, they will be back within a matter of months. They know they are gonna be back. Because the re-conviction rate is too high for that group of sentences. So why release these people?' (Participant 9, Category D)

The assertion that 'it has nothing to do with me' underscores the explicit ineligibility of life-sentenced prisoners for the early release scheme. This claim is evocative of a sort of emotional or psychological disengagement or desensitisation. It recalls works on the numbing or neutralisations of the 'pains of imprisonment'.^{27 28} Indeed, over time, the emotional highs and lows associated with hopes of release become dulled, leaving prisoners in a state of apathy or emotional sedation.^{29 30} The claim also mirrors broader theories of survival under adverse conditions, where emotional detachment serves as a coping mechanism. The affirmation that the scheme has nothing to them could thus be perceived as a way to preserve themselves from dashed hopes.

It also could implicitly suggest a latent desire that such policies could one day be extended to include them. This participant invited future policies to include long-term prisoners, 'I do think they should look at mandatory lifers and other lifers that have done a long time' (Participant 3, Category C). Despite their formal exclusion, the scheme could generate a 'ripple effect' of hope, inspiring even those excluded to imagine they might one day be 'chosen' and prioritised. Such side effects of hope operate by underscoring the higher likelihood of recidivism, discrediting those who are eligible. In doing so, the excluded prisoners indirectly

seek to reassert their own worthiness and readiness for reintegration. Put differently, this act of discrediting allows them to construct a narrative where they, rather than the current beneficiaries of the scheme, would make more deserving candidates for such policies.

The rejection also allows them to reinterpret the scheme's perceived failure not as a personal defeat—something to which they are not eligible because of their crime or sentence, something that has to do with them—but as a systemic flaw to address the deeper structural issues of overcrowding. Such rationalisation helps prisoners retain a sense of agency in an environment where they often feel powerless. The profound scepticism could also be understood as a form of quiet resistance where prisoners reframe their

ineligibility as something that has no effect on their personal progress, identity, and self-worth.

The strategies are therefore more than actions to manage the emotional volatility of dashed hopes. These techniques are processes through which prisoners manage the dissonance between the priorities of government policy and their own lived realities of imprisonment and release. They underscore the urgent need for reforms that restore trust and create tangible opportunities for rehabilitation, transformation and successful reintegration amongst those serving the longest sentences.

Meaningful consultation with these individuals is necessary to ensure policies that address real daily and world implications, fostering procedural fairness and building trust in the system.

Shared hopes: The impact on families and relationships

It is also interesting to note that hope's scope spans beyond the prisoners' sphere to include their families. One participant from the Hope project shared a personal example of how his home leave had been cancelled during this period, something which he had been looking forward to for months and for which he had been saving up money to buy his mother a gift. The participant described how his mother, not aware of the early release scheme, thought the visit had been cancelled because he'd 'done something wrong', both straining their relationship while also negatively affecting the mother, a blind and elderly woman who lived too far from the prison to visit, who then had to

27. Haney, C. (2012). Prison Effects in the Era of Mass Incarceration., *The Prison Journal*, 0, 1-24.

28. Haney, C. (2018). The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement: A Systematic Critique. *Crime and Justice*, 47, 365-416.

29. Crewe, B. (2024). 'Sedative Coping', Contextual Maturity and Institutionalization Among Prisoners Serving Life Sentences in England and Wales. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 64, 1080-1097.

30. Liem, M. (2016). *After Life Imprisonment: Reentry in the Era of Mass Incarceration*. NYU Press.

manage the dashed hope of a visit from her son (Participant 7, Category D). Another participant told us 'It's false hope to families because they don't get it and there's kids thinking we'll get out' and someone too shared; 'It's upsetting for the families we have to say look this won't matter us' (Focus Group participants, Category C). As a result, some decided not to share the information about potential release with their families, fearing it could only heighten their anxieties. One individual explained, 'I've not spoken to family as [it] would add more to their stress' (Participant 6, Category B).'

These views resonate with research that shows how families often share in the emotional burden of imprisonment,^{31 32} clinging to the hope their loved ones will one day be released and come home. This shared hope can serve as a source of resilience, helping prisoners and their families endure the strain of separation and the challenges of maintaining relationships across the prison boundary. Yet, as one prisoner poignantly described to us 'Yes, my children who are now my only family left are of the opinion that I will die in prison without them for [a] crime that are false allegations. My mental health has been suffering badly for weeks because of this' (Participant 4, Category C).

The early release scheme, SDS40, reveals the dual nature of hope: it shapes prisoners' outlook on their futures and aspirations for release but also influences how they seek to protect the expectations and emotional states of their families. This highlights the broader social reach of penal policies such as SDS40, where hope becomes both a shared strength and a source of collective vulnerability. When fostered through clear, consistent policies, hope can reinforce familial bonds and offer a measure of resilience. However, when hopes for release are dashed, the resulting despair reverberates beyond prison walls, becoming a collective experience that can deeply affect families. In the context of SDS40, hope functions as both a mechanism of endurance and a fragile currency,

one that can empower or fracture the prison-family dynamic depending on how it is cultivated or undermined by the system.

Discussion

Our findings, drawing on formal interviews, observations as well as informal conversations with life-sentenced prisoners held in Category B, C and D prisons, highlight the unintended yet foreseeable effects of progressive reforms aimed at addressing the prison overpopulation crisis. In these concluding remarks, we offer thoughts on reimagining future early release policies that would include, rather than exclude, those who are serving long sentences.

Firstly, the exclusion of life-sentenced prisoners from the early release scheme underscores the absence of data-driven decision-making in policy design. Research consistently demonstrates that life-sentenced prisoners have significantly lower reoffending rates compared to those serving shorter sentences. However, the lack of engagement with this data has resulted in policies that prioritise the release of higher-risk individuals while overlooking the rehabilitative progress of many life-sentenced prisoners. This failure to differentiate between risk levels undermines the principles of evidence-based justice, creates a perception of arbitrary decision-making, and exacerbates disengagement among life-sentenced individuals

who feel unfairly deprioritised.

Secondly, the findings reveal how delays and the removal of opportunities for release move the goalposts, as it were, building up uncertainty and obscurity as to when the time in prison will end. For many life-sentenced prisoners, these delays jeopardise parole eligibility, disrupt rehabilitation efforts, and reinforce a sense of stagnation, being in limbo or standing in 'liminality'.^{33 34} The inability to demonstrate progress, growth, and transformation has practical effects: it perpetuates not just despair but also

The early release scheme, SDS40, reveals the dual nature of hope: it shapes prisoners' outlook on their futures and aspirations for release but it also influences how they seek to protect the expectations and emotional states of their families.

31. Breen, J. (2008). Prisoners' Families and the Ripple Effects of Imprisonment. *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 97(385), 59-71.

32. Benisty, M., Bensimon, M., & Ronel, N. (2021). Familial Pains of Imprisonment: The Experience of Parents and Siblings of Incarcerated Men. *Victims & Offenders*, 16(2), 247-265.

33. See footnote 26: Crewe, B., Hulley, S., & Wright, S. (2000).

34. Crewe, B., et al. (2014). *The Emotional Geography of Prison Life*. *Theoretical Criminology*, 18(1), 56-74.

disengagement with the requirements to obtain release. This moving of goal posts even creates a ripple effect on families who lose hope in the possibility of release. Ultimately, the very notion of 'release' becomes rather opaque under the impact of selective early release schemes. This illuminates the effect of 'bifurcation' policies that determine eligibility based on sentence length and offence type rather than on actual risk levels and preparedness for release.³⁵ Ultimately, delays in the mechanisms of sentence progression raise concerns about the reducibility and proportionality of life sentences, further intensifying their severity.

The exclusion of life-sentenced and IPP prisoners from the early release scheme also has broader societal implications. It reflects a punitive approach to those serving life sentences that prioritises retribution over rehabilitation, potentially perpetuating cycles of recidivism for those serving shorter sentences. 'I've seen people getting out then they're back on the news getting in trouble again' (Participant 9, Category D). By not providing opportunities for early release based on individual assessments, the policy undermines the justice system's rehabilitative ethos (that is, to encourage, recognise and reward change). A more

nuanced approach that considers individual circumstances and centres rehabilitation could better serve the principles of justice and the long-term safety and wellbeing of society.

In conclusion, our early findings from the SDS40 Early Release Scheme emphasise the critical importance of including prisoners in shaping penal policies. Prisoners provide invaluable insights into operational challenges, such as the strain caused by processing early releases, which disrupts key activities for life-sentenced prisoners, including ROTLs and access to approved premises. They also offer essential perspectives on how policies impact their rehabilitation and engagement. Meaningful consultation with these stakeholders is necessary to ensure policies address real-world implications, fostering procedural fairness and building trust in the system. Ignoring these voices risks propagating disengagement, inefficiencies, and perceptions of systemic injustice.

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35. Seeds, C. (2017). Bifurcation Nation: American Penal Policy in Late Mass Incarceration. *Punishment & Society*, 19(5), 590-610.

The importance of higher education for individuals in prison

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Access to higher education (HE) is essential for bridging skill gaps and equipping incarcerated individuals with the tools needed to compete effectively in the job market post-release.¹ The benefits extend beyond individual transformation to positively influencing society by fostering self-confidence, improving mental health, and instilling a sense of purpose among those incarcerated.² Despite these advantages, the current prison education system faces challenges with significant barriers, limiting access to meaningful learning opportunities and hindering its potential as a rehabilitative tool.

In this article, I will draw on my firsthand experiences of navigating prison education and HE within penal settings. My experience of imprisonment aligns with a key feature of Convict Criminology (CC): to centre the lived experiences of those affected by the criminal justice system as a legitimate and valuable source of knowledge, using them to critique the prison system and advocate for meaningful policy change.³ My first time in prison occurred in the winter of 2000. From that initial encounter, it felt as though my life had become a revolving door — cycling in and out of prison, trapped in what seemed like an unbreakable pattern of offending and reoffending.⁴ During my most recent prison sentence, however, I came to recognise the immense transformative potential of HE to break this cycle. Engaging in HE in prison has been profoundly impactful — not only for myself, but in my view, for countless others in prison. It has helped us to manage our mental health challenges associated with incarceration while giving us hope for a better future outside the criminal justice system.

Prison education policies

Prison education policy in England and Wales primarily focuses on providing basic Level 1 and 2 qualifications in numeracy and literacy.⁵ Those in custody are usually required to obtain these before they can apply for distance learning studies. Institutions like the Open University (OU) offer degree courses tailored to secure environments, with enrolment occurring twice yearly, in September and January.⁶ As Darke et. al explained, partnerships between universities and prisons have created a dual pathway where incarcerated learners can access transformative education.⁷ After securing Level 1 and 2 qualifications people in prison must complete the 3-month OU 'Access' modules which are designed to prepare learners for the demands of HE studies. However, only a small percentage of incarcerated individuals gain access to this opportunity.⁸ Furthermore, many individuals, already at a financial disadvantage, feel compelled to prioritise prison work over education due to the higher wages offered in workshops (though still minimal). By contrast, educational programmes are minimally compensated, which means there is little incentive for people to prioritise learning over earning.

Bridging the gap between policy and practice

This paper advocates for the establishment of Argentina-style prison-university facilities within separate prisons in the UK, specifically designed for incarcerated individuals undertaking HE studies. It also calls for a substantial expansion of educational opportunities within the prison system. Education is

1. Hughes, E. (2021). Higher Education and Desistance from Crime. *Irish Journal of Academic Practice*, 9(1), 1-28.
2. Jones, M., & Jones, D. (2021). Understanding Aspiration and Education Towards Desistance from Offending: The Role of Higher Education in Wales. *Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry*, 7(1), 23-49.
3. For detail on Convict Criminology, see: Darke, S., Aresti, A., Faisal, A. B., & Ellis-Rexhi, N. (2020). Prisoner university partnerships at Westminster. In S. S. Shecaira, L. G. B. Ferrarini, & J. D. M. Almeida, J.D.M. (Eds.), *Criminologia: Estudos em Homenagem ao Alvaro Augusto de Sá* (pp. 475-498). D'Placido.
4. See footnote 2: Jones et al. (2021).
5. Ministry of Justice. (2023). *Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2022 to 2023*. HM Government.
6. Earle, R., James, M., Pike, A., & Weinbren, D. (2020). The Open University and Prison Education in the UK – the First 50 Years. *Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry*, 7(1), 70-87.
7. See footnote 3: Darke et al. (2020).
8. Education Committee (2022-23). *Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity: Government response to the Committee's First Report*. UK Parliament.

widely regarded as a cornerstone for reducing reoffending and supporting reintegration.⁹ In England and Wales, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) research found that people who participated in HE in prison were 7.5 per cent less likely to reoffend within a year of release compared to those who did not.¹⁰ The systemic neglect of prison education exacerbates England and Wales' high recidivism rate of 42 per cent, which costs taxpayers an estimated £15 billion annually. Further, people in prison who obtain degree-level qualifications are significantly less likely to reoffend compared to their peers, demonstrating education's rehabilitative potential.¹¹ However, the current lack of emphasis on prison education undermines the prospects of those in custody, limiting their chances of successful reintegration into society and their ability to desist from crime.¹²

As Crewe explains, imprisonment often involves an 'erosion of agency', where autonomy, identity, and self-determination are systemically stripped away.¹³ This erosion 'runs counter to the development of the skills and motivation that education seeks to foster' (p. 340). Furthermore, in prioritising containment and discipline, prisons often deprioritise activities that promote long-term reintegration, such as education (p. 346). Equally significant is the lasting social stigma attached to incarceration, which creates further obstacles to rehabilitation. In his seminal study *The Society of Captives*, Sykes identifies the 'pains of imprisonment' as central to understanding the institutional neglect of rehabilitative initiatives.¹⁴ He argues that the 'frustrations and deprivations of prison life' often lead to apathy and resignation, stifling those in prison motivation to engage with constructive opportunities such as education (p. 78). Brierley and Best further highlight how individuals with lived experience of crime and imprisonment can play a crucial role in criminal justice by supporting desistance.¹⁵ Drawing on the

concept 'Desistance Habitus', they argue that those who successfully transition away from criminal behaviour develop new norms and values that reinforce positive change. Establishing HE-focused prisons could create environments necessary for incarcerated individuals to internalise these pro-social habits, fostering long-term desistance from crime. Therefore, giving incarcerated individuals the opportunity to achieve meaningful education has the potential to benefit them as well as their families and wider communities.

The MOJ acknowledges too that access to employment and education is key to reducing reoffending.¹⁶ For decades, this has been a recurring theme in reviews, reports, and recommendations aimed

at rehabilitating individuals in custody and providing them with the best chance of leading crime-free lives upon release. One of the most significant inquiries into UK prisons, Lord Woolf's 1991 review, commissioned after the HMP Strangeways riot in 1990, highlighted the urgent need for substantial expansion of educational opportunities.¹⁷ Woolf stressed that, 'education should not be a privilege but a fundamental part of the regime' (p. 30), envisioning equitable access rehabilitative opportunities designed to enhance employability and life skills. More recently, Dame Sally Coates has identified significant

My life had become a revolving door — cycling in and out of prison, trapped in what seemed like an unbreakable pattern of offending and reoffending.

shortcomings in prison education in England and Wales and proposed reforms to transform it into a more rehabilitative and meaningful process. She notes, 'Prison education is too a poor relation, seen as a low priority rather than as a fundamental part of rehabilitation' (p. 6). She adds, 'Learning must be connected to the world outside prison, offering prisoners the skills and qualifications employers are looking for' (p. 16).¹⁸ Despite these progressive recommendations, the reality is that 57 per cent of incarcerated adults in England and Wales still have

9. Prison Reform Trust. (2023) *Prison: The Facts – Bromley Briefings Summer 2023*. Prison Reform Trust.

10. See footnote 8: Education Committee (2022-2023).

11. Aresti, A., Eatough, V., & Brooks-Gordon, B. (2010). Doing time after time: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of reformed ex-prisoners' experiences of self-change, identity and career opportunities. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 16(3), 169–190.

