Irish Probation Journal

Providing a forum for sharing theory and practice, increasing co-operation and learning between the two jurisdictions and developing debate about work with offenders.

THE
PROBATION
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An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh

PBNI
Probation Board For Northern Ireland

Contents

Editorial

This third edition of the *IPJ* is published close to the centenary of our two services' founding legislation, the Probation of Offenders Act 1907. While much in society has changed over the last one hundred years, the reasons for having probation services have not and the pioneering spirit that contributed to the establishment of probation as a way of dealing with offenders in the community has not diminished in any way. This perspective was reflected in statements made in connection with the launch of the Probation Service (formerly the Probation and Welfare Service) earlier this year.

The range and depth of subjects covered in the present issue are evidence of the endurance of this pioneering probation spirit. And even though probation has come under an increasingly critical focus over the past year, the quality of contributions to this edition demonstrates the robust and evolutionary nature of the services we and our partner agencies provide.

The subjects covered in this edition include women offenders, policy development, cultural diversity, sex offenders, restorative justice, self-harm and the principles of effective probation practice. The articles on women offenders are particularly noteworthy as this area of study has been somewhat neglected in recent times.

It has always been the hope of the Editorial Committee that the *IPJ* would encourage and facilitate debate. Such debate is to the fore in Colm Power's response to the article by Sam Lewis, David Lobley, Peter Raynor and David Smith in the 2005 edition of *IPJ*. In the interests of fairness, we have afforded the authors of the original article a right of reply.

We thank all those who contributed to this edition. The Editorial Committee of *IPJ*, as well as the managements of the two services, is also delighted to welcome the input of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). The IPA brings a wealth of valuable expertise and experience to

the publication of the journal and we look forward to developing this working relationship. Finally, we renew our call to you, the journal's readers, to continue to submit articles for future editions. In the context of next year's centenary of probation, we would particularly encourage contributions that reflect the richness and diversity of practice in probation and other justice disciplines.

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September 2006

The Need for Policy Development for the Risk Management of Sex Offenders in Ireland

Dr Joseph Duffy

Summary: Since the early 1990s sexual offending has been acknowledged as a major social issue in Ireland, however there is little or no explicit policy for the risk management of sex offenders in Ireland. This article briefly outlines the nature of sexual offending in Ireland before considering current practice in the management of sex offenders and reviewing international perspectives on managing sex offenders. Finally it explores policy dilemmas in the complex area of managing sexual offending and argues the need for the development of innovative policy in this area.

Keywords: Sexual offending, policy, risk management.

Sexual abuse in Ireland

The nature and extent of sexual offending in Ireland have been highlighted by the publication of *The SAVI Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland*, the largest ever study into unwanted sexual experiences in Ireland (McGee *et al.* 2002). Historical accounts of sexual abuse among religious-run institutions have also received widespread publicity (Goode *et al.* 2003). The state responded by setting up the Commission to Enquire into Child Abuse and the National Counselling Service for people who have been abused. Individual cases of sexual abuse have received considerable media coverage and consequently have highlighted the effects of sexual abuse for the public (see McGuinness 1993; McKay 1998).

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Current practice for the management of sex offenders in Ireland

Sex offenders, arguably the most feared and loathed category of offender in society (Petrunik 2001), are treated unlike any other criminals (Eisenberg 2001). Widespread public concern, reflected in the media, about the management of sex offenders and the protection of the public was partially responsible for the development and enactment of the Sex Offenders Act 2001. Among the provisions of this Act there is, for the first time, a statutory requirement for sex offenders to notify the Garda Síochána of their address upon leaving prison.

It has been argued that there is an overwhelming need to provide mandatory community follow-up for sex offenders upon their release from custody (Murphy 2002). International best practice supports mandatory community follow-up (Eisenman 1991; Marshall and Pithers 1994) and its positive contribution to improving community safety. In Ireland there is little or no provision for mandatory support or super-vision once a sex offender is released from prison, thus increasing the risk of future reoffending. The practice of not granting temporary release to sex offenders results in state agencies having no influence over where an offender lives or works (Murphy 2002). It can be argued that this situation compromises public safety.

Walsh (1998) states that present efforts to deal with sexual crimes in Ireland are inadequate and unsatisfactory in that the main sentencing option for convicted sex offenders is imprisonment. However, given the large number of unreported cases of sexual crime, very small numbers of those who commit sexual abuse are imprisoned (McGee *et al.* 2002). One important implication of this situation is that attempts to reduce 'sexual victimisation in society will require a lot more in terms of social policy than simply focusing on imprisoned or indeed convicted sex offenders' (Murphy 2002, p. 708). Interventions with perpetrators of sexual abuse are in their infancy in Ireland. Many people, including clinicians, the judiciary, others in the criminal justice system and the general public, remain to be convinced of the role of clinical interventions in the prevention of sexual crimes (Walsh 1998).

Need for policy development

There is a significant lack of co-ordination and integration by statutory and voluntary services in the management of sex offenders in Ireland,

particularly when compared to international practice (Travers 1998). Managing the risk posed by sex offenders is a serious public policy issue that has implications and links with other important social policy areas such as child protection. Travers argues that if the state is serious about preventing child abuse a 'comprehensive approach to the problem must be initiated' (p. 227). She further argues that the benefits of multi-agency working must be reflected in policy.

There are several offices of the state charged with the legal responsibility for the provision of services for managing offenders and there are many other voluntary and interest groups who seek and have obtained a role in this area. Managing the risk posed by sex offenders in Ireland is a complex topic that gives rise to significant public and professional interest. The key services (the courts, prison, probation, health and voluntary organisations) have begun to link together. Those sex offenders who are subject to post-release supervision orders are now supervised in line with agreed protocols and this promotes greater inter-agency co-operation. However, not all sex offenders are subject to post-release supervision orders. Although effective interventions with sex offenders rely on inter-agency co-operation, such agencies usually operate independently of each other (Sheerin 1998). There is no systematic, organised, centrally funded, through-care management of a sex offender from the time an allegation is made, through investigation, prosecution, trial, sentencing, imprisonment and eventual release back into the community. From a public safety and policy perspective, any increase in co-ordination and development of services in this area would be welcome.

Policy development for the risk management of sex offenders in Ireland has received no attention from the academic community. Geiran (1996) explores the development of policy and practice for the treatment of sex offenders and concludes that while punitive responses will continue to be required for some sex offenders 'such measures alone will neither reform offenders nor prevent future re-offending' (p. 153). He argues that if society aims to reduce the incidence of sexual abuse, there needs to be a co-ordinated move to develop more than interventions for 'a relatively small number of individual perpetrators *after* they have offended' (p. 154). He observes that 'policy development [in Ireland] in relation to the treatment of sex offenders has been cautious, fragmented and incremental. It has been and continues to be characterised by a series of ambiguities, contradictions and dichotomies

existing side by side' (p. 151). In the ten years since Geiran made this statement, little has changed in terms of policy and decision-making regarding the risk management of sex offenders in Ireland. Action is now required that will go beyond focusing on the treatment of sex offenders and examine the development of policy for the risk management of sex offenders in Ireland.

International perspectives on managing sex offenders

The incarceration of sex offenders results in particular management, ethical and political issues (Birgden and Vincent 2000). Many countries have legislation providing sanctions for those who commit sexual offences but few require registration and community notification (Lieb *et al.* 1998). In Canada and some US states (for example Vermont) there is a seamless transition from prison to community-based sanctions for convicted sex offenders (Lundstrom 2002). The seamlessness is facilitated by having shared databases on offenders, and laws, policies and structures which aid co-operation between criminal justice and community agencies. In the UK there have been recent moves to increase co-operation between agencies responsible for the management of offenders in prison and in the community. Policies for the management of sex offenders in the US, Australia, UK and Canada are outlined below.

United States
Since the early 1990s every US state has introduced legislation creating registers for convicted sex offenders and provisions for notifying members of the community of the presence of high-risk sex offenders (Petrunik 2002). In more than 30 states access to sex offender registers is provided through state-sponsored websites (Logan 1999). Legislation passed in 15 states allows for the indeterminate commitment under civil law of persons who are found to meet the criteria for a violent sexual predator[1] (Petrunik 2002). Several states have passed laws making the imposition of chemical castration as a condition of parole mandatory for repeat sex offenders against children and an option in the case of other sex offenders (Logan 1999).

[1] A violent sexual predator is considered to have a psychological abnormality or personality disorder.

Australia

The community response to the management of sex offenders in Australia is marked by 'uncertainty as to whether offenders should be incarcerated as punishment or provided treatment in order to reduce the likelihood of re-offence' (Birgden and Vincent 2000, p. 479). In 1997 a royal commission recommended that police register convicted paedophiles and notify government officials and community groups of their presence (Lieb *et al.* 1998). Imprisonment can provide the mechanism to encourage an offender to participate in a sex offender programme while also delivering punishment for wrongdoing and acting to protect the public. In the Australian state of Victoria a therapeutic jurisprudence[2] framework is used to assess, manage and treat sex offenders in custody and in their transition back to live in the community (Birgden and Vincent 2000). Under this framework the law actively seeks to promote therapeutic objectives through balancing public protection and individual needs (Wexler 1990).

United Kingdom

In the UK in the 1990s there was growing concern about sexual and violent offenders, with those committing sex offences against children attracting extensive political, media and policy attention (Kemshall and Maguire 2001). As a result extensive legislation focusing on sex offenders was passed, including the creation of a mandatory life sentence on a second conviction for a serious violent or sexual offence, a sex offender register and a civil sex offender order.

- England and Wales
  Perhaps the most significant change to social policy in England and Wales was contained in the Criminal Justice and Courts Service Act 2000, which introduced statutory responsibility for joint risk assessment and management of sex and serious offenders by police and the probation service and the creation of Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs). These panels arose from local initiatives that eventually developed into a central policy of multi-

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[2] Therapeutic jurisprudence is defined as the analysis of the positive (therapeutic) and negative (anti-therapeutic) effects of the laws, legal procedures and enforcement practices on the mental health and wellbeing of those affected, including offenders, victims and other members of the community (Winick 1998).

agency working. MAPPPs developed on the premise 'that shared information, joint risk assessments and co-ordinated risk management plans across relevant agencies would enhance the effective management of a critical few high-risk offenders in the community' (Kemshall 2003, p. 2).

Two further pieces of legislation have significantly contributed to the management of sex offenders in England and Wales. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 modernised the English and Welsh justice system and sought to deliver justice more often and more consistently. In particular the Act ensures that punishment is appropriate for the offender and the offence and focuses strongly on rehabilitation to reduce reoffending. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 strengthened the registration requirements for sex offenders. It allows, among other changes, Sex Offender Preventative Orders to be imposed on anyone convicted of a serious sexual offence if there is evidence that they pose a risk of causing serious sexual harm. This legislation also contains a new civil preventative order, the Risk of Sexual Harm Order, which when imposed prevents adults from engaging in inappropriate behaviour such as sexual conversations with children online.

- Scotland

  The *Report of the Committee on Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders* (Maclean 2000) and the subsequent establishment of the Risk Management Authority (RMA) may revolutionise the management of serious violent and sexual offenders in Scotland. The report highlighted the need for an independent body, the role of which would be to ensure that statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies worked together systematically to address the risk posed by serious offenders (RMA 2006). The RMA has been established to ensure the effective assessment, management and minimisation of risk of serious violent and sexual offenders in Scotland.

  The Order of Lifelong Restriction (OLR) was introduced in Scotland in June 2006 as part of a package of measures to deal with high-risk offenders. The OLR is a new sentence which provides for lifelong supervision of high-risk violent and sexual offenders and allows for a greater degree of intensive supervision than was previously the norm. The OLR is designed to ensure that offenders,

after serving an adequate period in prison to meet the requirements of punishment, do not present an unacceptable risk to public safety once they are released into the community (RMA 2006).

- Northern Ireland

  Community supervision of sex offenders in Northern Ireland is organised and administered under the Multi-Agency Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management (MASRAM) system. The MASRAM system plays a significant role in enhancing community safety by ensuring that representatives from the probation service, police, social services and other bodies co-operate in exchanging information and devising risk-management plans for convicted sex offenders (NISOSMC 2005). MASRAM functions in a similar way to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) system in England and Wales. However MAPPAs have a legislative basis whereas MASRAM does not and there have been calls for placing MASRAM on a statutory footing (CJINI 2005).

Canada

In Canada the premise is adopted that a period of supervised release from prison to the community enhances public safety and the rehabilitation of offenders (Lundstrom 2002). The Corrections and Conditional Release Act 1992 outlines the responsibilities of the Correctional Service of Canada, which is required to give relevant information regarding decision making on the release, supervision or surveillance of an offender to the National Parole Board, provincial governments and parole boards, and law enforcement and other agencies authorised to supervise offenders (Lieb *et al.* 1998). Canada has no federal mandate requiring sex offender community notification, however some provinces are notifying the public about the release of sex offenders who pose a risk of harm to the public (Lieb *et al.* 1998). Control measures for the management of high-risk sex offenders in the community have been increased during the 1990s in Canada. Such measures include detention until warrant expiry, peace bonds, long-term supervision orders and legislation requiring the collection of DNA samples from persons convicted of violent sex offences and other serious offences (Petrunik 2002).

Risk management of sex offenders

The risk management of sex offenders involves services provided by corrections personnel, treatment providers, community members and others to manage risk presented by sex offenders (CSOM 1999). Risk-management approaches include supervision and surveillance of sex offenders in a community setting (risk control) and requiring sex offenders to participate in rehabilitative activities (risk reduction). Risk controls are external conditions placed on a sex offender to inhibit reoffending. Conditions may include levels of supervision, surveillance, custody or security. In a community setting, conditions are part of supervision and are developed by the individual charged with overseeing the sex offender's placement in the community. Risk reduction includes activities designed to address the risk factors contributing to the sex offender's sexually deviant behaviour. These activities are focused on rehabilitation and provide the sex offender with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to reduce the risk of future reoffending.

