

JOURNAL

PRISON SERVICE

November 2017 No 234



Editorial Comment

Occasionally, academic research is criticised for expressing the blindingly obvious albeit obscured by convoluted language. These are criticisms that could not be levied against the lead article in this edition, Dr Laura Kelly's exploration of the experiences of d/Deaf prisoners. This sensitive and in depth study uses interviews with prisoners in order to reveal their experiences, bring their lives into view, and illuminate the often hidden barriers and harms they face. The study draws upon Deaf studies which proposes that deafness (without a capital letter) refers to a clinical condition where an individual experiences impairment to their hearing function that meets a medically defined criteria. In contrast, Deafness (with a capital letter) emphasises the cultural aspects, where an individual identifies as being part of a distinct minority group, comprised of people who are proud to be Deaf and share the same language, values and life experiences. This broader conception opens up the way for a richer, more nuanced and complete understanding of the experiences of this group. Dr Kelly reveals that it is unclear how many people in prisons are d/Deaf. Estimates range from 400 to 1600. The interviews and analysis does help to understand the challenges of being d/Deaf in prison and how the lack of good quality adjustments, technology and equipment mean that individuals can become isolated. Some attempts have been made to alleviate these issues but there remain significant economic and cultural barriers to change. This article is a significant and important contribution that deserves to be read by those who are involved in prisons. There is much food for thought and reflection as well as sensible recommendations for how the situation can be improved.

Alan Hammill, Jane Ogden and Emily Glorney, in their article, report on a study about prisoner involvement in the illicit economy, that is trade that is forbidden by law or by prison rules, including canteen items, drugs, psychoactive substances, prescribed medications, alcohol and mobile phones and services such as money lending and gambling. They particularly focus on those who are vulnerable to becoming embroiled in the illicit economy. This uses research on consumer debt and identifies those who prisoners who are eager to please, easily led astray, impulsive or lacking self-control. This study proposes a quantitative scale to evaluate this, which may offer a tool for better understanding individuals and the composition of the

illicit economy in prisons. This is an article that has relevance to violence reduction and safer custody strategies in prisons.

The experience of military veterans has gained much greater attention in recent years, including those who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Katherine Albertson, James Banks and Emma Murray contribute a provocative article that attempts to offer a fresh perspective. They attempt to avoid the polemic that can often accompany debates about veterans, arguing that 'Ultimately, this cohort, not wholly heroes, victims or villains, have a right to a balanced and sensitive approach to the development of services suited to identifying, assessing and managing their needs'. They suggest that transitioning from military service to the community can be a difficult and painful process and that veterans experience multi-faceted disadvantages and exclusion. They also argued that veteran identity is deeply embedded and enduring. Taking these elements of identity and social justice, the authors argue that the experience of veterans should be encompassed within diversity and equalities practices.

The final article brings together a practitioner and a researcher: BBC reporter and producer Siobhann Tighe and Dr Victoria Knight of De Montfort University, Leicester. In this they draw upon a range of international examples of how radio has been used to build connections between prisons and the community and to deepen understanding. This contribution expands the media that have been the focus on criminological attention and identifies an important means of creating public discourse.

This edition also includes an interview with Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke. In this, he discusses the current state of prisons in England and Wales and the distinctive contribution of the inspectorate in promoting good practice and reducing harm. The interview also ranges across recent and upcoming changes to the inspection process including strengthening intervention in the worst situations.

As ever, *Prison Service Journal* covers both current issues and more enduring, intractable challenges within the criminal justice system. *PSJ* attempts to examine those issues from both a theoretical perspective but also with proper attention to the reality of the everyday experiences of those who live and work in prisons.