Crossing professional boundaries: Which factors increase prison staff vulnerability to wrongdoing?

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Prison staff wrongdoing in England and Wales has attracted media attention and academic concern. However, it has not, until now, been the subject of any focussed research to increase the understanding of why people risk their careers and possible imprisonment to engage in wrongdoing. Given the paucity of previous research, an exploratory study was conducted to address this knowledge gap. The findings reveal a workforce which feels undervalued by managers as well as wider society. The data also identifies individual, organisational and societal factors which increase staff vulnerability to wrongdoing. One of the conclusions drawn from the findings is that staff wrongdoing cannot be understood as the actions of individual 'bad apples', instead, it requires a holistic approach which addresses wrongdoing at all levels.

Prison staff work in environments which are challenging, stressful and dangerous with a high risk of physical assault and verbal abuse from prisoners.[1] Prison staff, particularly officers, have to maintain security and order but also be caring and supportive; they are both 'turnkeys' and 'care bears'.[2] Although non-custodial staff do not have the responsibility of 'turnkeys', they face the same challenges as custodial staff in setting clear boundaries with prisoners. Indeed, McIlwain argues that maintaining professional boundaries can be more challenging for non-custodial staff as their work might involve regular private meetings with the same prisoner and a greater need to be empathetic.[3]

Daily life in prisons in England and Wales is governed by the Prison Rules 1999, described by Loucks as an 'impenetrable bureaucracy' (p.6).[4] As noted by Liebling, Price and Shefer, it would be impossible to enforce all of the Prison Rules and prison policies all of the time.[5] Prison staff therefore have to translate policy into practice and to allow flexibility around rule enforcement. However, this discretionary power can lead to uncertainty around professional boundaries, particularly when rules are enforced unfairly and/or inconsistently. Importantly, discretionary power also means there are ample incentives and opportunities for staff wrongdoing, both for staff who actively decide to engage in wrongdoing and for those who find themselves on the proverbial 'slippery slope' and believe they have no other option than to continue to continue down the slope to engage in more serious wrongdoing.

Given the paucity of research into this area, my research was necessarily exploratory in nature and focussed on three key areas: how wrongdoing is perceived by prison staff; which factors are believed to increase vulnerability and what are the perceived barriers to reporting wrongdoing. This article focusses on the factors which make staff more vulnerable to wrongdoing.

What is staff wrongdoing?

Staff wrongdoing is behaviour which violates ethical, moral and formally established rules. It is a continuum of behaviours which range from 'bending' rules, for example, letting prisoners out of their cells

1. 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; Clements, A., & Kinman, G. (2021). Job demands, organisational justice and emotional exhaustion in prison officers. *Criminal Justice Studies, 34*(4), 441-458.
2. Tait, S. (2008). Care and the prison officer: Beyond 'turnkeys' and 'care bears'. *Prison Service Journal, 180,* 30-11
3. McIlwain, G. (2005). *Professional misconduct between non-custodial staff and inmates: a study of Queensland's correctional centres* [PhD Thesis]. Griffith University, Queensland.
4. Loucks, N. (2000). *Prison rules: a working guide.* Prison Reform Trust.

for showers during lock-up, through to the illegal such as theft of prisoner property and the trafficking of contraband. In England and Wales, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) defines wrongdoing 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)[6]

HMPPS's Counter Corruption Policy highlights how serious wrongdoing, in particular the trafficking of mobile phones and drugs, can fuel violence, debt and the illicit economy. However, even low level staff wrongdoing can contribute to a culture of unprofessional behaviour, destroy trust between staff and prisoners and erode public trust in the legitimacy of prisons and prison staff.[7]

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Close working proximity between staff and prisoners can lead to over familiarity with prisoners. This can, in turn, be associated with an increased risk of grooming and conditioning of staff. In their book *Games Criminals Play,* Allen and Bosta identified the steps which prisoners use to 'set-up' a member of staff for corruption through first blurring professional boundaries, then violating them.[8] The first step is for prisoners to observe staff, listen to staff conversations and watch which staff exercise their discretion to violate minor rules. Prisoners then test staff through offering food or initiating physical contact with staff such as a pat on the back. If the staff member fails to object, the prisoner can groom and manipulate them further, building up to a request to engage in serious wrongdoing. Once the staff member has violated professional boundaries, they are then vulnerable to prisoner threats to report the wrongdoing behaviour to the prison managers. These 'games criminals play' can therefore start off in a small way but may trigger a descent down the slippery slope towards more serious corruption.