Research indicates that imprisoned sex offenders represent a subgroup of the total sex-offending population (Murphy 2002), the characteristics of which provide particular consequences for their risk management. Imprisoned sex offenders are usually serious offenders and their offending is commonly categorised by features such as repetition and persistence and the use of violence or the threat of violence (Ellis 1989; Weinrott and Saylor 1991). Cann *et al.* (2004) examined reconviction data in a 21-year follow-up of released sex offenders in the UK. They reported that one-quarter of the sample of 419 offenders received a reconviction for a sexual offence during the follow-up period. Of those sex offenders that reoffended on release from custody, almost one-fifth received their first sexual reconviction between 10 and 12 years after release. These findings, highlighting the long-term risk posed by a subgroup of convicted sex offenders, have implications for risk management practice in this area.

Policy dilemmas and sexual offending

Sex offenders are treated unlike any other criminals, particularly in the area of punishment and rehabilitation. Often society will continue to punish sex offenders long after they have completed their time in prison. Attempts at community rehabilitation have been hindered by negative

public reactions. Eisenberg (2001) outlines the difference in approach to the community reintegration of offenders by giving the following examples:

> Drug dealers are released into the community after completion of their sentences with little ado. They can return to neighbourhoods ripe with drug contacts and teeming with eager customers. Likewise, bank robbers can live beside banks, 'hate criminals' can live among the targets of their anger and batterers can return to their wives. For a so-called sexual predator, however, release from prison is not the end of the punishment (p. 1).

Releasing a sex offender into the community creates concerns not associated with the release of other criminals. Sex offenders inspire a fear of further criminal activity, a fear that is not associated with other types of crime. These concerns have led to policy dilemmas on the release of sex offenders.

The growing problem of how to manage a sex offender released into the community in a climate of increasing public opposition to community reintegration of convicted sex offenders is another area that will require policy attention. Eisenberg (2001) draws attention to this issue, arguing that the punishment of sex offenders is becoming increasingly extra-judicial with public campaigns of open hostility towards these offenders and calls for indeterminate sentencing for sex offences.

Significant drivers usually influence policymaking. Policy development for the management of sex offenders is influenced by unique dilemmas where there is no lobby group for abusers and possible advocates of change may only represent one viewpoint, public opinion. Gusfield (1989) suggests that two groups, the 'troubled persons professions' (those working with marginalised groups) and the 'image-making industries' (the media), influence social problems and subsequent policymaking. Professionals are slow to make claims for the management of sex offenders because of the inherent complexity of the issue and the significant consequences of even a single failure.

Hall (1986) outlines three conditions for social policy change (quoted in Geiran 1996, p. 148). First, the issue must be perceived as legitimate, to the extent that a government considers it should be involved with it. The second condition is feasibility, which is defined as the possibility of taking steps to deal with a problem and achieve the desired outcome.

Third, there must be support for the government incorporating an understanding of 'whose discontents and whose satisfactions are involved'. A case was argued in these terms for the establishment of a state-sponsored sex offender programme within the Irish Prison Service in the early 1990s. It is important that a similar case is now made for the development of policy for the management of sex offenders in Ireland, both in prison and in the community, in which the problem is regarded as legitimate, feasible and worthy of support.

Conclusion

Knowledge of sexual offending has moved from treatment aimed at providing a cure to interventions that emphasise the control or management of risk posed by sex offenders, both in prison and in the community. This change of direction has resulted in an international move from a medical model to one of multi-agency risk management focusing on sexual abuse as a public heath problem. Imprisonment of offenders is not the sole answer to the problem and consideration has been given in many jurisdictions to managing sex offenders within the community. In some cases this community supervision is mandatory.

There is little or no mandatory community supervision of sex offenders in Ireland. The provisions of the Sex Offenders Act 2001 allow for community supervision but in practice only a small percentage of sex offenders receive court-mandated post-release supervision. Compounding the lack of mandatory community supervision and the insufficient number of specialised programmes addressing sexual offending, are the difficulties in integrating services for this high-risk population. Among the general public there are many misperceptions regarding sexual abuse and a lack of faith in the state's ability to address this issue adequately. Little academic debate exists concerning the need for policy in this area. There is a lack of leadership in advocating a superordinate view, which would link the criminal justice, health and education agencies operating in this complex arena. Published work focuses on the benefits or otherwise of community versus prison-based treatment programmes, and fails to tackle the bigger issue of how to manage sex offenders successfully within the community. Lead agencies in other jurisdictions, for example the UK Home Office and the US Center for Sex Offender Management, have initiated debate in this area

and provided policy for the multi-agency management of sexual offenders. It is now time to give attention to policy development for the risk management of sex offenders within an Irish culture in a manner that reflects the complexity of the issues involved.

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A Place for Motivational Interviewing in Probation?

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Summary: Motivational interviewing (MI) was developed by Miller in the early 1980s. From the beginning MI emphasised the counterproductive nature of the confrontational intervention models that were well established in the addiction field at that time. This article briefly outlines the key ideas that underpin the MI approach before looking at the possible place for this approach within the framework of the criminal justice system. Three questions are considered:
1. Is MI compatible with the philosophy, ethos and approach of the probation services in Ireland?
2. Does MI fit with the 'what works' movement in probation?
3. What is the position regarding the diffusion of MI within probation services?

Keywords: Motivational interviewing, behaviour change, addiction.

Motivational interviewing and the wheel of change

In 1983 two influential articles transformed the face of treatment in addiction. These articles were greeted with interest and support, perhaps benefiting from the experiences of the ground-breaking but poorly received work almost a decade earlier on alternatives to abstinence (Sobell and Sobell 1974).

Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) published their findings on a study of smoking cessation. Based on their research, they developed the notion of a wheel of change. They purported that participants in their research had experienced change not as a one-off event but rather as a cycle. They developed a six-stage model of change which highlights the need to

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move from a point where change is not even under consideration (pre-contemplation) to consideration of the possible need to change (contemplation), to consideration of the importance of the decision to change (preparation), to the change itself (action) to maintaining the change (maintenance). The model also expands on the concept of relapse and presents it as one of the stages of change. Perhaps one of the most useful notions derived from the wheel of change relates to recognition of the need to assess readiness to change. It is this concern with helping clients to move forward with positive change in their lives that provides a link to motivational interviewing (MI) strategies.

While Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) explored the readiness on the part of an individual in relation to the change process, Miller (1983) was concerned with the client's level of motivation to change. Miller's work proposes a model of working with problem drinkers by identifying and increasing their motivation for change; this controversial approach to working in addiction challenged the more confrontational techniques of the time. He emphasises the importance of empathising with problem drinkers, avoiding confrontation in order to engage clients in a change process. He considers that resistance and ambivalence towards change are normal. He further suggests that resistance is a result of the interaction between clients and workers and so can be reduced by the adoption of non-confrontational language and approach by the worker. The expanded ideas of change offered in the stages model (Prochaska and DiClemente 1983) supported the intervention strategies inherent in MI by providing a compatible theoretical understanding of change applicable in addiction that moved beyond privileging abstinence.

Miller and Rollnick's seminal work on the approach was first produced in 1991 and further refined in 2002. Miller and Rollnick define MI as 'a client-centred, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence' (2002, p. 25). It is important to note that beyond the actual technique employed, there is now seen to be a 'spirit' to MI. Fundamental to the success of MI are core commitments to the need for collaboration, evocation and autonomy (2002, p. 35). Miller and Rollnick also describe four general principles of MI: express empathy, develop discrepancy, roll with resistance and support self-efficacy (2002, p. 36). In order to achieve this non-confrontational relationship with the client the MI approach employs a number of basic interviewing strategies, which are presented as phase one and phase two techniques:

- Phase one: Ask open questions, listen reflectively, affirm, summarise and elicit change talk (2002, pp. 65–84).
- Phase two: Recapitulate, ask key questions and give information and advice (at the client's request or with the client's permission). This phase also involves negotiating the change plan through goal setting, considering change options and eliciting commitment to change (2002, pp. 129–139).

These skills will be very familiar to probation officers in Ireland, thanks to the comprehensive training in interpersonal skills provided through social work professional training and/or in-service training. This familiarity generally means that probation officers are likely to embrace the MI approach, although, interestingly, it can also cause some problems.

Harper and Hardy (2000) report on a study in Middlesex Probation Area where a sample of probation officers were selected and trained in MI. Use of MI was self-assessed. The study reported that 'the mean score for competency fluctuated as training progressed. From an initial mean of five, scores fell to 3.73 but increased after training to 6.60' (p. 397). This trend seems to reflect a learning curve in developing proficiency in MI. At the outset officers were clearly very confident in their ability to deliver MI (presumably based on their experience with the basic skills as outlined above), however as they gained further awareness of the skills involved in increasing fidelity to the model, their confidence declined. With training, support and practice their confidence was later restored and enhanced. What is particularly interesting about this study is that the probation officers who were not trained in MI considered that it was 'nothing new' (p. 399).

Harper and Hardy conclude that MI may be 'particularly suited to the probation setting' and report that those trained in MI listed among the advantages of the approach that 'it was easily integrated into current practice and it enhanced learning from previous college courses' (p. 399). These factors imply that MI does have a place in probation services. The cautionary note is that, due to the familiarity of some of the basic skills employed, interventions may appear to be MI adherent when in fact they do not convey the spirit of MI. In order to ensure fidelity to MI the proponents of the approach recommend that MI interventions be evaluated not just for their effectiveness in motivating change talk in the clients but also for adherence to MI on the part of the worker.

Compatibility between Irish probation services and MI

Miller wrote in 1999:

> More than a decade ago, applications of motivational interviewing broke out of the addiction field and have been spreading into new and interesting areas: cardiovascular rehabilitation, diabetes management, family preservation, pain management, public health interventions and the prevention of HIV infection. The most recent surge of interest, in North America at least, is coming from a field where I least expected it: the criminal justice system. We are receiving calls for training from jails and prisons, courts, probation and parole departments, community corrections, diversion and pre-release programs (p. 1).

In Ireland there has been an interest in MI in various social work agencies since the late 1980s. However the reluctant engagement of addiction services in the approach probably hindered the uptake by other services such as probation. Given the current interest in MI it is useful to consider whether there is indeed a fit between the MI spirit and the mission of probation.

Since some of the elements in the spirit of MI – collaboration, evocation and autonomy – may be seen to undermine the argument in favour of MI in probation, it is important to address these points first. There are clearly some challenges in developing a collaborative relationship with an offender. MI promotes the view that it is crucial for the worker to provide an atmosphere that is conducive rather than coercive to change (Clark 2000). The alternative is seen as the adoption of the confrontational approach, which is the antithesis of MI spirit. Evocation refers to the belief that the resources and motivation for change reside within the individual. This is consistent with the value position of both the Probation Service (PS) and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). Intrinsic motivation for change is enhanced by drawing on the client's own perceptions, goals and values.

Of the three elements of MI spirit, autonomy is probably the one which offers the greatest challenge. In order to adopt the spirit of MI, the worker affirms the client's right and capacity for self-direction and facilitates informed choice (Miller and Rollnick 2002). The PBNI's vision statement purports as a value that 'everyone, including

offenders ought to accept personal responsibility for their behaviour' (www.pbni.org.uk). It is perhaps easier therefore to see how the autonomy issue is consistent with probation settings if one considers that alongside the right to make choices comes the responsibility for one's own behaviour resulting from those choices. This contemplation of one's situation reflects the way MI supports the importance of clients taking responsibility for themselves and their actions.

The mission statement of the PS is to challenge offending behaviour (www.probation.ie), however it is obvious that even with the full authority and power of the criminal justice system it is not possible to make an offender change. Readiness to change can be furthered through the implementation of negative consequences but even mandated clients can refuse to co-operate and/or change. The best chance to optimise the likelihood of change in MI is seen to be collaboration, which is closely aligned to evocation and recognition of the client's ultimate autonomy. Challenging offending behaviour in MI terms would be an acceptable goal as long as it was not adopted as the intervention in itself. As Miller and Rollnick clarify, MI considers 'confrontation to be the goal, not the counsellor style' (1991, p. 13). The PBNI's mission statement is more in tune with the ideals of the spirit of MI when it states that 'Our best contribution to public protection and to community wellbeing is to help offenders change their behaviour and reduce their offending'. The spirit of MI is reflected in the PBNI's core ideals, for example:

- We respect the rights of every citizen.
- Offenders must take responsibility for their behaviour and its consequences.
- Everyone can change.

This belief in treating people with respect, accepting the individual's capacity for change and desiring to 'bring out the best in people' is also evident in the guiding principles of the PS.

While MI does not address directly the sometimes complex nature of the control versus care roles of probation, Miller and Rollnick (2002, pp. 173–174) do offer some ethical guidance. They suggest that it is consistent with MI spirit to deal with this dual role with openness and honesty, clarifying and negotiating possible conflicts in the interests of promoting positive change. Another concern that may emerge from the care/control debate relates to the notion of MI as a client-centred approach. While MI is fundamentally centred on the client, it is also directive; this means that while adhering to the spirit of listening to

clients, MI also elicits and reinforces statements of concern and change talk (Ginsburg *et al.* 2002, p. 344).

Probation, social work and MI

The two probation services in Ireland have a tradition of alignment with social work services. Wahab (2005) makes the case for MI as an intervention appropriate for social work practice concerned with behaviour change and adds that 'motivational interviewing is an exciting intervention model for numerous social work settings due to its consistency with core social work values, ethics, resources and evidence-based practice' (p. 45). The belief in the ability of clients to change, the importance of building a respectful relationship and the need to adopt the most effective approaches in helping clients to deal with their offending behaviour mark a consistency between MI and probation spirit and outcome aspirations.