12. See footnote 11: Aresti et al. (2010).

13. Crewe, B. (2021). The depth of imprisonment. *Punishment & Society*, 22(3), 335–354.

14. Sykes, G. (1958). *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum-Security Prison*. Princeton University Press.

15. Brierley, A., & Best, D. (2025). Desistance habitus: Strategically using experience in practice. *Incarceration*, 6.

16. See footnote 5: Ministry of Justice. (2023).

17. Woolf, H. (1991). *Prison Disturbances, April 1990: Report of an Inquiry*. HMSO.

18. Coates, S. (2016). *Unlocking potential: A review of education in prison*. Ministry of Justice.

literacy levels below those expected of an 11-year-old today.¹⁹

In English and Welsh prisons, Prison Rule 32 (1) stipulates that every incarcerated individual should be able to profit from education facilities provided at a prison and be encouraged to do so.²⁰ From my experience of imprisonment, the gap between these policies and their implementation is like a bridge that was promised but never built — leaving people stranded on opposite shores. During my time in prison, it became clear — through my own frustrations and those of many others — that very little emphasis seems to be placed on prison education and HE. This not only undermines incarcerated individuals' human rights but also erodes the rehabilitative potential of incarceration. The fact that, after years of reviews and recommendations, the expansion of prison education has yet to be implemented raises critical questions about the genuine commitment to rehabilitation within the British penal system. In subsequent sections, I explore how prison education has deteriorated further over the years and analyse the barriers to implementing effective reform.

My lived experience of prison education

The impact of security policies on HE in prison

I have firsthand experience of the severe lack of emphasis on prison education. Perhaps the biggest barriers to education in prison, in my view, are security policies and the historical narrative that continue to shape the attitude of prison staff toward people in prison (though the latter is beyond the scope of this article). Both these policies and this narrative seem to reflect an institutionalised practice where education is subordinated, as Castro and Brawn argue, 'to the priorities of security and control.'²¹ Furthermore, these policies can impose significant challenges on incarcerated students, restricting their access to study materials, technology, and internet resources, and in some cases, outright banning their pursuit of HE. I recall while pursuing my undergraduate degree in a Category B prison, I encountered numerous barriers, some of which were aggravated by what I perceived to be the punitive and arbitrary use of power by prison staff, which I believe was often used as a method of asserting

authority. For instance, I was barred from enrolling on my final OU modules due to 'security reasons', which I felt was both vague and driven by personal animosity rather than legitimate concerns. I was also restricted from having access to other internal education programmes and the library. Despite filing multiple complaints, supported by the Prison Advice Service (PAS), the decision was only reversed after the PAS threatened High Court action. By that point, I had missed an entire academic year, which profoundly impacted both my educational trajectory and mental health. Research corroborates that the denial of meaningful education in prisons not only violates fundamental rights but also undermines incarcerated individuals' mental well-being, contributing to feelings of frustration and hopelessness.²²

Even in open prisons, where I pursued my Master's degree at the University of Westminster, structural barriers persisted. While I had slightly better access to resources — such as attending university in person, accessing the internet, and using university facilities — systemic obstacles stemming from security policies often disrupted my studies. This appeared to be the case for many of my peers too. For example, people held in open conditions must undergo regular risks assessments to determine their eligibility for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). These assessments, conducted at regular intervals, are designed to evaluate suitability for community-based employment, education and maintaining family ties. However, this process often prioritises perceived security risks over the benefits of reintegration and rehabilitation, restricting many individuals from accessing education. On one occasion, I returned to the prison slightly later than my ROTL expiry time because of a delay on the train. Despite providing compelling evidence to show that the delay was beyond my control, I was charged with breaching a prison rule and subsequently found guilty. Consequently, my ROTL was suspended, which prevented me from leaving the prison to access university, leading to missed lectures, assessments, and crucial independent study time via the internet. Fortunately, my course leader, who was aware of the challenges incarcerated students face, consulted with the university and secured deferrals for my assessments.

Education should not be a privilege but a fundamental part of the regime.

19. Ofsted & HM Inspectorate of Prisons. (2021). *Prison Education Review: The Importance of Improving in Custody*. HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
20. HM Prison and Probation Service. (1999). *The Prison Rules 1999*. HM Government.
21. Castro, E., & Brawn, M. (2017). Critiquing Critical Pedagogies inside the Prison Classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 87, 99-121.
22. Prisoners' Education Trust. (2023). *Getting the new prison education contracts right*. Prisoners' Education Trust.

Without this intervention, I would certainly have failed the course. Surprisingly, I appealed the decision to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman, who overturned it weeks later. However, by the time the appeal was resolved, the damage was already done. These personal examples are a demonstration of the challenges faced by people in prison in HE.

Prison transfers: A disruptive barrier to learning

Prison transfers were another aspect that disrupted my HE studies. During transfers, my course materials were often delayed for months by sending prisons or sometime 'lost in transit'. This had a significant impact on my study routine, forcing me to put my studies on hold and miss assignment deadlines. Similar challenges have been identified in the wider literature also, as one critique stated: 'the logistical hurdles created by frequent prison transfers, which disrupt the continuity of educational programs and demotivates students who face recurring obstacles to completing their studies.'²³ There were times I wanted to quit, but I persevered, becoming even more determined to achieve my goals. Unfortunately, not all prison-based learners are able to do the same and some eventually abandoned their studies. Given the well-documented role of HE in reducing recidivism, many incarcerated individuals, including myself, struggle to understand why prison education remains so under-prioritised. These experiences highlight the need for empirical research to examine why the current system is not better fostering academic success, particularly for people in prison pursuing HE.

The digital divide: The impact of no internet access

The lack of internet access in prisons also affects incarcerated students' educational progression. Davies found 'digital pedagogy in prisons does not merely suffer from neglect; it is actively resisted as part of a broader system that maintains social inequality'.²⁴ Having embarked on both undergraduate and postgraduate studies while incarcerated, I experienced

the strain of not having digital connectivity. I had to rely solely on distance learning providers' textbooks for assignments without internet, access virtual tutorials, and experienced minimal support from prison staff. Greater digital access would have significantly enhanced my learning, as it likely would for others too. Here again, we see a conflict between the goal of rehabilitation through education for people in prison, with prison restrictions that undermine this.²⁵ As Davies contends, if prison education is to serve as a genuine rehabilitative tool, digital inclusion must be recognised as a fundamental right, not a privilege.

COVID-19 and further decline of prison education

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the weaknesses of the prison system in delivering education. Before the pandemic, most people in prison could attend education full-time, both morning and afternoon sessions, Monday to Friday. However, during the pandemic, in-person education was replaced with in-cell learning packs due to the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of infection and protect life. After the pandemic, most people have only been allowed to engage in part-time education.

The mental health toll of neglecting prison education

A major consequence of the lack of emphasis on prison education is its impact on mental health. Education has a stabilising effect on incarcerated individuals' mental health, offering a constructive outlet in an otherwise punitive environment.²⁶ Imprisonment often triggers negative emotions and, as someone who has endured multiple traumas and adversities in childhood, I experienced a decline in my mental health while in prison. However, my HE studies played a critical role in helping me to manage these difficulties, providing hope and a sense of purpose. In my role as a peer mentor in various prisons, I witnessed in others the impact of experiencing literacy difficulties on mental health, including being a factor in people harming themselves. In addition to the contribution of education to tackling reoffending, providing and encouraging engagement

The gap between these policies and their implementation is like a bridge that was promised but never built — leaving people stranded on opposite shores.

23. Davies, B. (2024). Debates in digital pedagogy within prisons. *Power and Education*, 0(0).

24. See footnote 23: Davies (2024).

25. See footnote 14: Sykes, G. M. (1958).

26. Gual, R. (2023). In-prison university programs in Argentina: Building citizenship. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 116, 145-161.

in education may provide an opportunity for prisons to support the psychological health and well-being of people in custody.

Global models of prison education: Lessons for the UK

The evolution and success of Argentina's prison education programmes

The history and evolution of Argentina's university-in-prison initiatives began in the mid-1980s when reformists recognised the transformative potential of HE. Established during Argentina's transition to democracy, these programmes aimed to foster academic communities and redefine citizenship for people in prison.²⁷ The University of Buenos Aires (UBA) XXII Programme, launched in 1985, is the oldest and most prominent initiative.²⁸ It offers in-person classes for incarcerated students, allowing them to pursue the same undergraduate degrees as people in the community.²⁹ UBA XXII upholds education as a fundamental human right and actively cultivates academic communities within prisons. The University Education in Prisons Programme (PEUP) was launched in 2004 during a period of prison reform in Argentina's Santa Fe province.³⁰ PUEP integrates incarcerated students into virtual degree programmes identical to those offered to students outside of prison, providing classrooms, computers, and internet access to promote educational equality and inclusivity.³¹ University-based coordinators play a vital role in helping students to navigate administrative and technical challenges while fostering collaboration with prison authorities.

Similarly, the National University of San Martin established the CUSAM (Centro Universitario San Martin) programme in 2008 at Unit No. 48 of the Buenos Aires Penitentiary. This initiative strengthens ties

If prison education is to serve as a genuine rehabilitative tool, digital inclusion must be recognised as a fundamental right, not a privilege.

with marginalised communities by combining formal education with broader opportunities for incarcerated individuals and prison staff.³² By the 2010s, over half of Argentina's public universities were involved in prison education programmes. Despite economic crises and a rise in punitive populist rhetoric, these initiatives have endured and evolved, challenging exclusionary top-down processes through grassroots activism and principles of carceral citizenship. Gual emphasises the critical role incarcerated individuals played in establishing and sustaining these programmes: 'The beginning of all three university programmes was thus characterised by a profound determination on the part of prisoners to become students and help set up the

prison university programmes' (p. 149).³³ Argentina's university-in-prison initiatives contrast sharply with traditional punitive approaches in the Global North, which theorists like Foucault (who described prisons as 'disciplinary institutions'),³⁴ Goffman (who coined the term 'total institutions'),³⁵ and Sykes (who identified the 'pains of imprisonment')³⁶ have analysed as mechanisms of control and discipline. In contrast, UBA XXII prioritises self-management, ideological plurality, and critical thinking, fostering transformation at both individual

and societal levels.

Challenges faced by Argentina's university-in-prison programmes

UBA XXII, in particular, has significantly contributed to access to HE, supporting reintegration, and reducing recidivism. Many graduates have gone on to secure professional positions in public and private sectors, including roles within the UBA and the country's Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. Beyond academic achievements, these programmes enhance self-esteem and societal reintegration.³⁷ However,

27. Laferriere, M. (2006). *La Universidad en la cárcel. Programma UBA XXII*. Buenos Aires Editorial Universidad.

28. See footnote 27: Laferriere, M. (2006).

29. Sozzo, M. (2012). *Contra la degradación. La experiencia del Programma de Educación Universitaria en Prisiones*, Universidad Nacional del Litoral. In M. Gutierrez (Ed.), *Lápices o rejas. Pensar la actualidad del derecho a la educación en contextos de encierro* (pp. 41-64). Editores del Puerto.

30. Noguera, M. (2022). In-prison university programmes in Argentina: Building citizenship. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 113, 1-20.

31. See footnote 27: Laferriere, M. (2006).

32. See footnote 26: Gual, R. (2023).

33. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. Allen Lane.

34. Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*. Anchor Books (extract in Newburn, T., 2009, *Key Readings in Criminology*, Willan).

35. See footnote 14: Sykes, G. (1958).

36. Salomon, J. (2024). *The university goes to jail in Latin America*. *América futura*.

Argentina's university-in-prison programmes continue to face major challenges, including insufficient funding, societal stigma, limited post-release job opportunities, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.³⁸ Political instability and frequent changes in government exacerbate these issues. Despite these obstacles, Argentina's university-in-prison initiatives offer lessons for the UK. Unlike Argentina, the UK benefits from a stable government system and access to extensive funding opportunities, which could ensure the longevity and effectiveness of similar programmes.

To implement something like Argentina's university in-prison programme in the UK would take considerable effort and commitment to rehabilitation. It would require a shift in the dominant security-focused approach, and an emphasis on equality of provision. Davies argues that incarcerated individuals are deliberately excluded from digital access as part of broader power structures that maintain social inequality.³⁹ Applying Gramsci's theory of 'cultural hegemony' (p. 33), he explains that the state prioritises the education of certain groups while marginalising others. He asserts that, 'by only allowing prisoners access only to the knowledge the state deems acceptable,' to 'he asserts that, by allowing prisoners access only to the knowledge the state deems acceptable those in government can maintain hegemonic power over them (p. 4). Davies also challenges prevailing security concerns, stating: 'The fear that digital access in prisons will compromise security is largely unfounded, as international examples demonstrate safe and effective models of implementation.'

Further lessons for the UK

Carlen used the term 'carceral clawback'⁴⁰ in the context of failed prison reform in Canada to describe how punitive policies consistently obstruct genuine

rehabilitation, despite government and public support. 'Prison,' she states, 'is the central symbol of the state's power to punish, and its main function is the delivery of pain' (p. 116). Argentina's in-prison university model is unique, and its implementation within the UK penal system may face resistance from policymakers, government officials and the public too. While progressive change in the UK is challenging, it is not impossible. For example, the HMP Strangeways riot in the 1990s catalysed significant reforms, ending inhumane practices like 'slopping out' and the introduction of in-cell sanitation, TVs, association time, and educational opportunities.⁴¹ Yet, penal policies around education continue to face setbacks due to top-down pressures and stringent security measures.

Establishing HE-focused prisons could create environments where people in prison internalise new norms and values that support long-term desistance.

Argentina's university-in-prison programmes show how grassroots activism, university support, and social justice movements have kept going despite political instability or populist rhetoric.⁴² As Gual notes, 'The determination and agency of incarcerated individuals were fundamental in establishing and sustaining these programmes, proving that progressive change is possible even in adverse conditions' (p. 149).⁴³ The Nordic prison model offers further inspiration that the UK can learn from. Pratt describes Scandinavian prisons as exceptionally progressive, with

better conditions, reduced overcrowding, and effective reintegration.⁴⁴ Norway's commitment to prison education, dating back to the 1700s and 1800s, emphasises rehabilitation and reintegration, treating education as a fundamental human right.⁴⁵ The Nordic prison system has the lowest recorded reoffending rate globally, a success attributed to its integration within broader sociopolitical and welfare frameworks.⁴⁶ Although critics challenge the notion of Scandinavian 'exceptionalism', noting high remand rates and solitary confinement,⁴⁷ the Nordic approach still provides

37. See footnote 27: Laferriere, M. (2006).

38. See footnote 27: Laferriere, M. (2006).

39. See footnote 23: Davies, B. (2024).

40. Carlen, P. (2002). Carceral clawback: The case of women's imprisonment in Canada. *Punishment & Society*, 4(1), 115–121.

41. Woolf, H. (1991). *Prison Disturbances, April 1990: Report of an Inquiry*. HMSO.

42. See footnote 26: Gual, R. (2023).

43. See footnote 26: Gual, R. (2023).

44. Pratt, J. (2008). Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part I - The nature and roots of Scandinavian exceptionalism. *British Journal of Criminology*, 48(2), 119–137.