The case of ex-prison officer Lee Davies illustrates how a failure to maintain professional boundaries can lead to corruption. As an inexperienced officer, Lee Davies was put in charge of a cleaning group. He became friendly with the group and began to agree to their requests to be let out for showers during lock up. Although some other officers pointed out he should not do this, no one explained how favouritism could become problematic. When one of the cleaners was upset, Lee again breached prison policy and went alone into the cell to console him. The prisoner told Lee his father was dying and asked Lee to bring in a phone so he could speak to his father. Lee agreed. Once he had committed this crime, Lee was 'asked' to continue to bring in contraband. Although Lee now says he knew what he was doing was wrong, he felt trapped. After a year of bringing in phones and drugs, Lee was caught and given a custodial sentence.[9]

The training mantra of being 'friendly but not friends' is very difficult to put into practice, especially for new recruits who have only received limited training and find themselves on a wing with other inexperienced staff. Two of the scenarios in my research survey included situations which could lead to inappropriate relationships. One scenario portrayed a female member of staff who was observed spending a lot of time with a male prisoner and was seen smiling at the prisoner when he touched her on the arm. The other scenario was where an officer confided personal problems to a

5. Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012). *The prison officer.* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
6. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. (2022). *Counter Corruption and Reporting Wrongdoing Policy Framework.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-corruption-and-reporting-wrongdoing.
7. Ross, J. (2013). Deconstructing correctional officer deviance: Toward typologies of actions and controls. *Criminal Justice Review, 38*(1), 10-126; 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.
8. Allen, B., & Bosta, D. (1981). Games criminals play: *How you can profit by knowing them.* Rae John Publishers.
9. Evolving Prisons podcast (2024 17 March). Available at: https://www.evolvingprisons.com/podcast/episode/301b2f1f/imprisoned-for-being-a-corrupt-prison-officer

sympathetic prisoner. Both scenarios represent breaches of the Prison Rules and should be recognised as professional boundary violations. However, despite a constant stream of media reports on prison staff being prosecuted after engaging in an inappropriate relationship with prisoners, neither of the scenarios were recognised as 'very serious' by the majority of survey respondents.

At present there is insufficient understanding as to why this low level wrongdoing is not perceived to be a boundary violation. It may be that prison staff only consider inappropriate relationships to be serious if they become sexual, or that the scenarios portrayed behaviours which occur so frequently they were not considered as types of wrongdoing. Whatever the reasons, there appears to be a lack of understanding that nearly all inappropriate relationships begin with a blurring of professional boundaries and can often be the starting point for various forms of prison staff corruption.[10] There is, therefore, an urgent need for focussed research on inappropriate relationships to address this ongoing problem.

As wrongdoing involves the violation of professional boundaries, it is essential that prison staff know where the boundaries lie. However, the boundaries are not clear cut and can vary according to the prisoner and the member of staff.[11] As one research participant noted:

> 'It's really easy for the boundaries to become blurred … I think it's just human nature where people are working and living together in close proximity for periods of time. And it can be quite innocent, with no malice or intent, that over time those boundaries become eroded.'

The question therefore arises as to what are the 'right reasons' for prison staff to exercise their discretion and blur or cross professional boundaries through bending the rules. Liebling, Price and Shefer conclude that decisions are informed by individual interpretation, knowledge, values, experience and relationships.[12] Unfortunately, many prison staff in today's prisons in England and Wales, lack experience and sufficient training so their ability to recognise the 'right reasons' to exercise their discretion to 'bend' the rules may be lacking.

The majority of prison staff do not decide to work in prisons with the intention of engaging in corruption. However, there is increasing evidence that some staff join, or soon after joining, actively pursue money making opportunities.