Probation officers must deal with a wide range of offending behaviours and so need a range of responses. MI is only one such response. Motivation for change is an undeniable aspect of success in engaging and retaining drug users in treatment. Probation officers are often in the front line of assessing and recommending interventions for clients with drug-use problems and it is reasonable that they would look to progressive movements in the addiction field for direction on how to deal with their drug-using clients. In fact McNally (2001), commenting on the strong relationship between specialised drug treatment services and probation in the US, remarked that although details were not then available 'in Ireland experience would suggest that a significant proportion of referrals [to drug treatment] do come through the Court, Prison and Probation Services routes' (p. 8). Hence the close links between drug-use problems and the probation population is the first and perhaps strongest case for developing MI within probation.

One of the strengths of MI is that it is applicable in many situations since its primary focus is on engaging clients in the intervention process in order to maximise the possibilities of change. Any approach which will assist in getting clients to avail of the services within probation is to be welcomed. MI is an option when trying to make an early intervention in order to keep someone out of the penal system. It can also be used when enhancing motivation to stay with the treatment system and to engage

positively with the help on offer. Hence employing MI to engage and also retain clients may be sufficient in itself or may be the basis of recruiting clients into more intensive interventions. It is important to consider the success of MI in promoting adherence to treatment, which has made the approach attractive to many in the broader medical field as well as in the addiction area. MI therefore has applicability in working with clients to try to support them in their adherence to specific rehabilitative or treatment programmes.

In general the examples that are available support MI's usefulness. They remind us that MI is not just about final outcomes but is also concerned with change and motivation for change as a continuing process. McMurran and Ward (2004) comment that 'motivating offenders to change in therapy is an important aspect of effective offender treatment, yet despite this, offenders' motivation to change has received little close attention in the academic and professional literature' (p. 295). Although Garland and Dougher examined the application of MI in the treatment of sex offenders in 1991, the diffusion of MI throughout the criminal justice system is clearly taking time. Even today, over 20 years after the MI model was first introduced, there is little evidence of its direct application across the range of probation work.

MI and 'what works'

Two aspects of the relationship between MI and 'what works' will be considered here. The premise behind the 'what works' movement is that interventions should be based on research evidence of success. This premise is fraught with difficulties: What sort of evidence is acceptable? Whose evidence is most influential? What intervention is being assessed? What outcomes are measured? In spite of these difficulties, the case for MI as a researched intervention will be outlined. The second aspect of the argument relates to the connections between the alternative established interventions in the 'what works' literature and MI.

MI and probation share an investment in ongoing evaluation of interventions to establish best practice based on evidence. The 'what works' movement, while laudable, cannot be accepted uncritically. When it comes to the question of what works, Ginsburg *et al.* (2002) warn that it is not enough to ask simply 'what works?' but rather we must ask 'what can be done to help offenders engage and remain in programs that focus

on changing criminal behavior?' (p. 334). Clark (2005), in discussing MI and probation, raises the concern that probation in the US may have become too focused on the process – not the relationship process between offenders and probation officers but rather the bureaucratic process – and suggests that the criminal justice system in the US 'has come to believe that it is in the *probation business* rather than the *behaviour change business*' (p. 2). In a review of practice skills in probation, McNeill *et al.* (2005) identify the following common elements in successful interventions that lead to behaviour change: 'development of accurate empathy, respect or warmth and therapeutic genuineness, establishment of a therapeutic relationship or working alliance and an approach that is person centred or collaborative' (p. 5). They suggest that these are features of probation work in practice, where 'early attempts to apply "what works" perhaps underestimated the importance of interpersonal engagement' (p. 7). Given these provisos, how does MI fare in relation to 'what works'?

Saunders *et al.* (1995) recount that MI at the outset, as with many other new ideas, was criticised for its lack of supportive scientific evidence. Over twenty years later those involved in the development and promotion of the approach have certainly tackled the issue of providing evidence on MI effectiveness. The outcome of research has not always been as positive as MI supporters might have anticipated. For example in Project MATCH (1997), the researcher sought to establish difference in terms of success in matching substance users with three different interventions: motivational enhancement, cognitive–behavioural and twelve-step-based approaches. Little difference was found. Ginsburg *et al.* (2002) do report that:

> . . . secondary analysis of findings from Project MATCH (1997) have begun to suggest that the authoritarian approach to promoting behavioural change is less effective than those that target internal motivation. One of the few matching variables that emerged from Project MATCH suggests that relative to other interventions used in the study, motivational enhancement therapy (NIAAA 1995) is well suited for use with clients who are initially angry (p. 339).

Following the disappointment with Project MATCH results, Burke *et al.* (2002) suggest that it is important to note if an approach is strictly MI or if it is an adaptation of MI; in the case of an adaptation, discrepancies

with the MI model have to be considered in judging the implications for effectiveness of MI. They present a comprehensive review of MI and adapted MI interventions and overall they find support for the efficacy of MI. This question of fidelity to MI is significant both in the evaluation of MI as an intervention strategy and, as mentioned earlier, in terms of successfully training workers to employ MI in practice.

Andrews and Bonta (2003) state that 'in our own field of criminal justice, evidence-based practice as outlined by criminologists has recommended that justice staff be responsive to motivational issues with offenders' (quoted in Clark 2005, p. 1). McMurran (2002) and Chui and Nellis (2003) also offer arguments for the importance of addressing client motivation. In their analysis of the importance of motivation in treatment, Longshore and Teruya (2006) explore the relationship between motivation and retention in drug treatment and conclude that 'readiness and resistance should both be assessed among clients entering treatment, especially when the referral is coercive' (p. 179). This supports earlier research which found that motivational enhancement and other brief interventions 'result in decreases in substance-related negative consequences and problems, decrements in substance use and increased treatment engagement' (O'Leary *et al.* 2004, p. 63).

Harper and Hardy (2000) reported on research with probation officers employing MI in their supervision of substance-using clients. They found that 'there were more statistically significant improvements in the attitudinal scales amongst offenders whose officers were trained in the technique compared to officers who were not trained in motivational interviewing' (p. 393). They also found that MI was 'more effective than non-MI work in bringing about change in offenders who had drug and alcohol problems' (p. 399).

It is fair to say that the jury is still out on MI. The research base is expanding but may be complicated by adaptations of MI and by the application of MI to such a variety of client settings. More setting-based research is required to substantiate the role of MI in probation. There have been some contributions considering MI within probation: McNeill *et al.* (2005) briefly note in their review of practice skills in probation that MI does have a place and they see it as being consistent with the role of probation. It is certainly worth serious consideration, not just because of promising outcomes in terms of changing behaviour but also because of its effectiveness in engaging and retaining clients, even mandated clients, in treatment programmes that may offer alternative interventions as well.

While MI itself has not been identified within the 'what works' literature, there is evidence supporting 'programmes focused on changing behaviour' (Utting and Vennard 2000, p. 28), which is the focus of MI. Utting and Vennard also cite the effectiveness of 'multiple service programmes combining a number of different approaches' (p. 28), which, again, is very consistent with MI and its role in engaging and retaining clients in treatment interventions. Cognitive–behavioural interventions appear to dominate in terms of the 'what works' literature presented by McGuire (1995). Although MI does not claim to be a cognitive–behavioural intervention, it definitely claims to focus on changing behaviour and views the most effective method of bringing about this change as working with the motivational levels of clients (Miller and Rollnick 2002). Increasing motivation for change involves working with the complex attitudes of clients towards their own behaviour, the consequences of that behaviour and their own goals. Helping clients to face the inconsistencies between these elements is central to MI. It also involves exploring ambivalence (Miller and Rollnick 2002) and cognitive dissonance (Miller 1983). Hence MI works at both a cognitive and a behavioural level. This does not automatically warrant elevating MI to the 'what works' cognitive–behavioural realm, but it certainly supports MI as a serious contender for a place.

What next for MI and probation?

In 1991 Miller and Rollnick 'considered what would happen if motivational interviewing became a routine response for work with criminal offenders' (p. 6). In 2005 the PS has achieved this goal: the internal staff training and development unit of the PS has trained personnel who are equipped to deliver MI training and routinely run MI training for probation officers. This important step forward marks the organisation's recognition of the usefulness of MI and offers the possibility of ongoing support for those who wish to practice and enhance their MI skills.

Leckie (1990) suggests three issues that should be considered when exploring new ideas in social work practice: role legitimacy, role adequacy and role support. Using this as a framework for progressing MI in probation, it seems clear that probation officers do have a legitimate role in employing MI as part of their repertoire of interventions. It is up

to the probation organisation as a whole to provide the necessary training and ongoing supervision to enable officers to implement MI in an effective manner and to ensure a sense of competence/adequacy in its staff. Finally, in addressing the issue of role support, it is important to realise that this involves more than training. As Clark (2005) points out, MI can work most effectively when the organisation as a whole – in this case the criminal justice system – adopts a philosophy which is compatible with the spirit of MI. Referring to the care and control debate within criminal justice, he suggests that it is best not to opt for an either/or position but to embrace a both/and stance, thus facilitating probation officers to 'examine how to impose sanctions *and* build helpful relationships' in targeting the goal of behaviour change (p. 6). This is a much bigger challenge than simply training staff in effective techniques. It is about the ethos and spirit of probation itself.

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The Irish on Probation in England: A Critique

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Summary: This article is a response to an unpublished 2004 report by Sam Lewis, David Lobley, Peter Raynor and David Smith entitled 'Irish Offenders on Probation'. It argues that weak methodology and poor research practice undermined what should have been an important report with innovative propositions for probation policy and practice in England, Wales and beyond. The 2004 report directly informed two articles (Lewis *et al.* 2005a and 2005b), one of which, entitled 'The Irish on Probation in England', was published in the 2005 issue of this journal (*IPJ*). The authors' critique in the *IPJ* article of previous research on discrimination and the Irish in Britain is also challenged here, primarily on the grounds that the 2004 report did not list or examine core texts on the criminalisation of the Irish in Britain. The authors' understanding of Irish and Irish Traveller cultures in Britain is questioned, as is the usefulness of their engagement in a Census debate.

Keywords: Research methodology, Irish in Britain, Traveller Community.

Criminal justice and the 'Irish' in Britain

The psychological impact on Irish emigrants of living in a country that was (and for some is still perceived as) the repressive imperial power that racialised and constructed the Irish as a negative 'other' cannot be underestimated (Johnson 1998; Hickman and Walter 1997; Hickman *et al.* 2001; Walsh 2001). People of Irish background or heritage in Britain who wish to express an Irish identity do not tend to identify with the term English or British (unlike the common use of Irish-American in the US). Commonly, a city-based identity is used alongside the term 'Irish', resulting in self-identification descriptors such as Manchester Irish,

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London Irish or Birmingham Irish. This tendency is rooted in the negative Anglo-Irish colonial relationship (Johnson 1998; Walsh 2001). Sim (1991) and Hillyard (1993; 1994) have shown how negative stereotypes of the Irish have been routinely propagated by the criminal justice elements of the British state and by sections of the mass media since the Victorian era, at least, and particularly at times of Anglo-Irish political tension. Discussions of the Irish and discrimination in Britain are usually contentious and reflect the tensions between how the host state and community traditionally vacillate between considering the Irish as a security threat, an ethnic subset of Britishness and a distinct ethnic group.

In the 'Irish Offenders on Probation' report Lewis *et al.* acknowledge the high-profile miscarriages of justice visited on some Irish people in Britain in the previous thirty years but question whether anti-Irish discrimination 'is *generally* true' in the criminal justice system of England and Wales (p. 13). They claim that 'good evidence of differential treatment [of Irish people] is hard to come by' (p. 12). The authors' *IPJ* article also states that 'our conclusion from a review of the literature is that little is known, though much has been asserted, about Irish experiences of criminal justice in Britain' (2005a, p. 6). But the report and the article fail to list some of the core texts on the criminalisation of the Irish community in Britain since the 1970s; for example Hillyard's seminal empirical work in this area *Suspect Community: People's Experiences of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Britain* (1993) is not included in either bibliography. This calls into question whether sufficient and appropriate background reading was carried out by the research team. In conversation with one of the authors, Professor Smith, after his presentation at the 2006 Northwest Probation Forum Diversity Conference, I asked why Hillyard's book was not in the report's bibliography. His reply was that the book concerns the situation in the 1970s and 1980s and that the Irish now find themselves in a more positive climate in Britain. When I pointed out that attitudes, particularly negative stereotypical views, take much longer to change than political developments, he conceded that this was indeed possible.

Responding to a review by Steven Greer (*Fortnight*, January 1994) of *Suspect Community* that challenged the idea that the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) had criminalised large sections of the Irish population in Britain, Hillyard wrote:

[Greer's] principal argument appears to rest on the fact that people from Ireland do not constitute a monolithic, cultural or ethnic block and includes 'defiantly "anti-Irish" supporters of Ulster loyalism'. But nowhere is it asserted [in *Suspect Community*] that the Irish are a monolithic grouping. On the contrary, the diversity is recognized and the study included a number of Protestants who had been arrested and detained. The notion that the Irish have become a 'suspect community' was based upon a mass of empirical evidence, which Greer seems to have skipped. This showed that irrespective of class, occupation or religion, one could be arrested and detained under the PTA as a direct result of some aspect of one's 'Irishness'. In addition, the study illustrated the way in which whole sections of the Irish community come under suspicion after an incident. For example, in 1990, a college was requested by the police to supply the names and addresses of all enrolled Irish students. Greer also takes exception to the notion that the legislation has tended to 'criminalize' the Irish in Britain. While this may be the view of this extraordinary legislation from among the leather-backed rows of English statute law, all the evidence from this study would suggest that the PTA has criminalized most of the 6,000 or more people who have been arrested or detained under the PTA and then released without any action being taken against them (1994, pp. 55–56, footnote 55).