45. Tønseth, C., & Bergsland, R. (2019). Prison education in Norway – The importance for work and life after release. *Cogent Education*, 6(1).

46. Smith, P., & Ugelvik, T., (2017). *Scandinavian Penal History, Culture and Prison Practice. Embraced by the Welfare State?* Palgrave Macmillan.

valuable lessons for the UK, particularly regarding prison education.

The case for higher education-focused prisons in the UK

The importance of prison education cannot be overstated. Drawing on global examples, including Argentina university-in-prison initiatives and Norway's progressive prison education models, this paper demonstrates how access to HE in prisons can better transform lives, reduce recidivism, and facilitate successful reintegration. While implementing similar initiatives in England and Wales presents challenges, the evidence for their potential benefits is undeniable. The criminological and sociological case for creating specialised prisons tailored to people in prison pursuing HE are too strong to ignore. Furthermore, as Brierley and Best argue, individuals with lived experience of

crime and imprisonment play a crucial role in supporting desistance.⁴⁹ Their idea of Desistance Habitus suggests that those who successfully move away from criminal behaviour develop a mindset that promotes positive change. Establishing HE-focused prisons could create environments where people in prison internalise new norms and values that support long-term desistance. Ultimately, programmes emphasising rehabilitation over punishment are essential for a fairer and more effective justice system.⁴⁸ Without meaningful investment in HE within prisons, the cycle of reoffending will persist, failing both individuals in our prisons and society as a whole.

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47. Mathiesen, T. (2012). Scandinavian exceptionalism in penal matters: Reality or wishful thinking? In T. Ugelvik, & J. Dullum (Eds.), *Penal Exceptionalism? Nordic Prison Policy and Practice* (pp. 13–37). Routledge.

48. See footnote 18: Coates, S. (2016).

49. See footnote 15: Brierley & Best. (2025)

Exploring the impact of the physical space on therapeutic processes: A rapid evidence assessment

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Research suggests that the condition of therapy rooms affects clients' perceptions of their practitioner's competence, and quality of care.¹ Additionally, the conditions of the room can impact on therapeutic relationships, comfort, and engagement.² Research in prisons and general forensic practice in this area is scant, despite the challenges being widely acknowledged.³ A rapid evidence assessment was conducted to evaluate evidence from forensic and psychotherapy literature to inform recommendations for delivering rehabilitative prison interventions.

People in prison across England and Wales may engage in a range of interventions, for example psychological therapy, programmes, and structured supervision sessions.⁴ The environments they take place in often varies among prisons, depending on resource and infrastructure. Spaces can range from purpose built and well-designed areas, to repurposed rooms in locations that are not always optimal. Prisoner and practitioner experiences of therapeutic environments in prisons have seldom been investigated. Some research is available which considers the environment of prisons more generally, but this does not specifically draw upon the rooms within prisons, where interventions are delivered.

Generally, prisons have been described as 'counter-therapeutic',⁵ and having the potential to trigger

reactions to previous trauma.⁶ Whilst this might be the case for many aspects of a prison's environment, the condition of the rooms where interventions are delivered is one that receives little attention in research. This includes not just the elements of the room itself, such as its aesthetics, colour and furnishings, but its location within the prison, be that a portacabin, a concourse or on a busy wing. This issue becomes more obvious with prisons that have aging buildings and fabrics, which many do, where levels of noise and footfall in surrounding areas are high, with spaces in need of refurbishment.

Previous non-prison related research has found that the physical therapy space can enhance feelings of safety and comfort, and that client retention was significantly associated with a 'welcoming environment' (as perceived by clients).⁷ Retention is particularly important with rehabilitative interventions since non-completion and withdrawal can actually increase risk of recidivism.⁸ This suggests that the consideration of physical therapy spaces may have practical implications that can optimise intervention delivery in prisons. With rehabilitation and relevant interventions being a key objective for UK prisons,⁹ and a scarcity of prison specific research in this area, a rapid evidence assessment (REA) was carried out. This REA aimed to synthesise qualitative and quantitative studies that explored the views of practitioners and clients from

1. Nasar, J., & Devlin, A. (2011). Impressions of psychopractioners' offices. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 58(3), 310-320.
2. Sinclair, T. (2020). What's in a therapy room? – A mixed methods study exploring clients' practitioners' views and experiences of the physical environment of the therapy room. *Couns Psychother Res.*, 21(6), 118-129.
3. Tite, L. (2013). *Counselling psychologists' experiences of working with clients who present with anger issues in prison settings: An interpretive phenomenological analysis* [PhD thesis]. London.
4. Walton, J., Ramsay, L., Cunningham, C., & Henfrey, S. (2017). New directions: Integrating a biopsychosocial approach in the design and delivery of programs for high-risk service users in Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. *Advancing Corrections: Journal of the International Corrections and Prison Association*, 3, 21–47.
5. Fletcher, J. (2014). Inside story: working in a women's prison. *Therapy Today*, 25(3), 28-31.
6. Hocken, K., Taylor, J., & Walton, J. (2022). Trauma and the experience of imprisonment. In P. Willmott & L. Jones (Eds.), *Trauma-informed forensic practice* (pp. 298–312). Routledge.
7. Backhaus, K. (2008). *Client and practitioner perspectives on the importance of the physical environment of the therapy room: A mixed methods study* [Ph.D. thesis]. Texas Woman's University.
8. McMurrin, M., & Theodosi, E. (2007). Is treatment non-completion associated with increased reconviction over no treatment? *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 13(4), 333–343.
9. Ministry of Justice. (2011). *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis 2011*. Ministry of Justice.

across forensic and psychotherapy settings, and experimental studies that had evaluated the effect of the physical environment on therapy outcomes.

Rapid Evidence Assessment

REAs can be used to search for, and evaluate, data and evidence to develop our understanding about a subject and to inform policy or practice. This involved screening and critically appraising the data gathered in line with inclusion and exclusion criteria that were developed to ensure rigor and transparency. These criteria were developed using the parameters of population, intervention, comparison, outcome, context and time (PICOC/T).

This REA focused on male and female adults who were engaged in or have participated in talking-based therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or counselling. It excluded children under 18 and those involved in non-talking therapies (e.g., medical or physical). Practitioners, students, and professionals in psychotherapy, psychology, counselling, or related fields were included, while non-health or non-social care professionals were excluded.

The intervention explored was the importance of the physical environment therapeutic process, with the physical environment acting as the independent variable. The REA compared opinions regarding standard, routine therapy spaces with those that have undergone changes believed to affect the therapy. Any study that did not focus on the physical environment's role in therapy was excluded.

The outcomes of interest were the views or ratings from practitioners, students, and clients about how the physical environment impacts therapy, as well as the client's progress toward therapeutic goals. Studies that did not analyse these perspectives or the effect of the environment on progress were excluded.

The REA was limited to qualitative and quantitative studies published in English since 1980. Qualitative research was required to use interviews, focus groups, or similar methods, while quantitative research could have involved randomised control trials, matched

comparisons, or various types of ratings. Excluded were non-scientific, weak, or minimally informative studies, including non-controlled studies, single case studies, and opinion papers.

The search involved exploration across three databases: SAGE, Taylor and Francis, and ProQuest. These databases were three of those made available by a designated University database at the time of writing. To locate a broad literature range, two search strings were used.^{10 11} In both searches, steps were taken to determine whether studies met the inclusion criteria. Firstly, the titles and abstracts of studies were examined. Those not relevant to the inclusion criteria in the PICOC/T were excluded. Those potentially relevant were saved and retrieved in full, to be reviewed against the PICOC/T criteria. Those deemed as not meeting the criteria were excluded (1,718), with the remaining studies (7) critically appraised.

A preference for therapy environments which mimicked living room settings was reported.

Results

This REA aimed to explore the importance of the physical environment on therapeutic processes. Given the scant research in this area, the search strategy and the inclusion criteria were broad. Despite this, only five qualitative studies and two quantitative studies were included. Unfortunately, none were from forensic settings, and no experimental studies were found. Instead, the research gathered originated from counselling and psychotherapy studies in non-secure settings. Experimental studies that were prison specific, may have enhanced the generalisability of findings. Data extraction facilitated a concise synthesis of the main findings across the studies.

Theme 1: Comfort

Comfort was identified as a key theme, with three of the reviewed papers highlighting its importance. A preference for therapy environments which mimicked living room settings was reported.¹² Studies also highlighted that feelings of comfort can be affected if therapy occurs in a location other than the usual (comfortable) room, despite having the same

10. Search string 1: general psychotherapy therap* AND Counselling AND psychotherapy* AND environment AND impact* AND "therapy room" AND outcome* AND effect.
11. Search string 2: therap* AND Counselling AND psychotherapy* AND environment AND impact* AND "therapy room" AND outcome* AND effect AND secure settings AND prison* AND correction*.
12. Jones, J. (2020). A place for therapy: Clients reflect on their experiences in psycho-practitioners' offices. *Qualitative Social Work*, 19(3), 406–423.

practitioner. Another reviewed paper, found that participants provided higher ratings of comfort in rooms containing a rug, pillows or cushions, fabric, plants, and artwork.¹³ The third paper also found that practitioners highlighted the importance of using spaces to provide comfort to meet the physical needs for clients and themselves.¹⁴

This theme highlights the importance of developing physical environments for prison interventions that are comfortable for both clients and practitioners. Any strategic use of furniture to support this is likely to be beneficial. For example, even something as small as adjustable chairs can lower heart rate variability, which invokes a more settled state and is suggested to be better for short-term memory, cognitive flexibility, and focus retention.¹⁵ In fact, seating has been shown to be one of the most crucial items in a therapy room, with both clients and practitioners reporting preferences for large, soft, seating.¹⁶ In the context of intervention rooms, utilising comfortably cushioned and soft seats may improve engagement.

Theme 2

Insight into the practitioner and therapeutic relationship: Another key theme arising three of the reviewed papers, was the physical space being used by clients to draw inferences about their practitioner. Findings highlighted that clients used the physical space to develop conclusions about practitioners, such as their areas of specialty and warmth in therapeutic style. This was supported by another paper reviewed, which proposed that practitioners were rated highly on trustworthiness, and expertise when a room contained a rug, cushions, fabrics, plants, and artwork. Such additions to prison intervention rooms are likely to support or even mirror and extend the warm, empathic style that practitioners delivering some interventions are encouraged to adopt.

The former of these papers reported that the physical environment is experienced by clients as

influential to their relationship with the practitioner. Clients reported that they used the physical space to make inferences about their practitioner, such as their interests, expertise and whether they were relatable. This can be particularly important in the context of prison interventions, where some clients can struggle to trust staff, or build rapport due to the effects of their trauma histories. Rooms in prisons where interventions are delivered, if they are unfurnished or are otherwise bare and stark, are unlikely to make prisoners feel valued or foster the physical space and sensory tone necessary for them to begin to trust and engage with practitioners. Essentially, rooms can set the tone for therapeutic relationships.

Theme 3

Aiding therapy processes: The third and most prominent theme indicated that the physical space could aid therapeutic processes, with 4 papers drawing upon this topic. One study found that art works in the therapy space helped clients develop feelings of connection to people from other time periods or communities.¹⁷ However, another paper found that the presence of nature in therapy settings encouraged connectedness.¹⁸ One paper reviewed found that practitioners used the physical space to convey

Perceptions of the physical therapy space were used to draw inferences about practitioner competence, and relatability.

therapeutic messages to clients, engage them in discussions and to appropriately self-disclose, all of which was aimed to enhance the therapy process. This involved the use of colour, artwork and self-revealing or decorative objects. The placement of objects gives clients insight into their practitioners, which might benefit intervention spaces in prisons. Whilst intervention specific materials are often used in prisons to convey therapeutic messages, it might be beneficial to consider how this could be achieved more creatively.

One study found that the presence of nature enhanced the therapy process through alleviating negative thoughts and emotions triggered by therapy.

13. Smalley, L. (2014). *The influence of the physical environment on client comfort, perception of practitioner, and retention in therapy: An examination of differences in undergraduate women (Ph.D. thesis)*. Spalding University.
14. Jones, J. (2018). A phenomenological study of the office environments of clinical social workers. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 11(3), 38–48.
15. Miller, H. (2017). *Texas A&M cognitive research summary* [Proprietary and confidential]. Texas, USA.
16. Backhaus, K. (2008). *Client and practitioner perspectives on the importance of the physical environment of the therapy room: A mixed methods study* [Doctoral dissertation]. Texas Woman's University.
17. Coles, A., Harrison, F., & Todd, S. (2019). Flexing the frame: Practitioner experiences of museum-based group art psychotherapy for adults with complex mental health difficulties. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 24(2), 56–67.
18. Dybvik, J., Sundsfjord, S., Wang, C., & Nivison, M. (2018). Significance of nature in a clinical setting and its perceived therapeutic value from patients' perspective. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 20(4), 429–449.

The paper also reported that the presence of nature encouraged a helpful perspective on client problems, in turn encouraging the use of alternative perspectives and problem solving. Participants described that being in nature provided a backdrop that made their problems seem less severe, which in turn helped them change their perspective and ways of dealing with problems. Similarly, one study found that inviting clients to engage in therapeutic practices outdoors was also beneficial.¹⁹ Participants reported that this encouraged autonomy, presence in the moment, equality between clients and practitioners, and increased motivation. It may be of benefit for practitioners to consider how they might incorporate nature into the intervention space. This might be done using plants, outdoor breaks, or natural light from windows.

Theme 4

Facilitating engagement: The final theme was the influence of the physical environment in enhancing engagement. This could be considered the least prominent theme, with two of the returned papers drawing upon this area. One of the included studies reported that art objects in the therapy environment encouraged

clients to think about their internal world, supporting them to self-reflect. This included art works, artefacts, and photographs. This was facilitated by clients simply expressing whether they liked or disliked an object, as this enabled reflection on how one relates to given things. This was reported to be beneficial with clients who found it difficult to engage in self-reflection. Therefore, when developing spaces for prison interventions, it might be of benefit to consider the use of art works or presenting material artistically. This may encourage self-reflection from clients, inviting them to begin thinking about their inner world or engaging in conversation with their therapists to build rapport.

Colour can be particularly impactful on client engagement in therapeutic environments. For example, one of the included studies reported that participants preferred therapy rooms to be 'neutral' with 'non-vibrant' colours.²⁰ Specifically, blue, green, and grey were the most preferred wall colours. In addition, blue,

white, and green were the colours most preferred for practitioner shirts. Although it is not practical to direct staff to wear specific colours of clothing, it may be beneficial to paint an intervention room in specific colours that promote engagement.

Discussion

The current REA aimed to explore the effect of the physical environment on therapeutic outcomes, following organisational interest, and recognition that it has the potential to shape the way intervention environments are developed, shape stakeholders of this area, and encourage possible changes in resource provision this might encourage. The REA was also motivated in part by the author's experiences when developing a room for intervention delivery at a prison.

From professional experience, resources for rehabilitative interventions can vary between prisons. Some use purpose-built spaces, though this is not always the case.

Whilst this REA did not return any research studies from prisons, the findings highlight that the physical spaces where therapy takes place can have an impact on important therapeutic

processes such as engagement, client retention, and sense of safety. These processes have been found to be crucial to rehabilitative interventions that support change in prison settings, and to reducing risk.²¹ The physical environment can positively reinforce rehabilitation, or potentially have a more negative impact.²² Despite the challenges of providing interventions in prison being widely acknowledged,²³ there is limited research informing which adjustments could be made to intervention spaces. The lack of studies relating to prison interventions in the papers returned was disappointing but reflected the scarcity within the literature base, and the need for further study. That said, the results provided findings from psychotherapy literature, which may offer some considerations for practice in prisons.