The study

In 2011, Jewkes noted that Category B male local prisons are generally regarded as least fit for purpose.[13] This situation has not improved. The ongoing problems faced by local prisons is reflected by the number of Urgent Notifications (UNs) issued by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Since the UN process was introduced in 2018, UNs have been issued to 16 establishments, of which nine were to Category B male local prisons.[14] The prisons were identified by the Inspectorate of Prisons as having high levels of violence, particularly against staff, high levels of recorded self-harm, poor living conditions, and major drug problems. These issues mean staff are more likely to suffer from higher levels of stress which have been linked with increased wrongdoing.[15] I therefore

10. 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; 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; Goldsmith, A., & Halsey, M. (2018). *Literature review: correctional corruption.* Centre for Crime and Policy Research, Flinders University.
11. 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.
12. See footnote 5: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2012).
13. Jewkes, Y. (2011). Local prisons. In Jewkes, Y. and Bennett, J. (Eds), *Dictionary of prisons and punishment.* (pp. 156-157). Routledge.
14. HM Inspectorate of Prisons. (2025). https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-reports/?listing_search=urgent+notifications&publication_typeyear=0&detention_type=0&report_themes=0.
15. 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; 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

decided to collect survey and interview data from two Category B male local prisons. One is a large prison in a major city while the other is a small prison in a provincial city. This permitted comparisons between the two prisons, while excluding variations such as prison category and prisoner gender. The surveys included 17 scenario questions which portrayed different situations prison officers may find themselves in. Respondents were asked to rate the scenarios in terms of perceived seriousness. The survey also asked for opinions on vulnerability factors. All respondents were asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed. If they did not want to be interviewed, they were asked to expand on their answers in a text box. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants across both prisons. It is appreciated that the findings lack generalisability due to the relatively small sample size, however, the vulnerability factors identified through this research shed some light on why prison staff engage in wrongdoing.

Crossing professional boundaries: Victims or villains?

The majority of prison staff do not decide to work in prisons with the intention of engaging in corruption. However, there is increasing evidence that some staff join, or soon after joining, actively pursue money making opportunities. Nick Hardwick (former Chief Inspector of Prisons), Charlie Taylor (current Chief Inspector of Prisons), the Prison Officers Association and researchers have all expressed their belief that Organised Criminal Gangs (OCGs) recruit or 'encourage' individuals to work in prisons with the sole aim of conveying contraband into the prison.[16] Some of these staff, might, indeed be 'villains' but others might feel they have no choice if they or their family are threatened with dire consequences if they do not agree to the OCG instruction. Hence, even this type of wrongdoer might have mitigating reasons for engaging in corruption.

Although some 'villains' decide to engage in corrupt activities to make money as a one off, they might not realise they could then be blackmailed into regular wrongdoing. Research participants explained how being paid to engage in corrupt behaviour as a single opportunity to boost income was not an option for staff who 'crossed the line':

> 'It won't just be once because people will know you've done it and they'll get their hooks into you and intimidate you into doing more, or you're doing it for emotional, relationship reasons … that's not going to stop with just one pass but so invariably people do multiple passes and get embroiled in a long term affair.'

Counter Corruption training in England and Wales recognises how relationship and financial difficulties increase individual vulnerability to corruption, as do drug and alcohol problems.

Whilst it is not contested that some staff are 'villains', the majority of staff have no initial intention of engaging in serious wrongdoing. It is therefore necessary to understand the factors which leads these staff to engage in wrongdoing. These factors can be described as individual, organisational and societal.

Individual vulnerability factors

Counter Corruption training in England and Wales recognises how relationship and financial difficulties increase individual vulnerability to corruption, as do drug and alcohol problems. Staff who feel isolated at work or who are involved in one:one working with prisoners are also at greater risk of over-familiarity. The Counter Corruption training videos (based on real life examples) describe how some of these factors could lead to inappropriate relationships. One of the videos focusses on how a female member of staff who suffered a marriage breakdown started to drink heavily and, due to these problems, formed an inappropriate relationship with two prisoners before smuggling in contraband for the prisoners. A second video describes how a different female member of