'Irish Offenders on Probation' implies that much of the research on the Irish in the British criminal justice system has been ideologically rather than empirically driven and asserts that evidence of discrimination 'needs to be answered empirically, not ideologically' (2004, p. 13). This statement betrays an ill-considered arrogance that the authors' research is 'value-free', with no ideological underpinnings.

My research indicates that concepts of Irishness are problematic even for those working within post-Macpherson[1] British police forces in an era when policies on ethnicity and diversity are pre-eminent (see Power 2006; 2004). One police sergeant, with a London-Irish background, teaching diversity training at a major police training college made a connection between the negative stereotypes of Irish Travellers and those

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[1] This 1999 British government enquiry followed the killing of Stephen Lawrence and labelled London's Metropolitan Police Service as institutionally racist.

stereotypes that have been applied historically to the settled Irish community in Britain:

> I was intrigued by the link between Irishness and Irish Travellers and some of the stereotypes that attach to Irishness . . . [An unmistakably Irish name] was enough for people to get on your case in the past. [The Southern English Metropolis – SEM] Police have about thirty thousand [officers], but of those police officers just 0.5 percent identify as white Irish. Either we are not recruiting [Irish people] or people from that background don't identify, which is alarming given that in the SEM area there is probably a million people [with] an Irish background . . . [T]here's no Irish police staff association . . . we have . . . Italian, Greek, Jewish, black police associations running for a long time (Power 2004, p. 80).

Similarly, the post-Macpherson attitude in a major northern English police force can be gauged from the response to a police staff seminar on Irish identity led by an experienced police diversity trainer when talking about:

> . . . how some young Traveller chap came over from . . . Northern Ireland because he'd been threatened . . . and the venom that came out. [Police on diversity training said]: "But the man's a thief . . . he shouldn't even be in this country . . . why should he come here and get this [help]." [T]hey felt quite open to express those feelings . . . That certainly did concern me in terms of the way that [police] view Irish Travellers . . . They put a difference between Gypsies and Tinkers [*sic*] and said: "Even the Irish don't like the Tinkers" (Power 2004, p. 85).

Many British-born Irish Travellers retain strong, identifiable 'Irish' cultural attributes including accent, large extended families and varying degrees of internal and cross-frontier nomadism. The link between Irish identity, state security, a suspect community and Irish Travellers was a recurring theme with many Irish and Irish Traveller respondents in my *Room to Roam* research (Power 2004). Again, crucially, relevant literature in this area was ignored and not even listed in Lewis *et al.*'s (1994, 1995a, 1995b) work in this area.

A high proportion of respondents in Lewis *et al.*'s probation research reported experiencing significant levels of prejudice from police

primarily, but also from the judiciary and prison officers. The report (Lewis *et al.* 2004, pp. 48–50; see also Power 2004, 2006) outlines some Irish respondents' complaints about the police. Though primary research cited in the report shows significant levels of prejudice experienced by respondents from the police, judiciary and in prison in England, the poor quality of the methodological approach and resultant data in the primary probation research in Manchester exceptionalises the probation experiences of Irish groups in this context as being positive on the whole: 'The PSR analysis and the data gathered from the interviewees . . . point to the same conclusion: there is no reason to believe that Irish offenders in the areas involved regularly received discriminatory or unfair treatment from probation staff. The message, then, is primarily positive' (Lewis *et al.* 2004, p. 40). In contrast, during my research with the Greater Manchester Probation Service, two highly experienced probation officers discussed the racism and prejudice directed against Irish Travellers within the probation service and the fear that probation staff have of this community:

> Everybody [in the probation service] knows that within the criminal justice system [Irish Travellers] do very badly . . . You look at [pre-sentence reports] and you will see short custodial sentence after short custodial sentence whereas you would not expect it [in] a white English [context]. Colleagues . . . will acknowledge that they do struggle with Travellers, how to approach them, they're suspicious of them. They don't know how to get over that barrier (Power 2004, p. 93).

The authors also stray into a Census debate, but whether the Irish are the largest or third largest ethnic minority in Britain is of little import (Irish Travellers are a comparatively small minority). Ultimately, the numbers game is unhelpful when trying to ascertain whether sedentary Irish or Irish Travellers are discriminated against in the British criminal justice system – no matter who plays it and for whatever ideological reasons. What is important is that where there is widespread discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and ignorance, this must be recognised and challenged successfully through effective policies and practices by relevant bodies such as the probation service. Interestingly, the authors use the term 'Irish' in an ideological manner as a political and politicised cultural term and not (as I would) as a geographical descriptor

for the members of the island of Ireland's diverse communities (including Travellers), and as a self-identifier of origin for people of Irish extraction in Britain.

The research in Manchester and Merseyside

The 'Irish Offenders on Probation' report was commissioned to look at the probationary experiences of the Irish in the counties of Merseyside and Greater Manchester in northwest England. The primary empirical research was supposed to be based proportionately on 75 interviews with Irish offenders on Community Rehabilitation Orders and on licences in these two counties, and as the report states 'with a particular focus on the distinct needs and experiences of Irish Travellers' (p. 3). But, the report reveals that as the fieldwork progressed it 'became apparent that this target number was ambitious' (p. 3). The research team renegotiated with the National Probation Service for 50 interviews and eventually conducted 48.

The research team was able to identify and interview only three respondents in Merseyside. Consequently the report does not explore or represent the probation experiences of Irish people in Merseyside in any meaningful way – a point coyly conceded by the researchers when they admit that 'very few Irish offenders were identified there' (Lewis *et al.* 2005b, p. 4).

In the IPJ article Lewis *et al.* admit that they 'consistently struggled to turn potential into actual interviewees, and came to rely heavily on the enthusiasm for the research of a few probation officers' (2005a, p. 7). As a result the bulk of interviewees came from three probation offices:

> Interviewees were therefore drawn from a total of eleven offices, but it was clear to the researchers that the presence in an office of an active supporter of the research was a crucial factor in influencing the numbers of interviews from that office. The figures given in Table 2 for the Cheetham Hill and Stretford – and to some extent the Atherton – offices reflect the presence of such an enthusiast for the research (2004, p. 17).

Thirty-one out of 45 interviews completed in Greater Manchester came from these three offices, situated relatively close to the city centre.

Greater Manchester is a very large metropolitan county and Manchester city itself is surrounded by a huge suburban area with quite a few large and medium-sized towns situated near the periphery of the county. Central Manchester and the surrounding areas are very mixed ethnically, but the suburban and peripheral areas can be extremely homogenised or clearly divided along ethnic lines. The research lacked interview data from the latter areas and as such the methodology used is unrepresentative of the Greater Manchester area as a whole.

The majority of interviews that formed the empirical base of this research were carried out where probation officers were proactive, informed and positive around issues concerning the settled Irish communities generally and Irish Travellers. Yet, my research in Manchester indicates a wide variance regarding levels of positive awareness of ethnicity or related prejudice and ignorance by probation staff between some urban and suburban probation offices. This is illustrated by the following extract from a previously unpublished section of an interview with two experienced Manchester probation officers in 2003 during the *Room to Roam* research project; as one probation officer explains:

> I'm very aware of that because the particular area [suburban Greater Manchester] that I moved to had a very stagnant group of staff, a very long-serving staff who all basically kind of moved somewhere that was very close to where they lived. The majority of staff were middleclass, very white and very English. And, you know, that's quite unusual really because there are targets in terms of our staff . . . [and] the community that we serve . . . They can't just sack people or move people – you have to just make gentle inroads, if you like, but very often just even one or two staff moving on and being replaced by two people who think differently, that can make a major impact on the team.

The input of proactive staff in choosing respondents may also have unwittingly contributed to the selection of unrepresentative compliant offender respondents rather than including those Irish and Irish Traveller offenders who sought help and support elsewhere, for example in the dedicated voluntary sector (see Power 2004).

The fact that the research interviews were carried out in probation offices is in itself problematic in that respondents (all offenders) may have felt pressured to be positive about their experiences due to the particular location. Why did the interviewer not take the respondents to

a neutral setting in order to allay possible fears? Should the report's authors not have declared these methodological discrepancies and does this not significantly undermine the veracity of their primary empirical research and analysis of the Greater Manchester probation situation?

Whatever happened to Irish Travellers' distinct needs?

Towards the end of the project's empirical phase Dr Lewis contacted me by email on 5 February 2004 (copied to Raynor, Lobley and Smith) asking if I would be willing to speak to her about my knowledge of Irish Travellers (I was happy to oblige and support the research). She continued:

> We are particularly keen to ensure that the distinct needs and experiences of members of the Irish travelling community are represented in our final report, but are struggling to find enough male travellers with experience of probation to ensure this. We have considered approaching traveller organisations, but know that members of such groups are understandably wary of talking to 'outsiders' who have no real links with the Irish community.

Here Lewis admits that the research team never established co-operative links with local, dedicated, voluntary sector Irish and/or Irish Traveller services. This should have been a priority for a well-informed and culturally sensitive research team wishing to gain extensive access to both settled Irish and Irish Traveller prospective respondents in relation to criminal justice experiences. This probation research was carried out without developing any meaningful contacts or rapport with the communities studied. It is all too obvious that the research team had little appreciation or understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of Irish and particularly Irish Traveller ethnicity in a British context.

An experienced probation officer based in Greater Manchester believes that Irish Travellers need specialised support throughout probation and criminal justice processes due to the unique nature of their culture and associated social disadvantages (see also Pizani Williams 1998; Morran 2001; Power 2004):

> [Irish Travellers have] not been included in terms of any specialist provision . . . Probation have actually been quite supportive in

Manchester about the Irish and Travellers . . . And I think that a lot has changed, although there are still an awful lot of people . . . working in this service [who] have this notion that equality is treating everybody the same. And if you set up a good service to meet a special need they see that as a step too far (cited in Power 2003, p. 264).

The research team failed to develop or present any specific recommendations, rooted in their empirical investigations in Manchester, for improving the probation experiences of Irish people or Irish Travellers through comprehensive policy and practice initiatives – and yet entitled their contributions to the *IPJ* and the British-based *Probation Journal* 'The Irish on Probation in England' and 'The Irish on Probation in the North-West of England' respectively.

Similar research support to that afforded in Manchester was obviously not available from the Merseyside Probation Service which is all the more reason why the research team should have looked for and found alternative sources for relevant respondents there. The decision not to pursue the research in Merseyside because the local probation service failed to deliver the requisite respondents also undermined an excellent opportunity for comparative criminal justice research on the Irish communities in these adjacent counties – both of which have distinct historical and contemporary migration and settlement patterns for the various Irish communities.

How was the report received at its launch?

The 'Irish Offenders on Probation' report was launched at the Northwest Probation Forum Diversity Conference in Preston, Lancashire on 1 February 2006. Unusually for a launch of new research, the chair did not allow questions about the Irish probation report after its presentation. As a result its launch as a legitimate piece of research to probation, prison service and other delegates went unquestioned. I was a speaker at the conference and later took the opportunity to challenge the academic authors of the report about some of the fundamental omissions and flaws in their background reading and methodology. They conceded some of the points outlined above, admitting that the research was flawed in a number of crucial ways and that the results could not be generalised about the Irish experience of probation in Britain. Dr Lewis admitted

that the research was inadequate and that the report itself would not be published.

The damage had already been done, however, as the research had been presented as legitimate in a public forum without any questions or critical response from the audience. Is this really how we should engage with research in relation to policy and practice in probation? Is this now 'what works' in the rapidly evolving amalgamation of probation and prison services? I raised these issues and other concerns about how academic knowledge is funded, produced, shaped and disseminated in my own talk at the conference, but many of the delegates presumably accepted the 'Irish Offenders on Probation' report at face value as legitimate research. In this respect I sympathise particularly with the offender 'subjects' of this research and also with those who worked so hard in the Greater Manchester and Merseyside Probation Services to secure the funding for what they as practitioners regarded as a much-needed piece of research.

Conclusion

Much of the original research report reads like a series of excuses as to why the team's research methodology failed in practice. The research team relied almost exclusively on the local probation services in the two counties to produce suitable Irish and Irish Traveller respondents. Staff at Irish Community Care Merseyside, who work extensively with both these communities, informed me that they had not been approached by the research team for assistance. A former Irish Community Care Manchester outreach worker told me that he had been approached by one of the team, but declined to help them as he felt that they should not be researching either the Irish or Irish Travellers as they had no knowledge about their cultures or communities. He felt from this conversation that the research team were just 'doing' another 'ethnic' group in the list of minority ethnic groups.

When I was interviewed by Dr Lewis I felt that she had little knowledge or understanding of Irish Travellers, even though this took place towards the end of the data collection period. How can academic researchers who have scant understanding of these minority ethnic cultures (particularly the nomadic aspects of Traveller culture) and who never mention an ethno-methodological approach in their report, hope

to access populations adequately (particularly highly marginalised ones like Irish Travellers), and then analyse these offender interviews in an insightful and sensitive manner?

The dearth of solid empirical knowledge displayed in the original report is echoed in the related *IPJ* article that offers little in terms of an insightful or definitive commentary on 'The Irish on Probation in England', but instead confines itself to a narrow discussion of probation in Manchester while straying into a Census debate that really belongs elsewhere. There is an undoubted need for critical and competent research in this area, however the authors' vain wish 'that this paper provides the beginning of a better understanding of Irish experiences of criminal justice and of what would constitute a helpful probation response to Irish clients' (Lewis *et al.* 2005a, p. 6) was in reality rooted in a deficient and mediocre report based on poorly executed research that could and would have delivered so much in more competent, well-informed hands.

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A Reply to Colm Power

Sam Lewis, Peter Raynor and David Smith*

We are grateful to the Editors of the *Irish Probation Journal* for inviting us to respond to Colm Power's critique of our research on the Irish on probation in England. In the following response we have tried to maintain a balanced and respectful tone as well as a concern with accuracy and veracity, as we have in all our work. Readers of the *IPJ* would quite rightly be bored by a detailed point-by-point response to Dr Power's critique, so we will be brief, dealing with specific points only when they are directly relevant to his claims about the quality of our research and the validity of its findings. Dr Power's central argument appears to be this: our findings did not coincide with his preferred beliefs, and the explanation for this must be that our findings were wrong. Our findings were wrong because our methodology was wrong: we failed to read the right things or talk to the right people. Indeed, we researched the wrong subject, and were the wrong people to be doing the research in the first place. We supposedly admitted the inadequacy of the research ourselves. What follows is our response to these claims.