Research within environmental psychology has reliably demonstrated that physical settings can have multiple impacts upon the people who use them.²⁴ In

The results of this REA also suggested that comfort and a 'homeliness feeling' was important.

19. Revell, S., & McLeod, J. (2017). Therapists' experience of walk and talk therapy: A descriptive phenomenological study. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 19(3), 267–289.
20. Rosser, J. J. (2015). *Psychotherapeutic implications of applied color theory* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.
21. McMurrin, M., & Ward, T. (2010). Treatment readiness, treatment engagement, and behaviour change. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 20(2), 75–85.
22. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F., & Tew, J. (2018). What is a rehabilitative prison culture? *Prison Service Journal*, 235, 3–9.
23. Liebling, A. (2011). Moral performance, inhuman and degrading treatment, and prison pain. *Punishment & Society*, 13(5), 530–549.
24. Lei, S. (2010). Classroom physical design influencing student learning and evaluations of college instructors: A review of literature. *Education*, 131(1), 128–134.

psychotherapy, it is suggested that the therapy room functions to provide a safe environment for clients and to aid therapy processes.²⁵ Aspects of the prison environment such as, metal doors, barred windows, high walls, and imposing fences, are likely to have a contrasting effect.

Research highlights that the physical state of a given setting can influence the impressions given to those who use them.²⁶ In the context of therapeutic practices, findings from this REA, support this by highlighting that perceptions of the physical therapy space were used to draw inferences about practitioner competence, and reliability. Some practitioners are trained to demonstrate a warm, empathic style when working therapeutically with people in prison. Their efforts to optimise space for engagement, motivation, and safeness, may support practitioners in doing this.

It has been noted that counselling practitioners and their clients both feel that a therapy room influences their working relationships.²⁷ This was also supported by the REA with both clients and practitioners experiencing the environment as a key part of relationship building. In some prison interventions, the quality of therapeutic relationships are considered to have a key influence on outcomes.²⁸ Strong therapeutic relationships have also been found to be 'helpful in keeping clients in therapy' (p.569).²⁹ Client retention is particularly important in rehabilitative interventions, given its previously discussed links to reconviction.

The current findings highlighted that therapy delivered in the presence of nature helped establish feelings of tranquillity and autonomy, and improved wellbeing. This is supported in wider research, where presence of nature is reported to induce more positive

feelings than views of non-natural environments.³⁰ Existing research also indicates that incorporating nature into indoor spaces using plants can enhance comfort, mood, and the perceived attractiveness of the environment.³¹ This suggests there may be value in using outdoors space for rehabilitative work where safety and security requirements can be upheld, or more simply imitating nature indoors with use of plants

Previous studies of therapy environments have reported that physical comfort for all parties was crucial.³² The results of this REA also suggested that comfort and a 'homeliness feeling' was important. These are likely to be more significant for people in prison who are away from home and ordinary comforts. Comfort is also important when considered

against the backdrop of trauma in the prison population. There may be considerable benefit to investing in soft, home-design furniture as a basic standard in the rooms where interventions are delivered.

The findings of the REA also suggest that practitioners used the physical environment to meet the basic needs of clients and convey therapeutic messages. Thus, it will likely be beneficial to consider how those delivering interventions in prison can meet client needs using the physical space. Although people in prisons needs are likely to differ, facilities to make a drink, comfortable

seating, and ventilation (depending on room temperature) are simple amenities that may support with meeting basic needs. More generally, practitioners delivering interventions can convey therapeutic messages with colour, furnishings, and in creatively presenting intervention content.

A sense of connectedness can be protective against multiple behaviours, including substance use, risky sexual behaviour, and violence.³³ The current

The nature of the physical environment should be a key consideration for those involved in developing spaces for prison interventions.

25. Frank, J., & Frank, J. (1993). *Persuasion and healing: A comparative study of psychotherapy* (3rd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
26. Devlin, A., Donovan, S., Nicolov, A., Nold, O., Packard, A., & Zandan, G. (2009). "Impressive?" Credentials, family photographs, and the perception of practitioner qualities. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 29(4), 503–512.
27. Sinclair, T. (2020). What's in a therapy room? A mixed methods study exploring clients' and practitioners' views and experiences of the physical environment of the therapy room. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(6), 118–129.
28. Kozar, C., & Day, A. (2012). The therapeutic alliance in offending behavior programs: A necessary and sufficient condition for change? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17(5), 482–487.
29. Horvath, A., & Luborsky, L. (1993). The role of the therapeutic alliance in psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(4), 561–573.
30. Bringslimark, T., Hartig, T., & Patil, G. (2009). The psychological benefits of indoor plants: A critical review of the experimental literature. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 29(4), 422–433.
31. Larsen, L., Adams, J., Deal, B., Kweon, B. S., & Tyler, E. (1998). Plants in the workplace: The effects of plant density on productivity, attitudes, and perceptions. *Environment and Behavior*, 30(3), 261–281.
32. Pearson, M., & Wilson, H. (2012). Soothing spaces and healing places: Is there an ideal counselling room design? *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 18(3), 46–53.
33. Bernat, D., & Resnick, M. (2009). Connectedness in the lives of adolescents. In R. DiClemente Santelli & R. Crosby (Eds.), *Adolescent health: Understanding and preventing risk behaviors* (pp. 375–389). Jossey-Bass/Wiley.

findings suggest that the introduction of art and nature into the therapy environment may enhance feelings of connectedness amongst clients. This suggestion seems relevant to the physical spaces for prison interventions also.

A limitation to the current REA is that the literature used was not specific to prison interventions and was low in quantity. As a result, any application of the proposed considerations should be considered cautiously. There are many variables within the studies identified which were arguably different to those in prison interventions and their outcomes. For example, in prisons, engagement in interventions may have bearing on a person's sentence progression. Variables that could also impact upon engagement in prisons include resourcing or unforeseen regime changes.^{34 35} Those who engage with interventions in the community, outside of probation requirements, are not influenced by such constraints. This includes prevalence of substances or custodial violence, opportunities to consolidate learning in relevant situations, or more nuanced factors such as prison culture. In addition, the rapid nature of an REA means that some literature may not have been located. Furthermore, until searched with rigor, the level of available literature is unknown.

Implications for Practice

The current findings suggest the nature of the physical environment should be a key consideration for those involved in developing spaces for prison interventions.

Given these findings, the following considerations for practice are made:

1. It may be beneficial to invest in soft, home-design furniture and décor as a basic standard in prison intervention rooms.

2. Explore provision to paint intervention rooms specific colours such as tones of blue, green, or grey given they could promote engagement and cues for safeness.
3. The use of indoor plants, outdoor breaks and natural light may be beneficial.
4. The presence of non-intervention related objects that give clients insight into their practitioners' interests or personality might be valuable.
5. The use of artworks or presenting intervention material creatively, may enhance client engagement.

Conclusion

There is evidence to suggest that the physical environment can impact on several therapy processes including engagement, relationships, connectedness, wellbeing, and receptiveness. This can in turn aid therapeutic processes such as engagement, which is important in prison interventions. Whilst there is a scarcity of literature investigating the effects of the physical environment on intervention outcomes in prisons, the current findings from general psychotherapy provide interesting considerations that might be of use. The findings from this paper also highlight the need for further research in forensic settings, and more rigorous searches in prospective evidence reviews.

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34. Programmes staffing shortages.

35. Prison lockdowns/ restrictions on service user movements due to incidents.

Navigating the menopause: The experiences of women prison governors

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Menopause is a significant life transition that many people will experience, yet it remains a topic shrouded in silence, particularly in the workplace. As women make up a substantial proportion of the global workforce, with 16.37 million women aged 16 and over employed in the UK in December 2024, understanding and addressing the impacts of menopause on their professional lives is crucial.¹ The natural biological process of menopause (when periods stop due to lower hormone levels) and perimenopause (when a person has symptoms, but their periods have not ended) typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 for people who were born female.² It can bring a range of physical and emotional symptoms that can affect job performance, wellbeing, and career progression. These can include feelings of anxiety, mood swings, hot flushes, difficulties in sleeping, and brain fog; with these often having a significant impact on relationships and work.³ Despite its inevitability, menopause is often overlooked in workplace policies and discussions, or policies and processes exist but are not adequately used, leaving many women having to navigate this challenging phase on their own.

This article aims to shed light on the perimenopausal and menopausal experiences of women who hold senior prison governor positions in HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in England and Wales.⁴ It explores what support is available for people, their experiences of such support and how the sometimes-debilitating symptoms of menopause have impacted on their job roles. The article also includes contributions from men who spoke about how their job

roles were impacted by menopause and concludes with recommendations for HMPPS's consideration.

The data for this article comes from a larger project examining the equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) experiences of prison operational managers and governor grades in England and Wales.⁵ To recruit participants, we collaborated with the Prison Governor's Association (PGA), the main trade union for senior operational managers in HMPPS. Before starting the project, we consulted with two members of the PGA National Executive Committee (NEC) to understand the need for our inquiry. Both individuals had extensive experience with the PGA and handling EDI-related casework, demonstrating that such a project was warranted. In terms of the distinct and individual needs of women, one commented:

'There is still not an acceptance that being a woman is different. So, I think if you're a woman and you follow the male white man's mode, I think you're accepted more than if you're a woman who is trying to juggle childcare and who is menopausal...and if you demonstrate the difficulties that some of these things bring to the work environment, then that's not acceptable.' (NEC 2)

When asked to recount cases they had been involved in, both NEC participants mentioned women's workplace experience of menopause, in addition to other EDI matters. One detailed the hidden and debilitating impact, with some women finding it challenging to perform their job roles as effectively as they had in the past. The other recounted a particular case:

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1. Francis-Devine, B., Zaidi, K., & Murray, A. (2025). *Women and the UK economy*. House of Commons Library.
 2. Toze, M., & Westwood, S. (2024). Experiences of menopause among non-binary and trans people. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 26(2), 447–458.
 3. NHS. (2022). *Menopause*. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>.
 4. Note: we did not have any participants who identified as female who said they related to the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. For the purpose of this article, we refer to women participants on the basis of their self-description when discussing the menopause, although it is noted that this may not be representative of non-binary or trans people.
 5. Harrison, K., Smith, L., Mason, R., Ward, S., and Wilson, C. (2024). Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Experiences amongst Prison Governors' Association members: Raw data report. Lincoln: University of Lincoln.

'I had one woman who was going through menopause and her office didn't have a window...and she's boiling hot...she went to the governor, male governor, and said, look, can I have an office with [a] window in it? I need to be able to open the window. I'm in the menopause. I get flushes. I need it. He said 'no, I'm not going to displace somebody else so you can have their office.' (NEC 2)

On a policy and process level HMPPS has made some progress in terms of supporting people who are entering menopause. This includes adjusting the annual physical fitness test policy and publishing information in relation to menopause in the occupational health (OH) user guide. There is a HMPPS menopause toolkit, with staff also encouraged to get support from OH, the employee assistance programme, and the championing women in the workplace group.⁶ While such change is positive, we were interested to see how these policies and support were being experienced at the frontline. We believe this is the first study which details the perimenopausal and menopausal lived experiences of senior prison managers working for HMPPS in England and Wales.

Literature review

As part of the wider research project, a scoping review of the published literature pertaining to the EDI experiences of prison staff was conducted using five electronic databases: Academic Search Complete, APA PsycINFO, Scopus, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), and SocINDEX. While a total of 746 papers were retrieved from the initial searches, after duplications had been removed and the relevance of the article checked through the reading of abstracts, we were left with 36 papers. Of these, none concerned the menopausal or perimenopausal experiences of prison or correctional staff. The only reference to a study the authors could find was Potts and colleagues who in 2022 announced they were to conduct interviews with 30 female menopausal prison officers working in prisons in England and Wales, but to date, this has not been published.⁷

Methodology

To address the research aims of exploring the EDI experiences of prison managers, the primary research comprised of two parts. Firstly, the initial data collection process involved the distribution of a questionnaire to all PGA members (n=1,090) exploring the various components that may influence an individual's EDI experiences within the workplace, and the relationship these experiences have with workplace wellbeing and intentions for future work. Two hundred and fifty-nine (24 per cent) PGA members completed the survey. While the survey did not specifically ask about menopause, in general we found that those who felt more included at work tended to have higher levels of wellbeing, highlighting the importance of creating workplace environments and cultures that promote diversity and inclusion.

Upon completion of the survey, participants were secondly invited to talk about their EDI experiences in a follow-up interview and 34 PGA members accepted this opportunity. 23 participants identified as male (68 per cent) and 11 (32 per cent) identified as female. While this is not a large sample, the split between male and female participants is representative of those who are members of the PGA. Interview participants identified with a

Menopause is a significant life transition that many people will experience, yet it remains a topic shrouded in silence, particularly in the workplace.

broad range of protected characteristics apart from gender reassignment, which may mean we are not able to represent the experiences of non-binary or trans people in this exploration of menopause. From these 34 participants, nine spoke about menopause with this consisting of five (55 per cent) women and four (45 per cent) men, highlighting how the menopause can affect the working lives of both sexes. To demarcate responses from different people, we gave each interview a number and these are reflected in the labels assigned to each quote (e.g., 'PGA 1'). All interviews were conducted and recorded either through Microsoft Teams or telephone. Interviews were conducted between July and November 2023 and lasted between 25 and 112 minutes, with the mean length being 65 minutes. All transcripts were entered into NVivo version 14 for coding with the analytical strategy adhering to

6. HC Deb, 10 March 2022, cW

7. Potts, J., Stevens, M., Cronshaw, S. & Van Hout, M-C. (2022). Menopause behind locked doors – a phenomenological study of UK prison officers. *Faculty of Business and Law Research Day*. Available at <https://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/BLResearchDay/article/download/856/476>

the principles of qualitative content analysis.⁸ The evaluation received approval from the University of Lincoln Ethics Application Service.

Research findings

The results of the content analysis were arranged into four areas; support available, experiences of that support, the impact for women, and the impact for men.

Support available

Support was largely categorised into formal support offered by HMPPS and informal support offered on a more local or personal basis. The three organisational initiatives mentioned were the menopause toolkit, supporting women in menopause (SWIM) and a peer-led forum which was a support for women and allies' network (SWAM). While little was said about the two latter forums, one participant did acknowledge the work that HMPPS was undertaking to try to support menopausal and perimenopausal women:

'We are a bit better at thinking about the menopause, and how it's impacting work...because if we don't do that stuff, we are not going to then change the culture where women don't feel accepted in what is already a male dominated environment.' (PGA 14)

Outside of the organisational initiatives, women tried to ensure they were being as supportive as they could to each other, with one explaining how she ran 'a menopause lunch...I don't want people to go through things that I have been through' (PGA 29). Another noted how, even though it was not part of her job role, she had been doing some work around menopause:

'We've got a really young staff group, however, there are people who are my age, I'm nearly 50, there are a group of us and actually, we don't do anything about that; and there's no acknowledgement about the

older end of the staff. For me, it is about getting a few people involved.' (PGA 22)

PGA 22 also importantly acknowledged how generally people were better equipped to support staff with issues they were more personally aligned with, showing the importance of lived or relevant experience when developing informal support networks:

When it comes to the maternity stuff, I have to refresh my mind every single time...but that's because at nearly fifty, that is not at the forefront of my mind, whereas if somebody came to me tomorrow and said something about the menopause, because of what I have been reading about: uniform changes, showers, the Disability Discrimination Act, I would probably be able to help them quicker than if somebody said to me 'I'm pregnant' (PGA 22).