16. Pidd, H., & Syal, R. (2023). Criminal gangs in UK sending recruits in to train as prison officers, union warns. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/27/organised-crime-gangs-uk-sending-recruits-to-train-as-prison-officers-union-warns; Sylvester, R. (2024, April 23). Gangs 'infiltrating prison workforce to help distribute drugs'. *The Times;* Tingle, R. (2024). How gangs are planting prison officers in jails: cartels are getting 'clean' members to work behind bars as 'sleeper agents' so they can pump drugs across Britain's prisons. *Mailonline;* Treadwell, J., Gooch, K., & Barkham Perry, G. (2019). *Crime in prison: what now and where next?* Available at: https://www.warwickshire-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PCCs-present-plan-to-government-to-tackle-organised-crime-in-prisons.pdf?x94727https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13339705/Prison-drugs-sssstory.html

staff also experienced a marriage breakdown and formed an inappropriate relationship with a prisoner who started to blackmail her. However, the current training does not warn staff as to how easily prisoners are able to observe staff and identify those who are experiencing personal problems or who seem isolated from other staff. Nor does the training highlight how grooming by prisoners can begin with seemingly innocuous behaviour such as providing a sympathetic ear and listening to the staff member's personal difficulties.

In her in-depth study of why four experienced American female staff entered into relationships with male prisoners, Jones identified several common themes.[17] These included personal vulnerability factors but also a lack of knowledge of appropriate boundaries and the prison culture which staff believed prevented them from seeking help. These conclusions were in line with my research findings. It was striking how many of my research participants recognised that lack of knowledge and fear of seeking guidance increased vulnerability to wrongdoing. Several people used the term 'naivety' to describe staff who were not experiencing personal difficulties but who were vulnerable due to their lack of training and experience. Not only are these staff more vulnerable to unintentionally crossing professional boundaries but their lack of knowledge can also influence subsequent decision making. If a prisoner then threatens to report the staff member for the boundary violation, the prison culture, particularly the fear of being disciplined might mean it is easier for them to engage in more serious wrongdoing than seek help from their manager.

If staff do not believe that managers are fair and supportive, their perception of organisational justice can be undermined.

Organisational factors

Research participants expressed concern about how their job had become more challenging and how they faced increasing levels of violence towards staff. These perceptions are confirmed by HMPPS's own statistics. From 2010-2022 prisoner assaults on staff increased by over 250 per cent.[18] During the duration of this research protesting behaviour such as barricading/hostage taking, concerted indiscipline and incidents at height increased in the 12 months to March 2023.[19] Although my research did not directly address job stress, participants referred to factors which could increase job stress. These factors included inadequate staffing, inexperienced staff, the lack of resources, prisoner violence and the high numbers of prisoners with complex mental health problems. Furthermore, as previous research has shown, high levels of job stress is associated with job dissatisfaction, boundary violations, inappropriate relationships with prisoners, high turnover, absenteeism, low staff morale, lower organisational commitment and staff corruption.[20]

The lack of adequate staff training, chronic prisoner overcrowding, the prevalence of drugs and mobile phones were additional problems which participants highlighted as daily challenges. This was particularly the case in the larger prison in which this research was conducted. These ongoing issues have been identified by external monitoring bodies including the Prison Inspectorate, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture as well as academics including Kate Gooch and James Treadwell.[21] In addition to these problems, my

17. 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.
18. In 2010 there were 2,848 assaults on prison staff of which 302 were classified as serious. In the 12 months prior to September 2022, there were 7,356 assaults on staff of which 721 were serious (HMPPS Jan 2023).
19. HMPPS. (2023). *Annual Digest.* Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651d3a76bef21800156ded1a/HMPPS-annual-digest-2022-23_FINAL1_RevisedSept23.pdf
20. See footnote 1: Armstrong, G.& Griffin, M. (2004).; 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 8: Mahfood, V., Pollock, W., & Longmire, D. (2013).
21. Gooch, K., & Treadwell, J. (2024). The Prison Firm: the 'transportation' of organised crime, the evolution of criminal markets and contemporary prisoner society. *Criminology and Criminal Justice. Special issue: New geographies of organised crime, 1*-20.

research identified two further organisational factors which contribute towards a struggling workforce: the gulf between management and staff as well as the pressure and lack of support experienced by management themselves.