On Dr Power's central argument, we need say only that the failure of our findings to support his beliefs does not necessarily imply that our findings are wrong. It would be equally logical to conclude that it is Dr Power's beliefs that are wrong.

Turning to our methodology, Dr Power first complains that our background reading was inadequate, and cites the work of Hillyard as an

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example of the kind of reading that we ought to have done. In fact our report mentions the importance of the Prevention of Terrorism Act as a source of possible discrimination against Irish people in Britain; and the concession one of us made that attitudes might take longer to change than political relationships was merely a statement of the obvious.

More seriously, Dr Power complains that we talked to the wrong people, or failed to talk to the right ones. The wrong people include the wrong kind of probation officers, whose views count for less than those of the 'two highly experienced' Manchester probation officers cited by Dr Power, who apparently have a privileged status of veracity and legitimacy. Since the study was concerned with Irish experiences of probation, the only possible approach was to seek interviewees through the probation service. Dr Power is oddly suspicious of the (mainly Irish) probation officers who enabled us to contact as many interviewees as we did, on the grounds that they may have selected interviewees with favourable views of probation. He also suggests that we should have held the interviews somewhere other than in probation offices (a tricky proposition on a wet day in Atherton, which incidentally is further from the centre of Manchester than Dr Power seems to think). In fact we say in the article that, in common with other 'consumer' surveys of probation, our sample is almost certainly skewed towards those with reasonably positive views of the service. Dr Power sympathises with probation officers who did not help with the research, as he seems to do with the former worker at Irish Community Care in Manchester who declined to help Dr Lewis. Dr Power accuses us of not contacting enough experts outside the probation service and then acknowledges that we were refused help by one such source of expertise.

Dr Power says that we 'coyly conceded' (Why 'coyly'? Why 'conceded'?) that we conducted only three interviews in Merseyside. For the record, we went to considerable lengths to secure interviews in both Greater Manchester and Merseyside, going outside formal probation channels, in Merseyside in particular, when it became clear that the information system in the probation service was having difficulty in identifying eligible interviewees (an embarrassingly recurrent topic of our meetings with the steering group that oversaw the research). Our efforts included sending letters and flyers for potential interviewees to all probation offices; requesting the chief officers of each area to email all their staff asking them to support the research; going through the local branches of NAPO (National Association of Probation Officers) to seek

members' support for the research; broadening the base of the research to include offenders on licence as well as those on probation; contacting Irish Community Care in Manchester (see above for the outcome); contacting the Action Group for Irish Youth (whose response in contrast was very helpful); interviewing Harry Fletcher of NAPO, a longstanding advocate of the need to take discrimination against Irish people seriously; and interviewing Dr Power. Paradoxically, in view of his disparagement of our sources, Dr Power is more extensively cited than any other source in both the report and the *IPJ* article.

According to Dr Power, it was the poor quality of our methodology and of the resultant data that led to our finding (which he evidently believes cannot be true) that our interviewees had relatively positive experiences of the probation service, while reporting discrimination in other parts of the criminal justice system. But, as we made clear in the *IPJ* article, this finding is in line with those of other studies, both of predominantly white (and non-Irish) and of black and Asian probationers. Dr Power evidently thinks that in this, as in much else, the experience of Irish people must be different from, and worse than, anyone else's. As we made clear at the start and conclusion of our paper, we reject this view of the Irish in Britain as uniquely victimised and disadvantaged. This is why the Census and other data we used from beyond the field of criminal justice are relevant to our argument.

Dr Power is especially agitated about our lack of attention to the particular situation of Irish Travellers. In fact we interviewed more Travellers than we expected to, and paid specific attention to their experiences in both the report and the *IPJ* article. We suggest that Travellers may be liable to receive community penalties for offences which would attract a lower level of intervention if committed by non-Travellers, and note the discriminatory effects on Travellers of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Dr Power's 'two highly experienced probation officers' might be surprised, but we found no evidence that pre-sentence reports on Travellers were worse than those on settled Irish people or that Travellers were disadvantaged in their access to community sentences; and Travellers' accounts of their experiences of probation were at least as positive as those of non-Traveller interviewees. Of course our numbers were small, and we do not have Dr Power's record of research with Travellers, but it is not reasonable that our evidence should simply be discounted against that of the two officers interviewed by Dr Power. The two officers are of course

entitled to their views, but the weight of evidence available to us pointed in a different direction.

Dr Power says that 'Dr Lewis admitted that the research was inadequate and that the report itself would not be published'. This is misleading at best. Dr Lewis told Dr Power that the research would have been improved if the number of interviewees had been greater, again a statement of the obvious. Self-critical and reflective researchers are always liable to think, when a project comes to an end, that it could have been better. And in fact the report has been published, in the sense that it has been widely distributed by the Greater Manchester Probation Area and was included on a CD-ROM that formed part of the pack for delegates at the conference attended by Dr Power. The decision on if and how to publish it was not ours but the research funders', and it was because we knew it was unlikely to be made generally available that we wrote a substantial summary of it for the *IPJ*. There is nothing in the report about which we feel coy or embarrassed, and it is untrue that much of it 'reads like a series of excuses as to why [our] . . . methodology failed in practice': only four of its 61 pages (excluding introductory material and references) deal with methodological problems.

We agree with Dr Power that it is a pity that there was no time at the conference for discussion of our presentation. As professional academics we welcome debate about and even criticism of our work when it is done in an evidence-based way and promotes the advancement of knowledge and understanding. Delegates would then have been able to judge our research in the light of Dr Power's critique and his characterisation of his position as empirically based and ours as ideological. We would have welcomed the chance to defend our work and are confident that we could have done so convincingly.

Individual and Organisational Accountability: Professional Supervision within the Probation Service

Sinéad O'Connell*

Summary: This article is based on research conducted for a Master's dissertation which investigated the practice of professional staff supervision within a specific area of Ireland's Probation Service (PS) (O'Connell 2005). Survey research and qualitative interviews with probation officers and senior probation officers were carried out in the context of a review of the literature in relation to staff supervision in a probation setting. Findings on the practice of staff supervision within the PS are presented. The need for a consistent form of delivery of supervision supported by a standard model of provision is indicated. Key recommendations include:
- The use of standardised formal supervision contracts and agendas.
- A clear agency policy and standards on staff professional supervision.
- Education, training and supervision for all supervisors.

Keywords: Staff supervision, research, probation.

Introduction

Social work supervision has been identified as one of the most important factors in determining the effectiveness and the quality of service to clients as well as the job satisfaction levels of social workers (Tsui 2005). As an indirect but vital element enabling social work practice, it is surprising that supervision has not received as much attention as other components of social work practice such as social work research or social work administration (Tsui 2005, preface). There is a noticeable lack of critical and in-depth discussion on the state of the art of supervision in

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the existing empirical research literature (Harkness 1995; Tsui 1997; Tsui 2005).

Supervision has been described in a number of ways in the fields of counselling, social work and, more recently, nursing as 'a process, developed in response to perceived needs, which allows for the supportive learning of the individual worker while ensuring accountability for practice' (O'Neill 2004, p. 10). For the purpose of this article, the definition by Morrison (2001) will be used as a working definition:

> Supervision has been defined as a process where one worker is given responsibility to work with another in order to meet certain organisational, professional, and personal objectives. These objectives include competent accountable performance, continuous professional development, and personal support (p. 3).

Supervision is an essential component of social work practice and a lack of it can potentially lead to wrong decisions, stress, burn-out and high staff turnover (Morrison 2001). Absence of effective supervision can also have negative consequences for the key stakeholders within practice: service users, staff, the agency and collaborative working (Morrison 2001).

Functions of supervision

Richards and Payne (1990, p. 12) identify three basic functions of supervision in social work:

1. Management function: Ensuring that agency policies and practices are understood and adhered to; prioritising and allocating the work; managing the workload; setting objectives and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done.

2. Educational function: Helping staff to continue to learn and to develop professionally, so that they are able both to cope with societal and organisational demands and to initiate fresh ways of approaching the work, according to changing needs.

3. Supportive function: Enabling staff to cope with the many stresses that the work entails.

Morrison (1993) added a fourth 'mediation function' which involves 'the establishment of healthy feedback mechanisms from the organisation to the individual and equally important from the individual to the organisation' (p. 11).

Benefits of supervision

Effective supervision benefits the major stakeholders as follows:

1. Benefits for the agency:
   • Clearer communication both up and down.
   • Improved standardisation.
   • Improved staff consultation processes.
   • Increased pride in the organisation.
   • Lower rates of turnover, sickness, complaints.

2. Benefits for staff:
   • Role and accountability clear.
   • Boundaries clarified.
   • Confidence enhanced.
   • Focus on user.
   • Learning needs identified.

3. Benefits for service users:
   • Worker clearer, more focused and prepared.
   • More observant of users' strengths, needs and risks.
   • More consistent service.
   • More able to involve user.

4. Benefits for collaborative working:
   • Role clarity for the worker.
   • Identifying appropriate expectations of others.
   • Ensuring worker communicates and listens to other agencies.
   • Appreciation of different roles, challenging stereotyping.
   • Assist in mediating conflicts with other agencies, or negotiating over resources.

(Morrison 2001, p. 19)

Social work and probation practice

Probation's relationship with social work has become an increasingly contested one in recent years. Geiran (2005) writes 'that probation in Ireland . . . has its shared roots in charitable voluntary work, which became professionalised over time' (p. 82). In Ireland:

> . . . there are valid grounds for maintaining the broadly social work perspective on probation work. These included shared historical roots with social work in the United Kingdom, ongoing probation connections with social work in other European jurisdictions, Service orientation towards (professional) social work entry qualifications, the predominantly social work education and training of most Probation and Welfare Officers at present, and the assessment and intervention methods and models employed by them (Dack and Geiran 2003, p. 4).

Both the skills and values listed in respect of probation work parallel closely those required for social work in general (Dack and Geiran 2003, p. 5). Perhaps more than in any other area of social work, there is a long history of debate as to whether probation work is in fact social work at all. This question is manifested most noticeably in the care versus control discourse which has continued in probation literature and practice for decades (see Goslin 1975; Raynor 1985; Trotter 1999). However, there is little evidence that probation work is not social work, solely on the basis of its controlling elements (Geiran 2005, p. 97).

Supervision within the Probation Service (PS)

The introduction of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) in 1996 was identified as a critical element in the Irish Civil Service's Strategic Management Initiative (Dack and Geiran 2003, p. 5). The underlying rationale behind the introduction of PMDS was a perceived increase in customer demand for improved services and increased accountability. Dack and Geiran point out that as the PS's history of supervision is 'grounded in the social work profession, it could be argued with some justification that the Service was ahead of many other parts of the Civil Service in embracing the new orthodoxy' (p. 6). The authors question whether supervision in the PS links the management of professional practice with the business goals of the

organisation. PMDS, they contend, throws down a challenge to traditional supervision. In this regard, Dack and Geiran state:

> The operation of the PMDS suggests that the needs of all stakeholders are germane to the working of the supervisee, the Probation and Welfare Officer. When supervision is an agency-wide activity, integrated into the strategy of the organisation, informing the training and development needs of the agency and the individual practitioner, feeding back through management the concerns of practitioners, then the supervisory relationship allows for the development of the reflective organisation. Furthermore accountability for practice is not based solely on individual discretion but becomes an organisational and managerial responsibility (p. 6).

The remainder of this article examines the reality of supervision in the PS.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research I interviewed a small, non-representative (and non-random) sample of senior probation officers (SPOs) and probation officers (POs), based in one PS office. Both a quantitative questionnaire and a qualitative semi-structured interview approach were used to gather data from the respondents. I recognise the limitations of this research in terms of the sample, the topics covered and the fact that it does not focus on all the management functions that managers in the PS undertake but rather on what has become identified through the literature as professional supervision.

Findings and discussion

The data generated was collated and key themes were established.

Frequency and types of supervision

Respondents were asked about the frequency and type (formal or informal) of supervision they experienced. 57% (n=12) of all participants stated that formal supervision was used on their team. Again 57% stated that informal supervision was used on their team. 90%

(n=19) of all participants wrote that one-to-one supervision was used and 19% (n=4) stated that group or team supervision was used.

100% (n=5) of the SPOs who participated stated that they were providing formal one-to-one supervision; and 80% (n=4) stated that they provided supervision on a monthly basis.

95% (n=20) of all participants stated that they were receiving supervision and just one participant (4.75%) stated that no formal or informal supervision was received. 81% (n=17) of all participants stated that they received supervision once a month; one participant (4.75%) received supervision once every few weeks; and one participant (4.75%) received supervision 'once every 3 months, maybe'.

The following excerpts give a flavour of the respondents' varied views on the frequency and types of supervision:

> 'I would regard formal supervision as essential to good practice. I have had some informal supervision when I have requested it.'
>
> '. . . supervision is happening quite a lot and . . . I go to my supervisor for advice quite often – that is supervision . . . '
>
> '. . . it's very much around how I'm performing and responsibilities towards my post. It is very much answerable to management.'
>
> 'I can get access to advice/supervision (within reason) if I need it outside of scheduled sessions.'
>
> Supervision 'is formal and informal, we have it once a month, and then we have it whenever we want just to go in and have a chat with him as well'.
>
> '. . . it would be called informal but it is quite a formal discussion. So you know I had a conversation yesterday, it wasn't a set meeting but I went to my supervisor and we talked for an hour. That to me was a formal, very good supervision session but it had not been planned. It could fall under somebody's label as informal. I would certainly say there is very regular informal supervision and there is very regular formal supervision.'