The hidden and debilitating impact, with some women finding it challenging to perform their job roles as effectively as they had in the past.

Experiences of support

Experiences of formal support were mainly focused on the menopause toolkit and in particular what participants referred to as the 'menopause passport'. One governor described the idea of the passport as being 'great' but added that 'my manager's reaction to it is not so great' (PGA 28). She explained:

'...because of the perimenopause, I have trouble sleeping, and I travel almost 50 miles to work...and some days, like last night, when it feels like you've had about 40 minutes sleep, it is really difficult. So, my previous manager sat down and did a passport where it was agreed that on days when I was having trouble with sleep, I could work from home.' (PGA 28)

While this was initially working well and was supportive of her individual needs, her current line manager:

8. Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.

'Doesn't like senior managers working from home...if I was 20 years younger and I had a childcare issue, I could... [but] there isn't a broad acceptance amongst governing governors, I don't think, about the menopause... So, I've come into work on so many occasions fatigued, and not being able to work from home because the governor doesn't like it.' (PGA 28)

She felt that this lack of knowledge and understanding was mainly because 'most governing governors are still men' (PGA 28), with her passport being initially agreed with a woman. While she acknowledged the existence of SWIM and SWAM, she explained how the level of understanding needed to make any real difference for women was not evident 'at the top of our tier' (PGA 28). She also thought it was because many people did not like talking about the menopause and therefore it was a subject which needed to be more openly spoken about. This was also emphasised by another participant:

'If your line manager that you're having a conversation with is male or much younger, they would not understand. The only people that understand what menopause feels like is people that have been through menopause...having the conversation with your line manager if he is male, when it isn't being talked about more openly in society, would just be an awkward conversation, they would want to get away from it as quickly as possible.' (PGA 17)

While the menopause toolkit is a national initiative, how it is implemented in HMPPS seemed to largely depend on the care and understanding of individual line managers, with some being much better at this than others.⁹ While PGA 28 had not been fully supported by her current line manager, she tried to ensure those she lined managed in turn were treated with care and respect:

'We always agree when she needs to work from home, that she can do. She probably does that once or twice a fortnight.' (PGA 28)

For others, support from their line managers had been brilliant, although there was nevertheless scepticism whether this was due to the individual involved rather than the broader organisational policies:

'In the Prison Service we talk a lot about the menopause, I don't know whether we do that because it's presentation or whether there would be any action. I know if I spoke to [line manager] and said that I needed this and this to be able to function properly, he would do what he could to be able to arrange those things. Would I think that other people in the organisation would take it that seriously? I don't know.' (PGA 17)

Despite this level of current support, PGA 17 was still reticent to talk about her needs and was fearful of how confidential reports could be used if she ever sought help from OH:

'I would think carefully about where that would go from a report perspective, because actually what you don't want is that somebody has written in your OH report that you are not really coping. For me, my menopause symptoms are having a direct impact on my ability to carry out my job

but if anyone knew, that would be career limiting.' (PGA 17)

The general view, therefore, was that while there was a menopause toolkit, general understanding and support was still lacking, with it being almost shameful to have to speak to a line manager to ask for help:

'For females, I think it makes us feel vulnerable, that somebody is going to judge us based on that, and I just think that is not a position that I would ever want to put myself in.' (PGA 17)

Those who felt more included at work tended to have higher levels of wellbeing, highlighting the importance of creating workplace environments and cultures that promote diversity and inclusion.

9. Davis, S. R., Taylor, S., Hemachandra, C., Magraith, K., Ebeling, P. R., Jane, F., & Islam, R. M. (2023). The 2023 Practitioner's Toolkit for Managing Menopause. *Climacteric*, 26(6), 517–536.

Coupled with this was also the view that prison governors in particular could not complain about the situation and were expected to just get on with it:

'A senior manager is a bit like the Queen, you're expected to just turn up and wave and smile at everyone, you are not supposed to have any feelings, and if you are ill, you just get on with it, you're not supposed to have menopause.' (PGA 28)

Some of our woman participants would thus rather hide than be open about the difficulties they were facing.

Impacts on women

In addition to formal and informal support mechanisms, women participants also explained how the symptoms of perimenopause or menopause had affected their ability to carry out their roles:

'The biggest issue for me is brain fog, which being in a massively complex prison is not helpful...I do full staff briefings; I have 300 people in the room...I have to write things down because otherwise I just lose it...That is probably the worst symptom and the one that bothers me the most, because I wonder whether sometimes I am making myself clear because of the brain fog that happens.' (PGA 17)

This was emphasised by an NEC member who spoke passionately about the impacts of menopause on women:

'I've represented people who said, 'I need something. I'm struggling in the menopause because they say they're going down the poor performance route because they're not performing as they should'. Well, when you're in the thick of the menopause, you don't perform as you used to. It can be very debilitating.' (NEC 2)

Other impacts included forgetting words, hot sweats, and tiredness through lack of sleep. While it was acknowledged that theoretically menopause

symptoms were not classed as a disability, in reality it felt like it was, with one participant explaining how 'menopause is a bit of disability because it does impact on your ability to function at 100 per cent' (PGA 17).

Women also explained how the lack of support they had received from HMPPS, and line managers, had made them feel isolated, lonely, and frustrated. One went further, explaining how she was ready to leave the Service:

'I think organisationally, we haven't changed. We have had lots of policies, practices and strategies, but actually when it comes down to it, we don't implement them. I enjoy my job, but if I had an opportunity to leave then I would take it. It is frustrating. The whole thing: the lack of respect for women, the lack of respect for the menopause, for older women doing a difficult job, all of that.' (PGA 28)

Impacts on men

The men who spoke about the menopause did so in a number of contexts. One participant's comments were in relation to the protected characteristic of age and how in his experience HMPPS was not doing enough to support those staff who were growing older. He acknowledged that some work had been undertaken to support women who were going through menopause but argued this opportunity could have also been used to focus on age and general support for prison staff as they grew older, but this was not how it had worked out:

'The emphasis was on making adjustments for women who have reached a certain age, and it was about the effects of reaching a certain age...it struck me as ironic that it wasn't about the age, it was about the effects of it. I thought there's an opportunity here, take it! But they didn't take it...It was quite right to say let's make adjustments for women who are experiencing menopause, absolutely, but I just think it was another missed opportunity to talk about age.' (PGA 7)

Other men spoke about menopause in the context of how they now had a better understanding of its impact on their colleagues, mainly due to their own

People were better equipped to support staff with issues they were more personally aligned with

wives having been through it. This had enabled them to think more about the needs of those women they line managed in terms of what their additional needs might be:

‘It’s absolutely horrific to watch someone you care about go through that...I’ve had staff who have gone through that, and I have provided them with desk fans, the opportunity to go outside when it’s raging hot, you suddenly start having hot flushes and all those other things.’ (PGA 6)

This was also emphasised by PGA 17 who explained how her line manager’s understanding came from the fact his own wife was experiencing similar challenges:

‘I was having a conversation over a period of time with [line manager], and I kept getting halfway through a conversation and then forgetting what I was talking about, and he said — I’m going to tell you that that is a menopause symptom, you probably just want to go and have it checked out. He was absolutely right.’ (PGA 17)

Another key point which came from male participants was the importance of including both men and women in HMPPS led initiatives such as SWIM and SWAM. This was seen as an opportunity to help create open discussions about menopause as participants noted that generally, men were ‘uncomfortable talking about it’ (PGA 6). Such conversations therefore needed to be more normalised within the workplace so women could be properly supported. This normalising was also thought to be enhanced through women senior leaders talking about their menopausal and perimenopausal workplace experiences. PGA 4 described this as:

‘...really powerful . . . what a learning curve, and the generations before us just didn’t talk about it, and we need to, people need to understand it better.’ (PGA 4)

Sharing ideas on how women could be supported in the workplace with men were also key, with one male participant explaining how as a prison governor

he had to ‘be ready to address a wide range of issues’ (PGA 25) with his staff population. While he had experienced some of his women officers saying, ‘You don’t know anything about the menopause’ (PGA 25), he did always try and offer as much support as he could, but had found that in some cases women, when asked what they needed, had said:

‘Well, I can manage. That is not always the right answer because you might not be able to manage as well. It is quite difficult. It is just looking for that support. Somebody will have that relationship with that person. I will say ‘can we just discuss this and see what we can do to resolve it’.’ (PGA 25)

While we do not know why the women refused offers of help, it could be due to the perceived negative consequences of asking for support, as identified by PGA 17.

Recommendations

Recent guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission has stated that employers should offer reasonable adjustments to women who are experiencing symptoms of either menopause or perimenopause.¹⁰ This includes providing rest areas, granting flexible working requests, allowing women to wear cooler clothes (perhaps through relaxing uniform policies), and permitting women to work from home when possible. While the menopause is not generally considered to be a disability, if the symptoms have a long-term and substantial impact on a woman’s ability to carry out her normal day-to-day activities, these symptoms can be considered to amount to a disability. When this is the case, any employer who fails to make reasonable adjustments could be liable for disability discrimination. Support and reasonable adjustments should therefore be consistent and well implemented across an organisation such as HMPPS to ensure women, and those who do not identify as women but may face menopause symptoms, have their needs met.

The main recommendations from our research focus on the following:

- ❑ Ensure that institutional policies and practices, such as workplace adjustment passports, are

The lack of support they had received from HMPPS, and line managers, had made them feel isolated, lonely, and frustrated.

10. Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2024). *Menopause in the workplace: Guidance for employers*. Retrieved from <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/menopause-workplace-guidance-employers>

implemented consistently and are available to all who need it without prejudice.

- ❑ remote existing guidance and explore any gaps in information to line managers so they have the knowledge to support staff with menopause symptoms, so people do not have to rely on individual knowledge or experience.
- ❑ Create a working environment where reasonable adjustments to 'normal' working practices are implemented consistently, used appropriately, and reviewed regularly in line with guidance, with such adjustments reflective of individual need.
- ❑ Ensure that where reasonable adjustments and flexible working arrangements are set, these should not be changed unless there are valid reasons to do so, and any such reasons should be provided in writing to the person in question.
- ❑ Encourage all staff regardless of gender to become involved in SWIM and SWAN initiatives so that conversations about the menopause are normalised and everyone regardless of sex or age has a better understanding of how people experiencing menopause in the workplace can be supported.

Conclusion

Our study of the perimenopausal and menopausal experiences of senior prison managers is small, not just because of the number of participants involved but also due to it being a part of a much larger data set that did not contain references outside of binary genders. Despite this, it is the only current study of its kind in the UK, making our data on the experiences of women in relation to menopause uniquely important. This gap in the evidence base is significant and so we take this opportunity to issue a call for future research in this area. Initiatives such as those mentioned above can help to ensure there is a change of culture where women feel equally as valued as men, older women feel equally as valued as younger women, and those experiencing (peri)menopausal symptoms regardless of gender are supported at work. By fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment, HMPPS can ensure that people of all ages, and genders, are valued and are supported throughout all stages of their careers.

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What the public wants from prison reform: Finding common ground

Alice Dawnay is a social entrepreneur and justice charity leader with a special interest in the power of human connection across divides.

This article is a transcript of a presentation given at The Perrie Lectures in 2025. The Perrie Lectures is an annual event which has the purpose of stimulating dialogue between criminal justice organisations, the voluntary sector, and all those with an academic, legal, or practical interest in people in prison and their families. The theme of the 2025 event was 'The Future of Imprisonment'.

I'd like to begin with an uncomfortable question: Who are we talking to when we talk about prison reform? Because, too often, the answer seems to be... *ourselves*. That is, the campaigners, the policymakers, those who work in justice charities and who talk about justice for a living. I say this not as an attack but from a place of respect and real understanding — because after working deep in the justice sector for more than two decades, I'm one of you! And yet I've come to see a problem when we mostly talk to ourselves about criminal justice reform. That is that we miss out on something vital, that our conversations become echo chambers, and that we risk overlooking the concerns of other people who've lost trust in our justice system — ordinary voters, victims of crime, residents in high-crime areas — people whose trust it will be vital to win back. And the danger is that if we remain in a bubble, we deepen an already polarised debate.

It seems the age-old question of where responsibility and accountability lie divides us more than ever. We have a fundamental split between people who feel the individual is responsible for the tear he causes in the fabric of society on committing a crime...and people who believe society is responsible for the tear. Two sides that the media loves to bait with the shorthand of 'tough' vs 'soft'. And it's this polarisation that's clouding a new way forward for our ailing justice system; that's keeping us locked in a tug-of-war between punishment and rehabilitation, individual responsibility and systemic injustice... debates that generate a lot of heat, but not much light.

I want to discuss the importance of listening. Listening to explore different perspectives, find common ground, and discover new ways to move forward, to break free of this stagnation. But first I'd like to take a step back, because it's a surprise to me as much as anyone that I'm standing here discussing

public opinion research. My own journey began quite differently; it began as a practitioner — listening and learning from people in prisons about what it was they needed in order not to come back. Understanding how difficult the question, 'How do you want your life to be?' is for people who had never previously considered there was another option.

The Switchback approach

I set up Switchback¹ in 2007. It is a resettlement charity based in Spitalfields in East London and its scaffolding is a human relationship that — with both support and challenge — has now helped thousands of young men not only to get things sorted after prison and find employment they can keep, but to fundamentally change their relationship with themselves and society. Its ethos is of seeing the moment of release as an opportunity to choose how you want to go forward. And this approach is in the full knowledge of the numerous pitfalls awaiting individuals in the immediate days and weeks following release. Housing is rare and precarious, family and relationships are often fractured and unreliable, easy ways to pay off old debts with quick money are everywhere, racial profiling in stop and search still has to be contended with, bank accounts are harder to secure without ID or an address, job applications require criminal record disclosure. And yet at Switchback it was always important not to be feeding these young men — at this critical juncture — a story of disempowerment, a story of the world being against them.

Switchback is an organisation that, together with its young men, rallies against these hurdles. An organisation that understands how each new obstacle chips away at someone's resolve to go straight. It is a demonstration of how society should extend a helping hand to people who have served their time and need to start over. Switchback also understands the strength and courage of the young men it works with, and that, in having someone who believes in them, they can overcome these hurdles and build entirely new lives that they can be proud of. Critically, the organisation doesn't further disempower its young men through narratives of victimhood. It recognises that, yes, society

1. Switchback. (n.d.). *Supporting young men to find a way out of the justice system and build a stable, rewarding life they can be proud of*. Retrieved from www.switchback.org.uk

has a responsibility to address roots of crime and offer viable ways out, but also that people have agency and responsibility for their actions.

Charting this course was always a balancing act that felt rare and valuable. But having moved on from the organisation after 15 years of leading it, I found myself looking back on the work we, as justice charities, did to try to influence bigger change in the system. While organisations were doing important — often life-changing — work with individuals, the prison population was ballooning, conditions were deteriorating and cycles of harm and trauma for victims and perpetrators were being perpetuated on a grand scale. I recognised in myself and colleagues a sense of futility and exhaustion, and a growing detachment from the people and communities most affected by crime in their daily lives. I wondered how I might apply the lessons from Switchback — the embracing of complexity and rejection of binary thinking — to changing the system more widely.