Distrust between governors and staff is not new. In 2009 the House of Commons Justice Committee reported on the role of prison officers, noting that 'historically, the relationship between the uniformed prison officer and management has been assessed as poor' (p.36).[22] This situation appears not to have improved. Officer participants in my research described management as being like politicians who care more about appearances:

> 'All they [managers] care about is delivering the regime, they don't care about staff safety, they just care about looking good on paper.'

The belief that management would not support staff has many ramifications. One officer in my research described how she was more worried about the paperwork and possible punishment for drawing her baton to break up a fight between prisoners, while another officer admitted he chose to flush cannabis found in a prisoner's cell down the lavatory instead of completing the paperwork on the basis the charge would get 'thrown out' by a governor. This level of distrust between management and staff is an ongoing problem for the Prison Service. If staff do not believe that managers are fair and supportive, their perception of organisational justice can be undermined.

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It is not just officers who feel unsupported in their work, research focussed on the wellbeing of management has found that managers also feel overworked and undervalued.[23] The development of managerialism from the 1980s and the endless target setting and monitoring by Prison HQ has intensified control whilst simultaneously eroding the professional discretion of prison governors.[24] Governing governors are told by HQ what their budgets will be and how their resources should be used but they are also held to account for the performance of their prison. Despite their lack of control, governing governors are often criticised in areas over which they have limited authority including recruitment which increases their sense of frustration and resentment towards Prison HQ. [25]

Many of the manager participants in this study referred to the rules, policies and regulations imposed on them by Prison HQ. One issue in particular raised by participants, was that of recruitment and vetting and how it is controlled by Prison HQ. Although HMPPS describes vetting as 'the first line of defence against corruption' (p.12), participants in my study echoed the findings of Gooch and Treadwell that recruitment and vetting for prison officers is *'notoriously weak'* (p.17).[26] This frustration was expressed very clearly by participants who believed that the 'wrong sort' of people are recruited as prison officers. Participants described how inadequate recruitment, vetting and training meant that many new recruits were 'wannabe' social workers who were completely unprepared for the realities of working in prisons. These officers were soon overwhelmed by the challenges of working in large prisons and resigned with their vacancies being filled by more young, inexperienced staff.

Societal factors

Historically prison staff have seen themselves as under-valued, under-resourced, neglected and

22. Justice Committee. (2009). *Role of the prison officer. Twelfth report of session 2008-09.* Available at: https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/102/justice-committee/publications/reports-responses/?
23. Harrison, K., & Nichols, H. (2023). The health and wellbeing of prison governors in England and Wales. *Prison Service Journal, 268,* 4-10.
24. Bennett, J. (2015). Managing prisons in an age of austerity. *Prison Service Journal, 222,* 15-24.
25. Taylor, C. (2023). The importance of culture where it comes from, where it goes wrong and how it can be sustained and improved. *Prison Service Journal, 269,* 8- 11.
26. See footnote 4: HMPPS (2022); see footnote 17: Gooch, K., & Treadwell, J. (2024).

misunderstood by wider society.[27] These feelings of being unappreciated have been exacerbated by the post 2010 austerity cuts which resulted in a decrease of officer numbers by 26 per cent.[28] As the greatest number of staff losses occurred among the most experienced officers, there was a collective loss of not just 'boots on the wing' but also jailcraft knowledge. The impact of the staffing cuts in my research was recognised by all long serving participants. Although the Government in 2016, realising the disastrous effects on prisons, committed to recruit additional staff, the huge loss of experienced staff has had ongoing effects.

The feeling of isolation and being misunderstood by society has persisted. Participants in my study described how they felt society regarded them as 'thugs' and referred to the prison service as the 'forgotten service'. This feeling of being overlooked was often expressed alongside complaints about salaries when compared to those of the police force or border staff. Although starting salaries have increased since the data collection in my research, the findings are consistent with those of a larger survey distributed to all prison officers in England and Wales by the Justice Committee in 2023. The responses to the Justice Committee survey revealed that the longer staff spent in the prison service the less satisfied they were with their salary package, while 51 per cent felt their salary was not in line with other similar public sector jobs.[29]

It was not just the failure of prison staff salaries keeping pace with other public sector services which made respondents feel forgotten, it was also Government failure to provide sufficient funding to run the prisons. As one participant noted:

> 'There are staffing shortages, not enough money, not enough programmes, not enough vocational kind of opportunities.'