Definitions and understandings of the function of professional supervision
All five SPOs answering the questionnaires said that support and learning were part of their supervisory sessions with their team members. Three stated that they also addressed accountability during their sessions; one said that he discussed casework with his supervisees.

90% (n=19) of supervisees (POs and SPOs) stated that support was

discussed during their supervisory sessions. 52% (n=11) stated that learning needs were addressed and 62% (n=13) noted that account-ability formed part of their supervision. For one PO, goals and practice priorities formed part of the supervision sessions. Another noted that case management was discussed and another that supervision was about meeting the service mission. 9.5% (n=2) of POs said that work procedures and good practice were discussed.

The functions of supervision outlined in the findings tended to focus on operational rather than developmental matters. This differs with the emphasis on the supportive function desired by respondents. Supervision was described as a managerial function, with a focus on the supervisee's role and job. For example, while 95% (n=20) of all participants agreed or strongly agreed that supervision was a useful tool in probation practice (just one participant disagreed), 81% (n=17) felt that supervision was centred on case management. 81% again agreed that supervision allows a supervisor to give feedback to the supervisee; and 76% (n=16) felt that supervision is used to manage staff.

The benefits of supervision
Is supervision of benefit? Views varied based on respondents' current experience and on beliefs held on supervision generally. 71% (n=15) of participants stated that supervision was of benefit to them, 14% (3 POs) stated that supervision was of no benefit to them as supervisees and one did not know if supervision was beneficial.

Comments from the questionnaires in relation to the benefits of supervision included that supervision makes 'the manager and the service accountable for the work of the supervisee'. Four of the participants (19%) mentioned that it assists in the management of workload stress, provides feedback on cases and helps 'people to develop as professionals'. Participants also mentioned that supervision 'enables a fresh opinion on a case'. One participant felt that supervision provides 'links to academic, theoretical discourses'. Another felt that beneficial supervision 'depends on the relationship with one's supervisor' and that this relationship can impact on the quality of supervision provided and experienced.

Four of the participants (19%) were negative in their comments of the current status of supervision within the PS. One participant felt that supervision 'would be beneficial if I got it'. Another participant said that in its current form it was not of benefit and another wrote that his

current experience of supervision is 'am I getting the job done?'. One respondent felt that supervision was not provided at the level she required and said that if she wants 'to discuss a particular dilemma it would be up to me to raise it'. She stated that there was 'no sense of challenge or attention to professional competence or development' and that supervision was 'more a discussion of work arrangements'.

Recent experiences of supervision within the PS seem to be on a continuum from extremely negative – 'Supervision is rarely at the level I require' – to very positive – 'current supervision is excellent'. Many of the participants said that they also received informal supervision. One participant mentioned that the introduction of PMDS into the PS 'has improved the level of supervision here and given it more of a focus on supervisee's personal support and progression'.

85.5% (n=18) of participants said that supervision was of benefit to their clients. However 14% (n=3) disagreed with this statement. Of those interviewed, only one respondent mentioned clients and that supervision practice can at times mirror practice with service users. He stated, 'I believe that the organisation reflects some of the way that we deal with clients'.

Experiences of agency policy
In relation to written policy guidelines on the usage of supervision within the PS, there was some ambiguity and lack of knowledge. 28.5% (n=6) of POs stated that there were guidelines; 19% (n=4) of POs stated that there were no guidelines; and 47.5% (n=10) of POs stated that they did not know whether guidelines existed or not. The reality is that there are no available written guidelines on supervision although the expectation that SPOs provide monthly supervision is explicitly stated in the published job description.

There was disparity between the SPOs interviewed, who all referred to support and accountability as functions of supervision, and the POs interviewed, of whom only one mentioned support and one mentioned accountability as functions of supervision. None of the interviewees mentioned education as a direct function of supervision. Overall, the functions identified by the participants in the present study, though not uniform in their presentation, do appear to fit within the broad functions outlined by Kadushin (1992) and Rich (1993).

The findings suggest that there is no consistency or standard method of providing supervision in the PS. The provision seems to rely on an

individual supervisor's commitment to provide it. However, the majority of respondents stated that they were receiving formal one-to-one supervision once a month and SPOs generally indicated that they were providing supervision once a month.

Interestingly the SPOs interviewed had not availed of any training in the provision of staff supervision. However, training in supervision and supervision techniques is essential. O'Neill (2004, p. 13) notes that supervisors' attempts to re-create their positive experiences of supervision, or to avoid the negative aspects they experienced, does not guarantee effective supervision. Tsui (2005, preface) highlights the differences between staff supervision and student supervision.

The majority of respondents felt that supervision was of benefit to them. However, as Morrison (2001) points out, 'supervision only improves outcomes for clients (users), and only adds value for staff, if certain key conditions for its effectiveness are met' (p. 18). These include: clarity of purpose, psychological safety, positive modelling by the supervisor, user-centredness and skills and knowledge enhancement. These conditions are not universally met within the surveyed PS area. As a result the benefits of supervision may not be fully realised in its current form. This raises the importance of the quality of supervision rather than simply focusing on whether or not supervision takes place.

There would appear to be no clear link between what the participants have stated about the role of supervision in relation to clients and the literature which emphasises supervision's role and place for clients in terms of assuring the quality of practice, protecting them from unsafe, discriminatory and unethical practice (Brown and Bourne 1996; Kadushin 1992; Morrison 1993). Only one respondent mentioned the benefit of supervision for clients.

The absence of an agency policy beyond an explicit expectation of its provision within the PS is concerning. No guideline policy document on supervision exists within the PS apart from the recommendations in the PMDS guidelines, which are general Civil Service guidelines and do not address the four main functions of social work supervision as outlined by Morrison (2001). As Morrison states:

> Given the pressures on agencies, if supervision is to be properly embedded, a clear policy linked to standards on supervision is essential. Without such a policy, supervisors are left to rely on their personal and professional authority rather than on organizational authority (2001, p. 22).

Recommendations

1. In terms of their implications, these limited findings signal a broader need for the PS to educate its staff in the functions, processes and theory of staff supervision and the process and content of effective supervision.

2. This research recommends that service-wide policy and standards (incorporating the relevant parts of PMDS) be drawn up and implemented. The policy needs to be set within the context of the defined purpose and function of the PS. It should provide a clear, realistic, working framework for the use of supervision, its content and process.

3. The findings indicate that some SPOs appear to be relying, to a significant degree, on their experience as supervisees and on their practice teacher training to supervise their staff. It will benefit all stakeholders if an education and training programme based on the theory and practice of supervision is set up.

4. The findings indicate that supervision in the PS tends to focus on operational issues. This research recommends that staff supervision should have a dual – operational and developmental – focus.

5. Line management at all levels should be involved in reviews of staff supervision. As Davies (1988) recommends, 'The roles and responsibilities of staff at all grades should be clear, together with the role of team meetings. It is particularly important that boundary lines and accountability issues are clarified and agreed at all levels' (p. 144).

Conclusion

The implications of this study are that staff supervision needs to be given greater priority within the PS if it is to benefit all four major stakeholders: the service user, the staff, the agency and collaborative working. The implications signal a journey ahead with significant, though achievable, challenges. As Davies (1988) concludes:

If the [probation] service uses staff supervision imaginatively; if it is used to encourage new ideas; if it is used to encourage an exchange of views and involve staff at all levels in the future directions of the service; if staff feel the supervision they receive is relevant to their task and to their aspirations for the service; if they feel supported by their managers in their efforts, then the service will remain healthy. The service will remain lively, pioneering a range of responses to offending that command respect from all sections of the community (p. 148).

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Good Relations and Probation: An Outline of a Developmental Initiative by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Dr Derick Wilson*

Summary: Work on equality and diversity is essential in societies emerging from conflict, however, it is insufficient to work on these areas alone. The need to secure an agreed law and order system and the experience of being equal and different citizens under that system are also fundamental and deeply intertwined requirements (Wright 1996). It is therefore imperative that criminal justice agencies see the goal of wider 'good relations' as central to their practice. In July 2002 the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Future Ways Programme, University of Ulster entered into a joint developmental action research programme entitled 'An Equity, Diversity and Interdependence Approach to Good Relations'. This article charts the key steps taken by the PBNI/Future Ways partnership to establish a framework for action on good relations. Good relations practice requires staff to work to a mental model in which people are viewed as equal and different citizens rather than as members of opposed and partisan traditions. Such a demanding shift presents personal and professional challenges that must be supported by organisational leadership and commitment. This process initially required external support, however once the organisation as a whole committed to the good relations agenda then the PBNI's learning and training arm assumed responsibility for leading the programme.

Keywords: Good relations, citizenship, sectarianism, racism, organisational learning, organisational change.

Northern Ireland and the good relations agenda

Northern Ireland is a politically contested society slowly, painfully and with great difficulty emerging from a conflict that was as much about the

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existence of the state as about whether the state was governed fairly and treated all its citizens equally. The absence of violence, however, does not equal peace: social relations remain shaped by years of hostility and fear; embedded separatist and competitive norms, expectations and beliefs permeate social structures and inter-group relations at all levels and in all environments. People and organisations have often survived in this context through silence and avoidance of issues such as religion or politics in the presence of the 'other' (Wilson and Morrow 1996). Cultural common sense involves learning to be polite. Organisations in the health and personal social services sector have been no different, with staff often 'operating above the divisions inherent in our society, rather than being part of them' (CCETSW 1999, p. v). This denial of wider realities, whilst understandable, fails to address the true situation facing staff and the people they serve.

As well as addressing religious and political sectarianism, the good relations theme is relevant to confronting racist behaviour in daily life. Northern Ireland is becoming a more diverse intercultural society and increasing numbers of racist incidents are coming to the attention of the courts. In the period 1 April 2005 to 28 February 2006, according to provisional figures from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, there were 835 racially motivated incidents over 658 offences and 206 homophobic motivated incidents over 140 offences.

As different people share the same space at work, the workplace has the potential to promote good relations. Unfortunately, people and organisations are often reluctant to move away from the uneasy equilibrium secured by promoting a neutral workplace culture. Nevertheless, promoting good relations between people from 'different religious beliefs, political opinions and racial groups' is a legally required duty of public bodies in Northern Ireland (Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland (NI) Act 1998) and many have built on the opportunities presented by devolution, new political structures and the legislation to move beyond the silence and avoidance that characterised many workplace cultures.

The partnership

The Future Ways Programme seeks 'to find practical and human ways that people can live, learn and work together equitably with their

differences in a society emerging from conflict' (see www.ulster.ac.
uk/futureways). It is a charitably supported programme based in the
School of Education, University of Ulster and offers learning and
teaching resources, research on reconciliation and public policy, and
community support. Future Ways has developed a framework for
organisational learning and change based on securing equity, valuing
difference and promoting interdependence. These values were
incorporated as key principles underpinning the work of the Northern
Ireland Community Relations Council in 1997/8 and, after a period
during which a significant number of voluntary, community and public
bodies piloted these principles and incorporated them into their policies
(Wilson 2005), they were stated as core policy principles within *A Shared
Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern
Ireland* (OFMDFM 2005). The equity, diversity and interdependence
approach provides a model for locating the dynamics of sectarianism and
racism within a wider framework of exclusion and prejudice: age, marital
status, sexual orientation, gender, physical abilities and having
dependants or not (Section 75(1), NI Act 1998) as well as the differences
of hierarchy, grade and power inherent within organisational cultures.

Future Ways sought to establish partnerships with organisations that
are core to central themes in a society emerging from conflict such as
education, housing and law and order and that also carried in their
organisational history a wider vision of people and societies being able to
learn, grow and change. Throughout the years of conflict the PBNI
maintained the character of a learning organisation, in keeping with the
view expressed by Lorenz that social workers are 'first and foremost
learners themselves, learners with a conscience and with an unashamedly
Utopian streak' (1994, p. 104). Many PBNI-supported community
programmes, across all traditions, had an implicit community
relations/reconciliation dimension and were considered standard setters.
An example was the development for ex-offenders of community
youthwork courses and access routes with the University of Ulster, which
offered the possibility of qualifications and employment to those most
impacted by the conflict, broke new ground and challenged existing
attitudes in the wider society. As Northern Ireland emerged from
conflict, the PBNI wished to be in a position to contribute to the
development of a public service culture committed to good relations
and community understanding, which in turn would contribute to
building a cohesive and interdependent society in Northern Ireland and

to the exploration of the role of the public service in a wider European context.

In July 2002 the PBNI and Future Ways entered into a joint developmental action research programme entitled 'An Equity, Diversity and Interdependence Approach to Good Relations'. The equity, diversity and interdependence approach requires the process to be:

- Inclusive: All stakeholders need to be involved including administrative staff, board members, programme staff, trade unions and senior managers.
- Relevant: The process must make sense to people and connect to their work priorities, histories and experiences.
- Accountable: It is vital that executive leaders and other stakeholder groups participate in open communication and information sharing and are honest about progress made and challenges experienced.
- Sustainable: Building trust and new relationships is a long-term process that requires sustained commitment of resources and personnel.

Aim and objectives

The programme's aim was to grow the PBNI's 'capacity to work through and learn from difficult issues around identities, prejudice and political divisions'. To achieve this aim, four objectives were set:

1. To develop the understanding of the organisation regarding the challenges and possibilities of operating in a politically contested society.
2. To support the organisation to define and identify key issues that are impacting on its capacity to deliver quality services.
3. To pilot and implement new ways of working both internally and in relationships with service users and wider communities.
4. To develop innovative ways of auditing the impact of the process on improving operational goals.