Asking new questions

What happens when we actually start listening to those people beyond our ‘bubble’? To what extent are people able to hold on to more than one truth at the same time? And might we be able to find common ground between the extremes of ‘hang em’ and ‘hug em’? Through launching the Common Ground Justice Project² a few months ago, co-founder Sam Boyd and I decided to find out.

One of my initial fears about asking questions was that people wouldn’t care. That my own proximity to the justice system meant I hadn’t noticed that others didn’t really think about it much. While healthcare and education are so obviously crucial to everyone, maybe ‘the man on the street’ felt justice wasn’t something that he was particularly bothered about. Maybe the justice system was seen to be something for ‘other’ people, for ‘poor people’, for ‘bad people’. However, we found the opposite was true.

I was surprised to discover that in fact 42 per cent of us approach debates about criminal justice through the lens of personal experience or through close friends or family (for example as a victim, offender or through

work). This rises to over 50 per cent in some geographical areas. Working together with More in Common,³ we conducted national polling and sat down for deep conversations with voters across the country. The researchers at More in Common commented on the very high engagement on this subject.

What we heard when we listened more deeply to the public

The results were eye-opening. Our pilot research shows most voters and victims are not — as social media would have us believe — at the extremes. They believe in personal and systemic responsibility, punishment and rehabilitation. And how we do justice in this country matters to people.

By using More in Common’s lens of the British Seven Segments,⁴ we were able to gain a far deeper understanding of the public’s starting points than seen before. We learned that people broadly fall into three groups: punishment-first, rehabilitation-first, and balancers in the middle. But across these groups we found many shared sentiments.

What we heard was:

- ❑ A **deep frustration** with the status quo. Public and victim confidence in the system has collapsed. 90 per cent of the public wants change and 64 per cent want ‘major’ change. Only 1 in 5 think that prison reduces reoffending.
- ❑ We observed strong understanding and empathy around systemic drivers of crime, with the punishment-first group, interestingly, even more likely than others to attribute crime to social determinants like poverty or addiction.
- ❑ We found widespread **openness to new ideas**—60 per cent of people support expansion of punishments outside of prison. Interestingly, amongst victims, this openness rises to 68 per cent.
- ❑ And yet... we heard a **hesitancy**—a worry — particularly among women and people from ethnic minorities about what those new ideas might actually *look like* in practice.

The danger is that if we remain in a bubble, we deepen an already polarised debate.

2. The Common Ground Justice Project. (n.d.). *Engaging people across divides to uncover a new way forward for the criminal justice system that cuts crime and commands broad public support*. www.commongroundjustice.uk
3. More in Common. (n.d.). *Understanding polarisation and working in initiatives to tackle division our society*. Retrieved from www.moreincommon.org.uk
4. More in Common. (n.d.). *Segmentation of the British public based on extended research into Britons’ core beliefs, their values and behaviours*. www.moreincommon.org.uk/seven-segments

In short: people are ready for change—but they want to see a path that’s grounded, not abstract or ideological. And they want to be able to visualise it, they want concrete examples of new solutions that speak to their core values.

Meanwhile, we did find one group of voters that stuck out as an outlier, with views that are markedly more liberal and rehabilitation-focussed than the rest of the country. This group, More in Common’s so-called ‘Progressive Activist’ segment, tend to be younger, highly educated, urban, on higher incomes (though not necessarily wealthy) and motivated by a strong sense of societal injustice. They make up around 8 per cent of the country. Yet, strikingly, they make up around 80 per cent of policy and campaigns roles in public and charity sector organisations.

This, I think, should give us pause for thought. It is a big disconnect. And reinforces the need for those of us in policy, campaigns, academia and the charity sector to reach outside our bubble with openness and curiosity. And of course we were looking for the common ground. We heard from Reform voters in the North East and Liberal Democrats in the South West, we spoke to people of all political stripes, ages, ethnic backgrounds and genders in different parts of the country. We also held a group entirely made up of victims of crime and another of people who had themselves been in prison and on probation. Through an array of strong opinions, four clear areas of common ground shone through—principles that the public across divides, find they can come together on:

1. The need for swift and certain punishment. Punishment matters — deeply — to people and their sense of justice having been done, and we won’t get far by shying away from that fact. We found that this belief in punishment is less about retribution and more about justice for victims and beliefs about deterrence (even though, as the research shows, severity of punishment in reality is less effective a deterrent than certainty of being caught). Delays, too, breed distrust. People want consequences to feel timely and real.
2. We heard the need for better accountability—on all sides. Not just for those who commit crimes, but for the system itself—police, courts, politicians. In other words, people who cause harm should be held accountable for their actions, and the government should also be accountable for the wise use of taxpayer funds.
3. The need for clear fairness in sentencing. Too often, people see justice as inconsistent and

unequal. There’s a pervasive sense that the system comes down far too heavily on certain groups, while letting other more serious offenders off too lightly. We heard from one Labour to Reform switcher in Bolton South, ‘There’s a wealth gap. So, the poorer in our communities, their journey to prison is very quick. But if you have money and you can afford top tier defences for exactly the same crime, you’d probably get off and that’s wrong. The Huw Edwards saga. How ridiculous is that that he got away with a suspended sentence, yet somebody can swear at a football match and get six months in prison.’⁵

4. The need to see greater contribution. People want to see those who have done harm making things right—not just sitting behind bars. Strikingly, the value of contribution was a principle shared by prison leavers as much as victims, with many saying they’d wanted to contribute more — both to society, and to victims by way of apology or reparation — but found no way to do so. None of the victims we spoke to had heard of the victim’s levy. As for many voters, this came through in terms of wanting to see people in prison and on probation cease being a tax burden on society and to start to contribute taxes instead. There was a real understanding of the value of employment.

These four emergent common ground justice principles: punishment, accountability, fairness and contribution are revealed from our initial broad questions. This is just the start for us, and we are looking forward to deeper listening in these areas.

A need for bold action

The Sentencing Review signals promising new signs of political bravery, and an openness to bold solutions, which our research shows have the potential for widespread support if they meet some key tests. The scale of the problem is such that we’ll need much more of that boldness in the months ahead.

Prisons are perhaps the most visible part of our criminal justice system, even though people in prison are out of sight behind high walls. Yet, prison is everywhere: TV dramas, documentaries, films. It captures the public’s imagination because prison stands for something clear, you either go to prison, or you don’t. To many, this means justice is done, or it’s not. And that binary means prison becomes *emblematic*—a

5. The Common Ground Justice Project and More in Common. (2025). *Course Correction: Britons’ Expectations of Criminal Justice Reform*, (p. 25). www.moreincommon.org.uk/media/sf3dcdgkz/course-correction-final.pdf

symbol of justice itself. But it's also more complicated than that. On the one hand, the public often sees prison as synonymous with punishment. If someone's done wrong, prison is what makes it right. There is a strong view that it represents a deterrent. And of course it keeps dangerous people off the streets for a period. There is also a prevalent belief that the prison environment needs to be harsh — that to make it punitive it needs to go beyond the deprivation of liberty: 'If we made prisons horrible places, made the punishments ridiculous, no one would do it.'

And yet, when you dig deeper, people also show a huge amount of empathy — especially for those whose crimes are bound up with addiction, poverty, or mental illness. People tend to support rehabilitation. They believe in second chances. One Conservative voter we spoke to who runs a construction company said,

'I've employed two young lads previously young offenders, and they rehabilitated and one of them is now an ambulance technician. He's done very well. The other one runs his own company. So, it does work. If they're given an opportunity and they get respect, I think they give respect back.'

And this exposure to roads away from crime is critical. The existence of prison as an option for punishment and rehabilitation is well known. But — although open to it — the public know very little of what else is available. Despite being unfamiliar with alternatives to prison, fewer than a third of people we heard from agreed with spending the forecast £10bn allocated to new prison building. A clear majority — 59 per cent — supported diverting *at least some of these funds* to community sentencing. Perhaps the vast amount of money earmarked for prison expansion reflects a failure of creativity and imagination for what a different future could look like?

A different approach that we tested on our focus groups was that of the Iceland supermarket boss Richard Walker who suggested that offenders could be sentenced to a job in Iceland instead of prison, with a backstop of jail time in the event of non-compliance.⁶ People physically sat up straighter. Their ears pricked up. This was something they could imagine, that made sense, that spoke to common values: an element of punishment, proper accountability, proportionality and a better sense of contribution to society in return for

harms caused. And there was a real willingness to get behind it — 65 per cent of the public supported this idea. Even the most authoritarian segments of society showed majority support.

It's clear that it would help expand our options if we made visible alternative routes to the same ends. The brilliant James Graham play, *PUNCH*,⁷ does this well: using theatre to reach people with the true story of how justice *can work* through bringing people together across divides. It shows how the values we know are important to people can be brought to bear through the quiet — not widely known — option of restorative justice. Perhaps we should turn the old adage 'Where there's a will there's a way' on its head? Instead, perhaps there's more truth in 'Where people are shown another way there becomes a will'.

Rebuilding public confidence

Nobody who works in any part of the justice system is unaware of the challenges. And it's a credit to the Justice Secretary and the prisons minister, who spoke just before me, that they are seeking to meet these challenges head on, face up to the prisons crisis and — crucially — that they acknowledge the need to rebuild confidence from the ground up.

This is an 'all of us' challenge. We are hearing that the British people:

- Feel let down by the current system.
- Want justice to reflect the values of punishment, accountability, fairness and contribution.
- And are open to reform—but need to trust it.

And for those of us working in policy or advocacy, there is a clear call to action: If we want effective justice reform, we must first build a bridge back to the public. Not by lecturing, but by listening. Not by imposing values, but by finding shared ones. Because without the public there is no reform, only rhetoric.

The public may not be the obstacle but the untapped ally, willing to see what new solutions look like. So, while the first question may be 'What does the public want from prison reform?' the next question must surely be 'Do we have the courage to show them?'

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6. Elliott, F. (2025, January 27). Criminals could be sentenced to work at Iceland instead of being sent to prison in bid to tackle jail overcrowding. *Daily Mail*. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14328995/Criminals-sentenced-work-Iceland-instead-sent-prison.html

7. Graham, J. (2025). *Punch* [Play]. Methuen Drama. Jacob, a teenager from Nottingham, spends his Saturday nights seeking thrills with his friends. One fateful evening, an impulsive punch leads to fatal consequences. After serving prison time, Jacob finds himself lost and directionless. Searching for answers, Joan and David — the parents of his victim James — ask to meet, sparking a profound transformation in Jacob's life. Retrieved from www.punchtheplay.com

Minimising and humanising the use of isolation (segregation): in Dutch prisons

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In most prisons around the world, one finds cells, or a section of the prison, dedicated to separating prisoners from their peers, as a disciplinary punishment a preventive measure or as a protective measure. These ‘prisons within prison’ or ‘deep custody’ units,¹ are known by a variety of names, with ‘separation’, ‘segregation’, ‘isolation’, and ‘solitary confinement’ used interchangeably to describe what is essentially the same practice: one person, locked up alone in a small cell for upwards of 22 hours a day, away from others and from prison life. It is widely accepted that placement in such an environment is not conducive to the health of people in prison. Evidence shows that exposure to these austere prison conditions negatively affects the mental, physical and social health of those subjected to it.^{2,3}

The negative health impacts of solitary confinement and the closed, hidden from view, nature of isolation units, have historically attracted criticism from both inspection bodies and human rights organisations, who call for fewer and even no isolation cells. Prison staff, on the other hand, often suggest that isolation units are essential for maintaining prison order and discipline, and find it difficult to conceive of running prisons without resorting to this prisoner management tool. With these two competing narratives in mind, in 2022 the Dutch Prison Service (DJI) commissioned a study to shed light on all relevant aspects of the use and necessity of isolation cells. The study's findings and recommendations, discussed below, were presented to prison directors, and a working group has developed a new policy on isolation, which is now being implemented.

This article was written jointly by the researcher, the National Director who commissioned the research and the Prison Director who leads the working group

charged with developing the new policy. We begin with a description of the reason for this research and the research findings and recommendations. We then discuss the process that took place to formulate and implement the new policy.

Context

The DJI is characterised by a relatively low imprisonment rate — in September 2023 the Dutch incarcerated 64 people per 100,000 of the national population in one of the 25 prisons run by the DJI under the Ministry of Justice.⁴ The total prison capacity in 2025 was on average 11,034 beds. According to internal DJI resources, the occupation rate in the remand and prison regimes was above 95 per cent.

The use of isolation (segregation), or ‘iso’ as it is colloquially known, in the Netherlands has been the subject of special attention on several occasions over the years, with ad-hoc efforts to restrict its use and to improve the conditions of isolation cells. As part of these efforts, frontline staff and prison directors are now educated about the adverse effects of isolation, soft furniture was introduced in isolation cells in all prison facilities nationwide, and the use of a ‘sanctions card’ stipulating the type and length of punishment for each prison offence was abolished in favour of more customised sanctioning.

In 2022, the Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Youth Protection (RSJ) asked the DJI to include the reduction of solitary confinement as a concrete policy objective. It also recommended developing additional policy directives on disciplinary punishments and solitary confinement in detention. In light of the potentially harmful health effects of isolation, the Council advocated that the use of solitary

1. Shalev, S., & Edgar, K. (2015). Deep Custody: Segregation Units and Close Supervision Centres in England and Wales. *Prison Reform Trust*.
2. Meijers, J. (2018). Do not restrain the prisoner's brain: Executive functions, self-regulation and the impoverished prison environment [PhD thesis]. *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*.
3. Shalev, S. (2014). Solitary confinement as a prison health issue. In S. Enggist, L. Møller, G. Galea, & C. Udesen (Eds.), *Health in Prisons: A WHO guide to the essentials in prison health* (2nd ed., pp. 27-35). *World Health Organisation, Regional Office Europe*.
4. World Prison Brief, <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/netherlands>

confinement cells as a disciplinary punishment should be stopped altogether.

Prison professionals felt that this last recommendation as one-sided and unworkable. They felt that implementing this recommendation would make prisons unsafe for both staff and prisoners. To try and bridge these two viewpoints, the national management of the prison system commissioned an independent scientific investigation into the use of isolation cells in the Netherlands.

A study on the use of isolation: Key findings

In 2022, Dr Sharon Shalev was commissioned by the Prison and Immigration Detention Division (GWVB) to conduct a study investigating what isolation in a penitentiary looks like in practice and what stakeholders thought about the practice.

The study, *Iso: perspectives on prison isolation in the Netherlands* involved quantitative analysis of national statistical data on the use of isolation; field research comprising visits to seven prisons and interviews with 87 prisoners, prison frontline staff, managers, mental health specialists and oversight committee members;⁵ and a spot survey of isolation cell capacity and occupancy levels across all 25 prison facilities of the Netherlands.

The study found that the use of isolation was relatively low, with 32.2 per cent (or 109 out of a total of 339 isolation cells) of all cells set aside for isolation (around 2.7 per cent of all available cells) being occupied during the spot survey (in May 2023). Overall, stays were fairly short: 22 per cent lasted between 1-4 days, and 42 per cent lasted 5-8 days. None lasted longer than 14 days (the maximum permitted duration). However, isolation was the chosen penalty in almost a fifth (18 per cent) of all disciplinary punishments imposed and almost a quarter (24 per cent) of all punishments were for the maximum permitted duration (though time in isolation was sometimes cut short). The most common reasons for placement in a punishment cell were unacceptable behaviour towards fellow prisoners or staff, disruption of order and safety of the prison, and the possession of contraband. In just under 40 per cent of all isolation stays during the spot-survey, isolation was imposed as a

protective measure for varied medical and behavioural reasons.