Despite the overall negative findings, my research revealed that participants in the smaller prison were far more positive than those in the large prison. These staff reported higher morale, believed there was little corruption in their prison and had greater faith in management's ability to control corruption. This prison had lower levels of violence, with most prisoners engaged in work or education. It also had positive inspection reports. Unsurprisingly, the staff sample in the smaller prison was older and more experienced. This difference is consistent with earlier research which concluded that prison staff in smaller prisons tend to have a more positive relationships with management and colleagues and express a higher level of trust in management.[30] However, despite this research, the Government is committed to building four new prisons, each with a capacity of over 1,500 instead of building smaller prisons which might provide more positive environments for prisoners and staff.[31]

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Discussion

The challenges of reducing staff wrongdoing in prisons are considerable. Suedfeld and Steel describe

27. Crawley, E. (2004). *Doing prison work: the public and private lives of prison officers.* Willan Publishing; Crawley, E. & Crawley, P. (2008). Understanding prison officers' culture, cohesion and conflicts. In J. Bennett, B. Crewe, & A. Wahidin (Eds.), *Understanding prison staff* (pp.34-150). Willan Publishing; Howard League for Penal Reform. (2009). *Turnkeys or professionals: A vision for the 21st century prison officer.* Availabel at: https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Turnkeys-or-professionals-print-final.pdf; Howard League for Penal Reform. (2017). The role of the prison officer. Avaialable at: https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-role-of-the-prison-officer.pdf
28. Prison Reform Trust (2023). *Bromley Briefings.* Available at: https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/publication/bromley-briefings-prison-factfile-january-2023/
29. Justice Committee. (2023). *Prison operational workforce survey results.* Available at: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/122073/default/.
30. Johnsen, B., Granhime, P., & Helgesen, J. (2011). Exceptional prison conditions and the quality of prison life: prison size and prison culture in Norwegian closed prisons. *European Journal of Criminology, 8*(6), 515-529.
31. Ministry of Justice (2024). *10 Year Prison Capacity Strategy.* Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67586f828a1ef8f66413b9c2/24.231_MOJ_10-Year_Capacity_Strat_Pub_v10.1_WEB.pdf

prisons as a 'capsule environment' — isolated and confined.[32] This is the working world of prison staff. As discussed above, prison staff need to govern by cooperation and reciprocity while maintaining professional boundaries. Treading the line between 'friendly and friends', and between 'turnkey' and 'carebear' are difficult skills to acquire. It requires more initial training than is currently provided, more ongoing training and sufficient time in the job to gain 'jailcraft'. In the absence of these skills the close working proximity between staff and prisoners is more likely to lead to boundaries becoming blurred, a situation which some prisoners are willing to exploit.

The vulnerability factors identified in this study have been categorised as individual, organisational and societal , all or some of which can influence an individual's propensity to corruption. Any approach to reduce staff wrongdoing needs to take into consideration that these factors influence individuals in various ways. It is a great deal easier for policy makers to focus on trying to prevent trafficking of contraband by individual 'villains' who can be caught and punished. However, this approach is over-simplistic, instead, staff wrongdoing needs to be understood as a muti-faceted problem which is influenced by different motivational factors.

It is not argued that the problem of prison staff wrongdoing began with the decrease in staffing numbers between 2010-16. However, it is clear that working in prisons has become increasingly challenging for a number of reasons. The downward spiral in experienced prison staff, particularly officers, needs to be stopped. This can only be done by addressing the organisational and societal factors identified by this research. Targeted interventions addressing all types of wrongdoing as part of a holistic approach is likely to be more successful than simply trying to deter or punish individuals 'villains'.

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32. Suedfeld, P., & Steel, D. (2000). The environmental psychology of capsule habitats. *Annual Review of Psychology, 51*(1), 227-253.