Step 1: Invitation and scoping (September to December 2002)

To establish the partnership, internal dialogue began at board, trade union and senior management levels to clarify understanding and commitment and to identify prospective members for the internal

Development Group. Following a scoping study based on one-to-one interviews with about 10% of PBNI staff, across grades and lengths of employment, Future Ways created a map of current practice, issues and dilemmas faced by the organisation in dealing with difficult issues around identity and sectarianism. This map acted as a baseline for ongoing assessment as well as offering a possible agenda for a programme of work. The main findings of the study were made available to all staff after presentation to the board and senior management. A full report was submitted to senior management and a summary report was then developed with a number of proposed actions concerning internal relationships and relations with clients and the wider community.

Internal relationships
The report proposed that the PBNI:
- Make a sustained commitment to the organisation's public and civic duty in supporting greater interdependence in society.
- Board, senior management and trade unions build their understanding of these themes.
- Support staff to develop their confidence and competence in addressing sensitive issues around politics, culture, religion and race and to hold the line against the movement towards 'benign apartheid'.
- Invest time and resources in developing groupwork practices in this area of work.
- Value ways of work where dealing with difficult issues rather than avoidance would become normal and matter of fact.
- Develop an induction element for new staff and board members focusing on good relations.
- Provide formal and informal support structures to acknowledge the difficulties which face staff, with particular reference to working in a highly politicised and divided community.
- Contribute to team building by offering administrative staff more opportunities to experience the work taking place with clients and in the community.

Client relationships
The report proposed that the PBNI:
- Ensure that assessment tools value and measure the 'relational' base to the work of officers.

- Assess the extent of racially motivated crime and develop preventative programmes in partnership with representatives from different minority ethnic communities.
- Support the acquisition of groupwork skills that address difficult issues rather than ignore or avoid them.
- Acknowledge that officers' caseload demands limit opportunities for local groupwork and community development approaches around offending and that good relations would be assisted if some further development programmes were legitimised that attenuated offending behaviour in local areas.

Relationships with the wider community

The report proposed that the PBNI:

- Examine the possibility of establishing a panel-type structure that would:
  - Have the promotion of good relations as its brief.
  - Determine the internal support and guidance that staff would draw on for work involving sensitive areas, themes and times of year.
  - Promote a range of approaches with clients.
  - Challenge and advocate the role of public and civic leadership within the wider community and public service.
- Acknowledge that staff may need space to reflect on their responses and relationships to former politically motivated prisoners and the extent to which they feel their position and authority is being challenged.
- Examine how the community development programme specifically contributes to wider trust-building and in particular engages with areas of low infrastructure including working-class Protestant communities.
- Through its community links, move the debate and practice dominant in the public service culture beyond 'fire-fighting' responses to community and interface violence and examine appropriate inter-ventions in partnership with community groups and other statutory agencies that engage with such problems 'further up stream'.

The board, senior management and trade unions formally legitimised voluntary teams to explore these proposals so that the organisation might move beyond a neutral culture.

Step 2: Growing commitment and understanding across the wider organisation (2003/4)

Establishing a development group

A Development Group was needed to progress the proposals, to provide a space for learning and reflection and to share responsibility for any emerging programme of work developing out of responding to the summary points above. It was agreed that the membership of the group must include:

- A broad range of staff capable of representing diverse opinion within the organisation.
- At least one-third of each of the key minorities that the organisation wishes to listen to and engage with.
- A range of grades including a proportion of new and middle-ranking staff.
- The presence of at least one senior officer and the active commitment of the PBNI board.

These criteria were designed to achieve:

- A breadth of discussion that can reflect divergent views within the organisation.
- A representative group to ensure internal credibility.
- Sufficient safety in numbers to ensure that minority voices can be raised without fear of isolation or career cost.
- A legacy within the organisation of staff who can carry their learning into the higher grades over time.
- The engagement of the executive leadership in actively learning from the process.

The resulting across-grade Development Group included an assistant chief officer, trade union representatives, area managers, probation officers and administrative staff and therefore represented different voices and positions within the organisation.

The programme's main focus in 2003 was to establish and sustain a critical dialogue within the Development Group. The group met for 4.5 days, including two residential days in April 2003.

Establishing a learning programme

A learning programme was created for the Development Group and the executive leadership, board and senior management. The Development Group members went through an extensive examination of their personal

experiences of living and working in Northern Ireland and of their personal and professional values around the themes of equity, diversity and interdependence and the nature of the social and political context. They established the identity of the Development Group and examined the relevance of the term 'good relations' to the PBNI's work.

The group members were able to identify a range of structures and approaches through which their work could be promoted and quickly came to understand the importance of a whole-organisation approach. They provided the board and senior management with a considered action plan covering a vision statement and principles for good relations practice, a set of individual commitments different staff could be invited to make, a proposal for fieldwork and business teams to take the process forward and a draft corporate plan around good relations.

A shortened version of the Development Group's experience was offered to the senior managers for a full day and on two occasions for the former (2003) and current (2005) board members. The board comprises people from diverse traditions and is therefore an important forum, capable of holding an interdependent vision of the wider society at the centre of the PBNI's business. At the board seminars, Future Ways developed formal inputs and interactive sessions around the good relations dimensions of their work in order to:

- Assist members to reflect on the drivers for this work and how it is understood.
- Explore the extent to which promoting good relations makes sense for the work of the organisation.
- Update members on the work undertaken to date.
- Assist members to reflect on how good relations can underpin and enhance elements of practice outlined in the draft strategic corporate plan for 2005 to 2008.

Session topics included:

- The societal context: the place of organisations in promoting good relations in Northern Ireland.
- What good relations means: the characteristics of good relations in relationships, teams, organisations and society.
- How we learn together: organisational realities and vision.
- A vision for promoting trust and good relations.
- Studies in organisational change in Northern Ireland.
- The development group model.

- The critical dialogue approach.
- Understanding organisational culture and good relations.

Reflecting on the drivers

The external levers initially included the good relations duty in Section 75(2) of the NI Act 1998, the Criminal Justice Review, the Justice Oversight Commissioner and proposed legislation on hate crime. These were later added to by the Shared Future Policy (OFMDFM 2005); the Racial Equality Strategy (OFMDFM 2006), which demanded action plans from all public agencies; the Strength in Diversity Initiative (Home Office 2005) for the criminal justice sector that asked organisations to reflect the society they serve; and the Good Relations Triennial Plans demanded of public bodies in April 2006.

Internal levers for good relations included the PBNI as an employer of people from diverse backgrounds, a deliverer of services to people from diverse traditions and backgrounds, an upholder of best public service values, and an organisation giving civic leadership. During scoping study interviews with experienced staff in 2002 it became clear that the PBNI had a history of standing with local communities through advocacy and community grants and also of challenging people when issues of fairness, acceptance and working together had been ignored. As such, the PBNI had knowledge of aspects of good relations work in its history.

There were also corporate levers for good relations and different elements of the corporate plan were identified for their good relations contribution, including:

- The purpose of the PBNI in integrating offenders back into the community.
- The legislative authority to develop work under Community Service Orders.
- The accountability of the PBNI externally in terms of public confidence.
- The core values of staff respecting difference and valuing diversity in working with community organisations and in holding offenders to account but never humiliating them.
- The corporate planning context in meeting government aims for an increase in community confidence in the criminal justice system.
- The need for a diverse agency that reflects the wider community.

All staff working within the criminal justice sector have to work within an equality and human rights standard. In this system staff need sensitivity

in working with people from diverse backgrounds and experience of working in a restorative manner and working across diverse agency boundaries. These requirements, in reality, demand a competence in good relations.

Step 3: Implementing new practices into mainstream structures and relationships (2005/6)

In 2005 the Development Group decided that good relations should be mainstreamed through a coherent and interlinked programme of information sessions and leaflets for staff, induction, post-qualifying development programmes and resources developed for working with clients. The good relations theme also needed to be rooted in the new corporate, operational and unit business plans.

Mainstreaming was secured by the publication of the PBNI's *Strategy for Promoting Good Relations Consultation Document* in April 2006. This document was promoted by a round table consultation session and established a series of internal and external actions that would be completed by year-end with identified lead people mandated to secure these activities. The proposed good relations actions in this plan require that existing policies, management and employment practices, strategic and business plans, quality processes, supervision relationships and promotion opportunities reflect the organisation's commitment to naming and working through difficult issues and to promoting good relations.

Overall the process has taken time and yet the organisation is now structurally committed and has a small team of staff from diverse backgrounds, the Development Group, poised and prepared to drive the programme forward. The PBNI compliance manager is now a full member of the Development Group along with a member of the four-person corporate team and two members of the senior management group. The active and committed participation of people in these positions underpins and strengthens good relations as an internal and external issue for all units and teams.

The Development Group is open to different issues, dilemmas and opportunities evolving across the organisation, depending on the team, area of work and priorities. Since April 2006 each team, in fieldwork, administration, personnel, finance and strategic policy, has set an annual good relations target. This target has to be locally relevant in order that

staff generate new working practices relevant to the good relations theme in each setting. The executive leadership and senior management team are also open to learning from each of these pilots. Meanwhile, the Development Group is:

- Promoting the theme of good relations to staff in all positions.
- Developing several days annually on good relations as a key strand in the induction of all new staff.
- Establishing a pre-qualifying module on good relations.
- Securing post-qualifying modules on good relations for further professional development.
- Developing an accredited course on good relations that staff will encourage clients who have committed sectarian or racist actions to undertake as part of their rehabilitation.

Learning points from this developmental practice

Valuable learning points can be drawn from this creative, asymmetrical collaboration between a medium-sized organisation with over 300 staff and a small developmental organisation with three research staff. Initially Future Ways was asked to lead the process while PBNI staff took the opportunity to reflect together. As momentum picked up and the Development Group developed its awareness and organisational agenda, group members moved into the lead positions. It is useful to return to the programme's original aim and four objectives to assess what has been learned.

Aim: To grow the PBNI's capacity to work through and learn from difficult issues around identities, prejudice and political divisions
Within the diverse staff of the PBNI, there was the capacity to distil and discern the strategic work needed on internal relationships, relationships with clients and relationships with societal partners that would improve good relations. Collectively the PBNI had the wisdom to contribute to the good relations agenda and therefore this process could be internally led and informed with the minimum of external support.

Objective 1: To develop the understanding of the organisation regarding the challenges and possibilities of operating in a politically contested society
The PBNI has a history of working sensitively within differing political climates. The scoping study brought to the surface a number of issues

known to PBNI senior management as well as some that had not been heard strongly before. Whilst some staff members were unsure or ambivalent about this approach, a sufficient number saw the potential benefits to themselves, their colleagues and the wider service of making the good relations theme central. A considerable number of staff members also spoke about the bridging function that the PBNI had performed in the past and were proud of this role; they expressed the view that the PBNI should continue to be politically aware. Different staff at different levels concluded that the organisation needed to legitimise staff addressing the good relations theme and identified areas where the organisation would benefit from such actions.

In a society more characterised by caution than by risk-taking it is understandable that the public sector changes slowly. However, it is in the move to secure an agreed criminal justice system in Northern Ireland that organisations such as the PBNI can show civic leadership.

Objective 2: To support the organisation to define and identify key issues that are impacting on its capacity to deliver quality services
Organisations need sustained and engaged top-level commitment to promote good relations. In the middle of this initiative the PBNI experienced changes in board membership and appointed a new chief executive and a new chairperson. The good relations process had to mark time during these transitional periods and then seek revalidation from the new appointees. There was also downtime when three members of the original Development Group, including two team managers, moved to the new Youth Justice Agency. Such changes are a normal part of organisation culture.

Having received a renewed mandate the Development Group was able to establish and agree proposals for promoting good relations, which have now been incorporated into the new good relations plan.

The process stretched out over a period of three years. It engaged external time of 39 contracted days and an additional 12 days given by Future Ways on a pro-bono basis as their contribution to the development research programme on good relations.

Objective 3: To pilot and implement new ways of working both internally and in relationships with service users and wider communities
The programme, whilst emanating from the PBNI's training unit, had to become a strategic corporate theme. The emphasis was initially

understood to be external to the internal working culture of the PBNI, assisting staff to work directly with offenders. It is to the credit of the PBNI that it then made the commitment to look internally at the organisational culture. The corporate policy, strategic priorities and the internal staff relationships were the first good relations priority and the organisation is now working from this base to focus on good relations in its external, offender-based work.

Objective 4: To develop innovative ways of auditing the impact of the process on improving operational goals
Target setting and internal audits are needed to underpin a whole-organisation approach and the presence of the compliance manager as a Development Group member is important in this respect. Moving the good relations theme from training into the wider corporate vision, operational plans and business plans has been an essential part of mainstreaming this practice and will be an audit tool to ensure compliance. Allocating a particular budget heading centrally for this work has also been an important institutional marker.

Conclusion

In a contested society such as Northern Ireland, emotions such as fear and anger rise to the surface very readily. In the absence of agreed law and order systems, and in a society that primarily identifies people as members of opposed traditions rather than as equal and different citizens, partisan dynamics can readily dominate professional, political, public and community life. A society moving beyond conflict initially requires enlightened and committed institutions, with a history of community initiative and dialogue, to model a public service vision that mobilises the diverse experiences and interests of staff in pursuit of a more plural society. In the scoping study interviews, longer-serving staff members argued that the PBNI has been one such body (Eyben and Wilson 2002).

The PBNI's good relations initiative was about the organisation developing a way forward on good relations within its structures and internal board and staff relationships as well as in its external relationships with clients, communities and other public and civil society organisations. It reveals a desire to promote and secure equal and

different citizenship at the core of how its staff treat and value one another within the organisation as well as how clients and members of community organisations are viewed. This is an important value position to take in a contested society. It signals a commitment to building a citizen-based society and to securing an agreed law and order system serving citizens from all backgrounds and traditions. This development is timely given the increase in racially motivated attacks on migrant workers and members of ethnic minority communities.