Once in isolation, conditions were the same for those isolated for protection and those isolated as punishment. Isolation cells were clean but austere. They contained a toilet, a bed, a mattress, and a foam cube to sit on. Some cells also contained a set of shelves. Isolated individuals spent most of the day inside their cells with little to do and with no access to rehabilitative or educational work. They could spend one hour in an outdoors exercise yard, have a shower once every three days, and make a 10-minute telephone call once a week. There was a degree of variation in these basic provisions, with some units allowing daily showers, longer periods in the yard, and more frequent and/or longer telephone calls. Some units kept a small

collection of books which prisoners could borrow, and in others, books could be borrowed from the prison's library. A number of the isolation units had a cell or two with a television behind Plexiglas screen, but in the majority a TV was not available to isolated prisoners. It was interesting to note that the vast majority of people we interviewed, prisoners and staff, thought that providing TVs in isolation would be a positive step. Some felt that TVs should be provided as a standard to help

mitigate the sensory deprivation that is inherent in isolation units whilst others felt that the use of TVs should be discretionary. Only two people - one staff member and one prisoner - thought that providing TVs in isolation would defeat the purpose of these units and that they should therefore not be provided.

In interviews, people who had been isolated said that they understood the reason for their isolation, and they mostly perceived the placement as fair. Staff felt that isolation was necessary but could be less austere and last shorter times. Not a single person - frontline staff, prisoner, or manager - advocated for longer durations. Some managers felt that frontline staff expected them to impose isolation on prisoners who transgressed against them. This perception was only partially supported by what frontline interviewees said. Both prisoners and staff said that isolation could be used in a more nuanced way, and proposed alternatives to isolation as it currently operates. Examples included a 'sliding scale' of restrictions and customised

It is widely accepted that placement in such an environment is not conducive to the health of people in prison.

5. Field research was conducted by Dr Sharon Shalev, Independent Consultant and Research Associate at the Centre for Criminology, Oxford University (PI) with Dr Esther van Ginneken of Leiden University and Maartje Schrauwen, at the time a Management Trainee at Arnhem prison, during August and November 2022.

restrictions — for example, allowing isolated prisoners to spend time on the wing in the daytime or giving isolated prisoners choices (for example, ‘serving’ 5 days in the isolation unit vs. 7 days isolation in their own cell). Other examples included exploring penalties involving ‘community work’ within the prison and developing restorative justice approaches to conflicts.

The study suggested that the reality of isolation units — the austere conditions, minimal regime provisions, little personal autonomy, and punitive practices- contrasted sharply with the mostly measured, non-punitive values expressed by staff in interviews, and with the relatively low use of isolation for relatively short times on the ground.

The study made 46 recommendations. These included reconsideration of policies on isolation; making improvements to material conditions in isolation cells and daily activities offered to isolated prisoners; ensuring that staff working in isolation units were appropriately trained; and that privacy was ensured when close-circuit cameras were used. The study also recommended better distinguishing between cells for protective custody of people who are mentally unwell, and those meant as a disciplinary sanction. In both cases, in-cell provisions and access to staff needed to improve. The study suggested developing a new policy which would ensure that the use of isolation is kept to an absolute minimum and that the duration of placements is as short as possible. Importantly, it suggested to prison managers that they have a mandate to think about isolation in a different way and seek alternatives to current practices.

Re-thinking isolation: From research to practice

In their respective reports, both the RSJ (2022) and Shalev (2023) use the definition of solitary confinement stipulated by the United Nations (UN) in the Nelson Mandela Rule 44.⁶ Solitary confinement is defined as the confinement of a prisoner in separation from others for 22 hours or more a day, without meaningful human contact.

Both studies were examined by an expert group, commissioned by national prisons management to formulate a new vision based on the conclusions and recommendations of Shalev’s investigation. In doing so,

the expert group adopted the definition as per the Mandela Rules and determined that this form of isolation should be avoided in DJI practice as much as possible. This means that prisoners should not be separated from others for 22 hours or more a day, without meaningful contact, when they are placed in a punishment or solitary confinement cell.

However, the concept of isolation is broader than solitary confinement as defined by the Mandela Rules, and in DJI the practice includes any placement in a punishment or isolation cell (or other accommodation space). This (legal) power to isolate will of course continue to exist in the spectrum of punishments and measures that a prison director can use. But when it is applied, it must have a person-centred recovery approach, in which the punishment or measure is proportionate, subsidiary and effective and, when it is

executed, includes a programme tailored to the individual’s needs. The expert group has formulated the following vision on isolation in detention:

Staff felt that isolation was necessary but could be less austere and last shorter times.

‘Isolation (for punishment or care) is only applied if no alternative is sufficient. In the event that isolation is applied, this is done as briefly and humanely as possible’.

A new vision on isolation requires culture change: people within the entire organisation have to think differently about isolation, with the aim of further reducing the number of isolation placements by considering isolation only as a last resort, as expressed in the vision. Recognising local particularities and the great diversity between prisons, especially in terms of the physical infrastructure of the building, their culture and organisational structures, the expert group decided not to translate the new vision into detailed national policy directives. Instead, a set of guidelines were developed, offering a range of alternatives to isolation which can be used (aiming at a change of behaviour, prevention and recovery rather than punishment) and tools for realising the vision, adjusted to local circumstances. The intention is for these tools to provide guidance while ensuring some uniformity in practices nationwide.

To integrate the new guidelines on isolation on the ground, ‘implementation teams’ were formed locally, tasked with developing plans to implement the newly embraced vision. Implementation teams are typically

6. United Nations. (2015). United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) (Resolution 70/175 adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015). UN Doc A/RES/70/175.

led by the prison's Deputy Director or Unit Manager and usually include also frontline staff from the isolation unit, and in some prisons also mental health staff.

This is a major step forward in further reducing the number of isolation placements as well as implementing more humane practices. The implementation of the policy in every prison is followed in the planning and control cycle. Prisons are accountable to Headquarters through an annual report, periodical accountability meetings, benchmarks and performance indicators. Prisons are obligated to report how they implemented the vision as well as the actual measurable performance of their use of isolation cells. When performance is not sufficient and the use of isolation cells is not decreasing, national management will make orders to improve practices.

Reimagining isolation: Examples of local initiatives in two prisons

In PI Rotterdam (De Schie), a busy, closed male prison with a capacity of 252 places, housing both sentenced and remanded detainees, the Isolation Implementation Team undertook several initiatives.

The team composed a questionnaire that was given to each of the prisoners who were placed in isolation over a period of three months. The questionnaire asked about their treatment and communication with unit staff, whether they were seen by a doctor and a psychologist, how they experienced their stay, and whether there was anything that could be done differently. They were also asked specifically about their preferences in terms of mealtimes, when they wanted to have a hot meal (lunch or dinner) and what sort of clothing they would prefer when in isolation. Some of the changes which were then implemented include:

- ❑ Prisoners in isolation are now provided with a daily menu and three meal options.
- ❑ Isolation cells have been equipped with a pouf and a chair made of soft material.
- ❑ A booklet explaining the rules and expectations in isolation has been created. As well as information, the booklet contains physical exercises that can be done in the cell, relaxation exercises, puzzles and blank sheets for writing.
- ❑ The isolation unit is being fitted with a digital board to ensure that information and names are safeguarded to comply with privacy requirements.
- ❑ A mobile training machine which can be placed in the exercise yard has been acquired. Prisoners are also offered stress balls and 'pop it' fidget toys to help reduce stress.
- ❑ The team is working, together with the prison's psychologist, on introducing an 'exit interview'

to be held a few days before the end of the isolation period. The meeting will be held with the prisoner, a staff member from the isolation unit, and a staff member of the prisoner's own unit. During this meeting, they will discuss what can be done differently next time to hopefully avoid the isolation placement.

- ❑ The team is working with the psychologist to set up workshops or presentations for staff on how to communicate and work with prisoners in the isolation unit.

In Lelystad prison, a 652-person prison located outside of Amsterdam, the Isolation Implementation Team reported several initiatives, some still in progress. Changes already implemented include:

- ❑ Enriching cells
- ❑ Installing a chalk wall which detainees can draw or write on
- ❑ Equipping cells with specially furniture made of vandal-proof materials- chair, pouf / table, bed block with a mattress and cupboard on top.
- ❑ Equipping cells with infrared cameras so that lighting doesn't need to stay on at night (where the detainee is on constant watch)
- ❑ When meals and drinks are distributed to prisoners in their cell, the cell door is opened (rather than food being placed in the hatch) to provide some human contact.
- ❑ Prisoners are allowed to keep their own cell on the wing.
- ❑ Good behaviour is rewarded with, for example, extra smoking time.

Changes that are currently in process include:

- ❑ Introducing a smart touch media wall where the prisoner can watch television, listen to the radio, play games, provide information and possibly control his cell lighting.
- ❑ Staff training to ensure that they remain up to date with the latest developments and ideas, for example training courses on psychopathology.
- ❑ Exploration of the possibility of an extra round of nurses for those with suicidal ideation.
- ❑ Recalibration of the guidelines on sanctions.
- ❑ Drawing up an isolation policy with a multidisciplinary team.

It is clear, then, that significant steps are already being taken in the right direction at local level, working towards systemic change. Other examples include a focus on prisoners who are isolated during staff daily morning briefings. In some institutions, a daily consultation which includes behavioural experts now takes place at the isolation unit itself. There are also examples of isolated prisoners being offered activities so that they are not isolated for more than 22 hours a

day. In some institutions, isolation cells are now equipped with touchscreens on which prisoners can play games, write a letter, watch TV, listen to the radio, and so on. Most institutions have also equipped their isolation cells with a clock and in a number of institutions the direction of Mecca is marked with an arrow on the ceiling of the cell, so that Muslim prisoners know in which direction to pray. There are also examples of institutions that allow several isolated prisoners to go to the yard together. In some cells punch bags have been installed to provide an outlet for tension, and in others, murals of landscapes have been painted in order to create a calmer atmosphere.

These examples demonstrate that the Dutch prison system has taken a different path. The expert group is focusing on monitoring current developments and following future developments. The intent is to organise periodic expert meetings for the local implementation teams to report progress and share good practice.

Conclusions

It is of great importance to critically examine prison practices, especially those that have been in

existence for a long time. Independent research with a multi-faceted approach to the subject plays a valuable part in this.

In a prison context, the interests of the penitentiary organisation, prisoners, staff and society are sometimes the same, but certainly also sometimes contradictory. Proposals for improvement are much more likely to succeed if they take all these interests into account.

The use of isolation is a particularly sensitive area of prison policy and practice, where long-standing sentiments and practices are often entrenched and change is difficult to achieve. This project demonstrates how an open minded and mutually respectful approach can result in a fruitful collaboration between a prison service and an independent researcher, and lead to tangible changes on the ground.

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Book Reviews

Ministry to the Incarcerated

by Dr Henry G. Covert

Publisher: Loyola Press Chicago
Illinois (2022)

ISBN: 978-1-60126-827-3
(paperback)

Price £9.22 (paperback)

Reviewer: **Ray Taylor** is a former
prison officer.

Henry Covert's thoughtful book takes a Christian theological approach to the work of prisons and of prison chaplains, which is unsurprising given that the publisher is Loyola Press, Chicago, a Catholic (Jesuit) publisher.

Covert is an ordained minister with the United Church of Christ and prison minister at the State Correctional Institution at Rockview, Pennsylvania. In addition to supporting men undergoing the routine stresses and crises resulting from their incarceration, Covert supports those convicted and sentenced to death. In December 2024, Pennsylvania held 95 such prisoners, awaiting legal dispensation or execution (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections) although at the time of writing, there was a pause in executions in force in Pennsylvania.

Coverts is clearly a man of profound religious conviction. His perspective on issues relating to his mission, and the general role of prison ministry, is interesting to read and contrasts with other, more secular, accounts. He describes, for instance, his views on 'pastoral spirituality... the willingness to experience pain for the sake of others,' and 'attitudes of the heart... that are in God's realm.' (p. 6). This spiritual side of

his understanding of the needs of prisoners is also counterbalanced by a more secular perspective.

He acknowledges that his work includes supporting men of other faith than Catholic Christianity, as well as those with no religion, and the inevitable numbers of men who are skeptical about the role of prison ministry.

Much of the book focuses on matters that are specific to Christian ministry, seeing the aims of a prison chaplain to include 'helping inmates to search out the dark corners of their lives and encourage them to share their findings with God' (p. 7).

This need for personal reflection can also, of course, be relevant to those of other religions and those with no religion, and may be seen as reflecting the practice of secular therapeutic interventions.

In the context of rehabilitation, the book speaks of the need for managing expectations and following realistic goals in order to avoid the constant frustrations that will often attend a person's efforts (p. 8).

Coverts considers, in some detail, his own religious perspective on psychological and behavioural research (Chapter 2). He touches on the power dynamic among male prisoners, who hide their fears and anxieties through the expedients of role-play, bravado and machismo. He goes on to explore familiar carceral themes of lack of control, downward pressures on self-esteem and separation from vital outside familial and social relationships.

These challenges Coverts relates to his personal experience,

citing various specific examples of stressful situations prisoners find themselves in, as a result of these separations during times of their own, or their loved ones' crises. Likewise Coverts relates, through personal experience, many stories of how the prison environment creates so many additional stresses on residents.

More specific to the role of chaplaincy, the author discusses prison weddings. As he says, the desire to marry can come from prior relationships or can arise through correspondence. In either case there may be many benefits to a prisoner marrying during their sentence. These can of course include emotional support but more practical needs such as housing and financial stability. On the other hand, expectations from either partner can also be unrealistic, particularly when the individuals are initially unknown to each other. On the basis of interviewing prospective partners, Coverts expresses pessimistic views, citing naivety and immaturity as being primary causes of what generally results in a 'brief and devastating union.' (p. 48).

Much of the rest of Chapter 2 deals with themes that are familiar to most institutional workers. These include frustrations in dealing with the legal system, economic loss, and issues of medical and care needs.

Covert is surprisingly negative about experiences of dealing with terminally ill prisoners. While the pastoral carer may well find encounters with people dying of chronic illnesses distressing, surely dealing with illness, death and bereavement are a major part of the job description of a minister of

religion? 'What can be said to comfort an inmate who is dying alone in a state prison?' he asks. Prison ministry, says Covert 'has taught me not to struggle for the proper words.' Rather 'a prayerful and compassionate presence is important to a suffering person' (p. 53).

The short section on the author's experience of the process of preparing a prisoner for execution of a death sentence spoke more of the prison's experience than that of the condemned man. During Covert's time as chaplain there were several death warrants signed, all of which were given a stay of execution in good time except two. For one, the execution was halted within 48 hours of the appointed time, while for the other, sentence was carried out by lethal injection. The whole process and the state's taking a person's life was understandably viewed with horror throughout the prison (pp 60,61). More detailed reflection of the one experience of

supporting a man about to be executed is provided as an afterword (p. 121).

Chapter 3 discusses biblical foundations for the Christian minister in prison, comparing prison ministry to the work of Christian churches in the community. Much of this is of little relevance to those who do not seek religious explanations for offending and the experience of incarceration. Perhaps the most relevant part of this chapter is a list (p. 95) of 'areas of ministry' that share a common approach with those providing secular support in prisons or to people needing support generally. The include things like 'being present', 'listening,' 'sharing,' 'supporting' and of course 'challenging.'

Chapter 4 covers improvements required for individual ministers as well as the overall regime, environment and condition of penitentiary incarceration. General issues of prison conditions are discussed, including such essentials as

purposeful activities, incentives, and therapeutic interventions. Again, these areas are well known to general prison practitioners but may be of interest to a non-prison audience, and to those with no direct experience of the carceral environment. There is also considerable reflection on the parole process.

To conclude, this work is likely to be of most interest to other prison religious ministers, rather than to prison staff in general; in particular, those of the various Christian denominations and perhaps those committed to a ministry outside of prison. It may also be of interest to anyone wishing to learn about the individual approach and attitudes of one such minister in the context of the US penal system.

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What are prisons for?

By Hindpal Singh Bhui

ISBN 9781529226898

Publisher: Bristol University Press
Price: £8.99 (paperback), also available on EPUB, Kindle and as an audiobook

Reviewer: **Peter Dawson**, former civil servant, prison Governor and Director of the Prison Reform Trust.

This short, very readable book is part of the 'What is it for?' series, edited by George Miller for Bristol University Press. All of the titles listed pose a challenge to their author, but few will have required as much head scratching as this one. So it's fortunate that they chose someone so steeped in the issues as Hindpal Singh Bhui to address it. He brings an immense knowledge of prisons both at home and abroad, and an enviable grasp of the ways others have approached the book's central philosophical question.

The first chapter, 'A journey into prisons', describes the fascination of living close to a prison as a child — 'a ready source of stories which I thought would impress other children' (p. 2). Hindpal ends up working in prison 'more by chance than design' (p. 3), having trained as a probation officer, and receives the baptism of fire that working in HMP Wandsworth in the late 1990s represents. A desire to change things for the better leads him to a job in the prisons inspectorate, where he remains over 20 years later, having visited over 200 prisons at home and abroad.

This first chapter also sets out how the book will examine the question of purpose by looking at 'who is sent to prison, and why them' (p. 7), rather than simply rehearsing the various statements of purpose in statute or policy documents. It's a method that challenges any complacency based

on purely theoretical analysis. Because the disproportionate incarceration of the poor, people from ethnic minorities and foreign nationals suggests that prison in practice operates as an agent of social control, far from any tidy conception of it as the just conclusion to a just process.

Chapter two conducts a whistlestop tour of modern penal history, describing how the impact of both apparently benign and unquestionably malign policies 'fundamentally challenges the idea that the prison and other agencies of law and order evolved primarily to reduce harm to individuals or society' (p. 33). With brief outlines of how social and political context has informed governments' approaches to prisons, and references to key thinkers including Foucault and Garland, the author makes a convincing case that how and why governments have used prisons has always represented a choice, and that 'punishing criminal behaviour was only one of those reasons and, until comparatively recently, was hardly an objective of prison at all' (p. 38).

In chapter three, this theme is advanced by looking at how prison systems in different parts of the world have served very different purposes, reflected in who and how many are incarcerated as a result. Chapter four looks in more detail at examples of mass incarceration and its chilling correspondence with persecution on the basis of race. The author describes the common view that mass incarceration has its roots in politicians competing to look tough on crime, largely in pursuit of electoral advantage. But in examining the American example more closely, he exposes the deliberate use of prison to substitute for the lost machinery of slavery and segregation. The example of equally deliberate

decarceration policies in Finland following the second world war gives some small comfort, but the author concludes that the UK compares more closely to the US than to Finland. He shows how mass incarceration in different jurisdictions has borne no relation to the incidence of crime prior to its adoption, nor to any reduction in crime thereafter. However, perhaps the most insidious harm of all is how it has 'achieved the normalisation of a fundamentally abnormal state of affairs', with 'its insistent message that prison is the obvious solution to crime and the only means of delivering a meaningful punishment' (p. 78).

Chapter five takes us in a slightly different direction, rehearsing many of the well-known general characteristics of the people who end up in our prisons. It is illuminated and humanised by real examples, and tackles the 'rational choice' perspective — essentially, that any prisoner has volunteered for that status — with an insight that can only come from innumerable hours spent listening to those people. The importance of choice is not minimised, but the author quotes McNeill as saying 'what correctional agencies need to work to correct is not an errant individual, but — more often — a broken set of social relationships' (p. 95). Chapter six builds on that insight with the most empathetic section of a highly empathetic work, acknowledging that for some prison has provided the 'hard break' that they needed from a damaging lifestyle. But it also describes what Crewe formulates as the need to construct a 'penal avatar' (p. 109) as the way to survive a long sentence, undermining any idea that prison is for most a conducive context for 'rehabilitation'.

Chapter seven, 'Where next for prisons', considers a variety of different schools of thought about

what prisons are for and what their future should be. Penal enthusiasts, abolitionists and liberal reformers all get a fair hearing, and there is a risk that the reader is left dissatisfied by this impeccably reasonable but ultimately inconclusive analysis. Wasn't this book supposed to answer the question? Endearingly, the author confesses all on the final page — 'I realised fairly quickly that I was never going to deliver a neatly packaged answer to the question (p. 138). But by that stage he has done something more important. He suggests that the starting point for a coherent set of ideas around purpose in prisons needs to be to ask some different and fundamental questions. He lists them:

- ❑ How can we reduce crime?
- ❑ How can we reduce harm, including to people who break the law?

- ❑ How can we prevent the criminal justice system from reinforcing social inequality, and instead make it a means of promoting equality?
- ❑ How can we best achieve the socially useful functions of prisons?
- ❑ Does punishment require the prison?' (p. 137)

I take this to signify that if the expectations of what prisons can achieve were both more honest and better informed, we might more realistically reserve this most painful of punishments to the circumstances that really require it, and in which some lasting benefit might result.

Over the course of a career in and around prisons I came to share what Hindpal describes as 'the feeling of unease and even confusion...about what they do and why' (p. 7). I think that's a healthy reaction to a profession that administers the deliberate

infliction of suffering. But it should prompt anyone working in this field to stop and take stock of what they are engaged in. It's difficult to see how healthy policy or healthy practice can come about if they don't, but my experience was that I was rarely if ever, required to read any serious literature on the issue. I suspect many of my successors might confess to the same experience. A few hours spent with the words of Hindpal Singh Bhui would represent a very good and accessible way of starting to put that right.

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Work, Culture, and Wellbeing Among Prison Governors in England and Wales

By Karen Harrison, Rachael Mason, Helen Nichols and Lauren Smith

Publisher: Palgrave MacMillan (2024)

Price: £109.99 (hardback) £87.50 (ebook)

Reviewer: **Dr Jamie Bennett** is a Prison Group Director in HM Prison and Probation Service.

Governors have a particular legal, institutional and cultural status in prisons. They represent the prisons they lead and are often considered to shape and embody the establishment. They are seen as key players in success and failure. Belief in the potential of prison managers is reflected in a recent government White Paper, which set out key policy proposals, acknowledging that:

‘Our plans for reform have been built on our trust in Governors to deliver, and on the recognition that they are best placed to drive effective change in their establishments to improve prisoner outcomes’.¹

This book, written by a multi-disciplinary team at University of Lincoln, draws on interviews with 63 prison managers in the UK. The research is novel, focussing on the wellbeing of prison managers, describing how and why they experience stress and distress, how they cope with the demands of their work and how the culture and institution ameliorate or exacerbate harmful effects. While much management research is instrumental, focussing on how to make managers more effective or

efficient, this research is profoundly humanising, seeking to understand the affective experience of people working in prisons.

The participants in the research — managers in prisons who are members of the Prison Governors’ Association — talk movingly of some of the harmful effects of their work. Some described compromised physical and mental health, and impacts on relationships with others. Many described a work-life imbalance, tipped in favour of work, which left a feeling that they ‘gave most of themselves to work with just a little left for family and friends, and hardly anything for themselves’ (p. 59). Some reported a decrease in self-care leading to poor eating habits, poor sleep patterns, and reduced exercise levels. These stark accounts highlight that prisons can be harmful environments not only for those who live there, but also for those who work in them, with the impact spilling over into family life and life outside.²

The authors delve deeper into the features of organisational culture that reinforce and exacerbate the harmful effects of prison work. They particularly highlight two factors — masculinity and managerialism. Masculinity has long been recognised as a feature of prison work³. The authors here draw upon the concept of ‘Masculinity Contest Culture’ (MCC), which has four core dimensions: show no weakness; strength and stamina; put work first, and; dog-eat-dog, a kind of hypercompetitiveness. These dimensions drive a culture of overwork, presenting a front of

copied, and resistance to accessing support. The masculine culture also has negative effects for women in the workplace, leaving many feeling that they cannot be their authentic selves, must adapt to survive and struggle to balance caring responsibilities.⁴ The second factor is managerialism, which describes the increasing use of surveillance through targets, audits and other measures, the promotion of general management approaches rather than distinct prison management, and nurturing a more compliant professional culture.⁵ The authors describe how managerialism has driven increasing, unrealistic and unsustainable workloads, a demanding hierarchical structure, and internalised desire to comply.

Much of the findings make bleak reading, if recognisable to anyone who manages prisons. The authors, however, do not simply offer a prophecy of doom, but also excavate some of the ways in which managers are able to survive and indeed thrive in such a difficult environment. These factors include good self-care, access to informal support from line managers, colleagues, and family, and valuing the meaningful opportunities prison work offers such as having a positive impact on the lives of others and serving the community. The authors propose ways in which prisons can move from disenchantment to re-enchantment, such as offering greater professional autonomy, improving resources and shifting the culture through better support. These reforms, they suggest hold out the utopian prospect of

1. Ministry of Justice (2021). Prisons strategy White Paper. HM Government.
2. For an account of ‘spillover’ experienced by prison officers see: Crawley, E. (2004). *Doing Prison Work: The Public & Private Lives of Prison Officers*. Willan.
3. For example, see footnote 2: Crawley (2004); and Bennett, J. (2015). *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local cultures and individual agency in the late modern prison*. Palgrave Macmillan.
4. See Smith, V. (2021). *The experiences of women prison governors*. *Prison Service Journal*, 257, 22-28.
5. See also footnote 3: Bennett (2015), and; Bennett, J. (2024). *Managing Prisons: Managerialism, austerity and moral blindness*. Palgrave MacMillan

'enchanted workplaces...that allow people to be active agents through the facilitation of autonomy, where people feel they are impacting within their work environment, where they perceive meaning and purpose, and where they can flourish' (p.193).

The book concludes by proposing the Humanisation of Workplace Wellbeing (HoWW) model. This model sets out that the prison working environment is made up of core factors, which can positively or negatively affect

wellbeing, including power, culture, and relationships. Individuals are impacted by this culture, albeit they can respond and make sense of this in different ways. This model is the theoretical contribution offered by this book and is one that could inform an evidence-based approach for thinking about organisational wellbeing strategies.

This fascinating book is a significant and novel contribution to the body of knowledge on prison managers. In their choice of subject, methodology and

analysis, the authors show a profound concern for the lived experiences of prison managers. The findings will be of great interest to prison managers themselves but also to policy makers thinking about prison staff, leadership and culture.

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Prisoner Leaders: Leadership as Experience and Institution

Edited by Marion Vannier and Paula Harriott

Published by: Palgrave MacMillan
Price: £119.99 (hardback), £95.50 (eBook)
ISBN: 978-3-031-78711-9 (hardback), 978-3-031-78712-6 (eBook)

Reviewer: Dr. Jamie Bennett is a Prison Group Director in HM Prison and Probation Service

This innovative book explores the nature of prisoner leadership, that is both the exercise of power and influence within the informal prison culture as well as more formal roles such as peer support and representation.

The book is edited by Paula Harriott, who has served a prison sentence and subsequently has become an activist, broadcaster and is CEO of the charity Unlock, and Marion Vannier, who is a distinguished scholar currently a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Manchester and a UKRI Future Leader Fellow. The book chapters are co-produced by authors who have experienced imprisonment and academics. The approach invited the authors to capture personal experience and reflections while also situating this within the sociological literature on prisons. The editors describe this process as 'participant action research' and 'collective auto-ethnography', terms that root the work in an endeavour to understand lived experience in prisons. While this approach may not be entirely new, for example a similar approach was taken in a special edition of *Prison Service Journal* (issue 272), it is rare and is put to a specific use in this book. There is no question that the method has yielded valuable insight and puts into action a commitment to greater inclusivity in prison research.

The chapters cover a range of aspects of prisoner leadership. This includes the use of formal peer support and representative roles in areas such as prison education and drug treatment. These are roles that have long been recognised as having a positive benefit both for the leaders themselves and for those they are supporting. Yet the book does not solely focus on these ways in which leadership is co-opted and harnessed by the institution. Chapters also explore the ways in which informal leadership is exercised within the prisoner culture. This includes the recognition that those involved in drug economy develop and deploy leadership skills including entrepreneurship, creativity, problem solving and conflict resolution.

A particularly bold chapter is that focussing on prison violence. It would have been easy in a book like this to ignore the use of violence in prisons and instead to focus on more prosocial leadership, but this book does not choose the easy path. The chapter on prison violence by Usman Ahmed, Caragh Kyle, Olga Sánchez de Ribera and Nicholas Trajtenberg Pareja, examines formal roles such as violence reduction representatives, but also describes how people in prison deploy violence as a power resource to provide them with influence both with the prison authority and within the prison culture. The authors of this chapter argue that within the power structures and culture of prisons: 'Potential leaders sometimes have no other choice but to take extreme measures' (p.39). The chapter is in some ways a work of 'ultra-realism' in that it seeks to explore the uncomfortable reasons people act in harmful ways. In this chapter, it is suggested that prisons undermine effective leadership in the context of violence through neglect (that is ambivalence and suspicion of prisoner leaders), imposition of

restrictive models that stifle authenticity, and inadvertently fostering violent behaviour among prisoners (through cultural expectations and the pervasiveness of violence). The analysis could be criticised for potentially legitimising violence by describing it as necessary, underplaying the dangers of unregulated and arbitrary violence, and minimising the contribution of the imported hyper-masculine prisoner culture. This is nevertheless a thought-provoking and intellectually bold chapter, characteristic of this book overall.

Further chapters explore gender and race. In relation to gender, Mundill Mahil and Emily Turner, describe that leadership in women's prisons is particularly characterised by advocating for others. Leadership is collaborative, culturally sensitive and relational. Ben Okoli and Kimmett Edgar's chapter on race opens with reference to the prison writings of George Jackson, an example of how American culture dominates the framing of race and imprisonment. There are limits to the use of such analysis given the differences in history and society. The work of artist and film-maker Steve McQueen has attempted to give greater prominence in popular culture to the history of racial oppression, resistance and empowerment in Britain. His TV film collection *Small Axe* (2020) includes stories from courts, police and prisons, illustrating how racial power and criminal justice are entangled in distinct ways in British history. The chapter argues that race is a salient factor, that is that prison culture makes Black men's race a central factor in their everyday lives. This can sometimes mean that negative, racialised judgements are made about conduct, behaviour and potential. Understanding and nurturing Black leadership, it is argued, can be

humanising not only for individuals but for the wider culture.

Collectively, the chapters comprising this book offer a serious and thoughtful examination of prisoner leadership. The book recognises that leadership may be institutionally sanctioned and formal but may also emerge organically within the informal hierarchies and power structures. Individuals will import skills and experiences that enable leadership,

and their capacity to exercise this or the way they do so, may alter over time. The nature of the prison environment also plays a role in the type of leadership that is fostered and encouraged. Leadership is shaped by an interplay between individual, cultural and institutional factors.

Marion Vannier and Paula Harriott have produced a novel and insightful book that will be of value to prison practitioners, researchers

and those interested in leadership, prison cultures and the potential of lived experience.

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