The emerging intercultural agenda in more stable societies and the recognition of racially motivated hate crimes brings this theme to the door of criminal justice and equality organisations in Ireland, north and south. Recent cross-border training initiatives on diversity awareness by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána, and collaboration on racism and promoting intercultural understanding between the Equality Commission and the Equality Authority, are encouraging developments. These initiatives combine best practice from a society emerging from conflict with best practice in a more stable society. They examine lingering assumptions about homogeneity being preferred or a narrow version of the diversity agenda being offered. North and south, inside and outside the criminal justice system, public and civic organisations need to promote the intercultural reality and prepare for the task of having intercultural workforces serving an intercultural public. These realities will demand a good relations competence and ease.

The growing interdependence agenda prompted by an expanded, more diverse European Union and the settlement of migrant workers and those seeking asylum and sanctuary demand new forms of public and civic response. If interdependence and intercultural understanding are to be secured then the probation services should become part of this agenda and strengthen the acceptability of the criminal justice sectors by building public institutions that block demeaning behaviours and establish good relations between a diverse citizenry as a necessity. It is imperative that criminal justice agencies see the goal of wider good relations as central to their practice.

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Self-Harm amongst Female Offenders in Custody: Lessons from the Literature

Janice Kelly*

Summary: The prison population is extremely vulnerable to committing acts of self-harm and female prisoners are more likely to self-harm than their male counterparts. The National Suicide Research Foundation (2004) recorded that 22.2% of the cases of self-harm that occurred in Irish prisons in 2002 involved females, even though women comprised only 3.1% of the total prison population. This article examines international research and trends to consider why self-harm is so prevalent amongst female prisoners, how self-harm can be prevented and what the best response is to those who self-harm.

Keywords: Female offenders, self-harm, prison, personality disorders.

Introduction

The prison population is an extremely vulnerable one and is more likely to exhibit characteristics associated with self-harm than the general community. These characteristics include poor interpersonal relationships, inadequate problem-solving skills, low motivation, socioeconomic disadvantage, low self-esteem, poor education and employment history, substance misuse and involvement with the criminal justice system. The prison population has a higher rate of self-injurious behaviour than the general population (McArthur *et al.* 1999b). In general, female offenders experience more psychosocial problems than their male counterparts. Research has shown that female offenders are more likely to have personality disorders, psychosis, addiction problems, neurotic disorders and learning disabilities. In addition, more female than male offenders

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have experienced childhood abuse and have been in abusive relationships (Maden *et al.* 1994; McArthur *et al.* 1999b). Self-harm also occurs more frequently amongst the female prison population. The National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF 2004) recorded that there were 144 parasuicide episodes (which they define as deliberate self-harm) involving 112 individuals in Irish prisons in 2002. Some 32 of these cases (22.2%) related to women. As only 3.1% of the Irish prison population of that year was female, women are clearly over represented in these figures. They may also under-represent the incidence of self-injury amongst prisoners as minor incidents often go undetected. As the ongoing trend shows that the female prison population is increasing, it is most likely that self-harm will become an even more prevalent problem in Irish prisons.

What is self-harm?

Isacsson and Rich (2001) argue that self-harm is not an illness but a behaviour. It is a physical act committed against oneself with the intention of inflicting harm. The severity of the act can vary from one that causes minor damage to one that threatens life. Some argue that self-harm and attempted suicide should be viewed as two separate categories; the former as a dysfunctional way of dealing with anxiety, tension, stress or guilt or of gaining control over aspects of one's life, and the latter as an intention to die. Self-harm is looked upon as a chronic problem that is more repetitive and less lethal than attempted suicide (McArthur *et al.* 1999b). Liebling (1996), however, believes that self-harm and attempted suicide are part of the same continuum, which begins with ideation, then self-injury, followed by suicide attempts and finally culminates in actual suicide. She goes on to say that people may enter or leave the continuum at various points.

Research indicates that prisoners who commit suicide have had a higher incidence of self-harm in the past and that those who self-harm are more likely to experience suicidal ideation (McArthur *et al.* 1999b). It follows, therefore, that regardless of which view is accepted self-harm should always be viewed as serious. McArthur *et al.* (1999b) state there is no correlation between intent and the seriousness of self-harm. This would certainly appear to be true in a custodial setting. In a prison situation there is limited access to less serious methods of self-harm such

as drug overdoses and more opportunities for more serious methods such as hanging and cutting. As a result there is an increased risk that any such attempts may turn out to be serious. Regardless of the seriousness of a specific incident, it should be noted that any level of self-harm indicates personal distress. For the purpose of this article I am using the term self-harm to encompass all types of deliberate self-injury regardless of intent.

Self-harm in a custodial setting

As already stated there is a higher rate of self-harm amongst prisoners than in the general population. McArthur *et al.* (1999b) put forward two theories as to why this situation should apply. The first is known as the 'importation theory', which states that the reason prisoners are more likely to self-harm is due to their personal attributes. Put into practice this means that suicide rates would be reduced if risk factors were identified and predictors for suicide were developed and implemented, such as the Suicide Risk Assessment and Management (S-RAMM) tool developed by the Cognitive Centre Foundation. This theory supports the view that a custodial setting plays little part in self-harm behaviour and that self-harm occurs more often in prison due to the vulnerability of this specific group to self-harm. McArthur *et al.*'s second theory is known as the 'derivational theory', which asserts that self-harm is caused by the stress and difficulties encountered through being incarcerated. These include the fact that prisoners' social support networks are broken: they no longer have on-demand access to their family and friends, they have lost control over their lives, they are denied membership of the wider society and they are part of a closed social system that contains violence, distrust and fear.

It might be that people in prison self-harm due to an interaction between the person and the environment. Holley and Arboleda-Florez (1988) argue that self-harm can be a way of gaining some control in an environment where rules and regulations apply such as prison. Those who are finding it difficult to tolerate the regime are more likely to use self-destructive behaviours. They put forward the view that punitive responses may increase the severity and frequency of these attempts. Additionally those who have lost their social support network may be more likely to turn to self-destructive behaviour in an attempt to deal

with feelings such as anger and frustration. Borhill *et al.* (2005) acknowledge that there is a link between self-harm and childhood abuse. They suggest prison may 'retraumatise women with histories of abuse because it replicates aspects of the traumatic experience, lack of privacy and autonomy, isolation from social support and dependence for basic needs on conformity to authority figures' (p. 68).

There are several points at which self-harming behaviour becomes increasingly prevalent in relation to people in custody. Dear *et al.* (1998) and Wool and Dooley (1987) note that prisoners on remand are overly represented in statistics of self-harm; this could be because they are subject to considerable stress as a result of the uncertainty regarding what lies ahead. Lloyd (1990) argues that many people who are on remand suffer from a mental disorder and are therefore considered to be at risk of suicidal behaviour. The *Report of the National Steering Group on Deaths in Prisons* (Department of Justice 1999) acknowledges that there is international evidence of suicide being increasingly likely during the remand stage, but found no clear pattern of this during their study in Ireland. Liebling (1995) puts forward the viewpoint that other precipitating factors for self-harm in prison include transfers, recent stressful prison events, refusal of parole, the start of a sentence and recent domestic events.

Several research studies have identified clusters of incidence of self-harm occurring within custodial settings. McArthur *et al.* (1999b) assert that prison subculture and the prison regime are factors in the level of self-harm within the prison. Ross and MacKay (1979) studied adolescent females in a custodial setting and found that 86% had cut themselves. They also found that the girls who self-harmed only once were more likely to be popular than those who had not self-harmed or who had self-harmed repeatedly. They conclude that this once-off self-harm occurred when girls realised that it would assist them in gaining acceptance. McArthur *et al.* (1999b) argue that this is a subculture that forms within the institutional setting and that is inherited from previous generations of prisoners.

Profile of those who self-harm in custody

Smyth *et al.* (1994) and Dear *et al.* (1998), amongst others, found that young people were more vulnerable to self-harm. This is also reflected in

the 2004 NSRF report, which found that the majority of the self-harm incidents in Irish prisons are committed by those aged between 15 and 39. This is indicative of the Irish prison population, where 86.4% of prisoners are under 40 years of age.

Prisoners most prone to self-harm are likely to have negative relationships with inmates and staff, have a history of mental disorder (including both mental illness and personality disorder), have a history of drug abuse, be victims of child sexual abuse, be impulsive and have poor problem-solving skills (McArthur *et al.* 1999a; Heney 1990).

Wichmann *et al.* (2002) argue that those who repeatedly self-harm not only commit self-directed acts of aggression, but are also more likely to be involved in institutional incidents of violence, drug and alcohol use and discipline problems. They also found that self-harmers were more likely to have adjustment difficulties to prison conditions, be victimised by their counterparts, have prior escape-related behaviour and have difficulty remaining crime free in the community. Their risk of reoffending was higher than those who did not self-harm.

Isacsson and Rich (2001) assert that between 90% and 99% of those prisoners who self-harm have one or more psychiatric disorders, under which heading they include personality disorder and substance misuse. Research also indicates that self-harm is more prominent amongst those who have personality disorders than it is amongst those with a mental illness. Rutherford and Taylor (2004) compared the self-harm rate amongst these two groups and found that 73% of those with personality disorders self-harm as opposed to only 19% of those with a mental illness. Gorsuch (1998) studied 44 women who were referred to a psychiatrist working in London's Holloway Prison and compared those who were 'difficult to place' in psychiatric services with those who never had a problem getting a bed in a secure NHS facility. The research found that the members of the group that was difficult to place in psychiatric services were more likely to have experienced abuse, be homeless, be guilty of more violent offences, have had arson convictions and have addiction problems. Most were diagnosed with a personality disorder as opposed to an acute psychiatric illness and were considered a management problem by the prison. The study showed that these women were also more likely to self-harm, with 95% of them engaging in such acts compared to 36% of those with psychiatric illness.

Such women find it difficult to survive in the community and in Ireland there are only a limited number of hostels and transitional

housing projects available for women. It is my opinion that women who have a variety of social and psychological problems struggle to deal with the rules in these services and as a result they can become excluded from them. Feeling even more marginalised, they then continue in the perpetual cycle of offending and prison.

Wilkins and Coid (1991) state that 'the containment of such disturbed and damaged women has now shifted from the psychiatric to the penal system'. Coid *et al.* (2003) assert that prisoners are being increasingly removed from the psychiatric system by rediagnosing them as having personality or criminal behaviour problems, or by 'reorganising the gate keeping processes leading to admission to the disadvantage of offender patients and lack of resources, specifically secure beds' (p. 337).

Prevention of self-harm in custody

Initial screening of prisoners for risk of self-harm is common practice internationally, however it is widely accepted that this in itself is not sufficient in preventing suicide. Dooley (1990) asserts that self-harm should be seen in terms of the morale of the institution and not in terms of an individual's problems. One should be wary of disregarding the individual in the equation, however, as not every prisoner self-harms. Therefore the act may be most likely to result from the interaction between a prisoner's characteristics and the institution. In order to address the issues relating to self-harm, preventative strategies within the prison and appropriate responses to those who self-harm should be utilised. I will first look at the positive protective strategies that the prison can take to reduce the level of self-harm amongst all prisoners.

Liebling (1995) argues that prevention of self-harm is often better placed in the mainstream prison than in the healthcare unit and that the focus should be on strengthening protective factors. She asserts that constructive activity within the prison is important in the prevention of self-harm. Although female prisons, for example the Dóchas Centre in Dublin, often provide a wide range of educational, recreational and work-related activities, many prisoners do not partake in these activities due to poor motivation. The Dóchas Centre previously operated a scheme to encourage women to participate in education and work within the prison by awarding points for partaking in these activities. These points could be traded in for extra privileges. The Dóchas Centre is also

reintroducing regular house meetings within the prison, which provide the prisoners with a forum for voicing their opinions on the way their house is functioning. Projects such as these assist women in gaining some level of control over their environment, which Liebling (1995) argues is necessary for them to recover from self-harm.

Liebling (1995) also identifies the need for these women to have hopes and plans in order to prevent self-harm in prisons. She argues it is essential that a positive sentence-management service is in place (including a comprehensive plan for each prisoner) in which needs are assessed and appropriate programmes developed. These programmes would equip prisoners with skills and capabilities to protect them from self-harming as well as assisting them to improve their behaviour in prison and reducing their offending behaviour on release.

There are no open prisons for female offenders in Ireland. It is arguable that the lack of such facilities may have a bearing on the women prisoners' motivation to become involved in educational activities and to partake in programmes aimed at helping to reduce their offending behaviour; the opportunity of progression to an open facility may have offered an incentive to participation. Due to the ongoing rise in the numbers of females being incarcerated, increasing pressure is being placed on the two existing prisons: the Dóchas Centre and Limerick. In view of the plans to move Dublin's Mountjoy complex (incorporating the Dóchas Centre) to a new site at Thornton Hall, it is an appropriate time for the Department of Justice to examine the concept of providing a low security or open prison for females.

McArthur *et al*. (1999a) argue that those who are at risk of self-harm should be regularly assessed and receive counselling from members of a multi-disciplinary team consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses and probation officers. It is important that cases of those who are at risk or who have self-harmed are regularly reviewed. Regular weekly healthcare meetings are held in the Dóchas Centre to review cases of prisoners that fall into this category.

McArthur *et al*. (1999a) also assert that the Victorian model for unit management divides the prison into small manageable units which allow for greater interaction between prisoners and staff and have the additional benefit of reducing isolation. The Dóchas Centre operates under this model and is subdivided into seven houses with staff assigned to a panel for each one. Prison officers have more contact hours with prisoners than any other profession within the prison and are more likely

to be in the vicinity when a crisis occurs. Selected prison officers could be given additional specialised training to enable them to play a key working role with long-term prisoners and repeat offenders.

Visits from family members can reduce feelings of stress and isolation. Keeping up regular contact with family can also help in reintegrating prisoners into society. The *Report of the National Steering Group on Deaths in Prison* (1999) recommends regular telephone contact and visits for families. Prisoners in the Dóchas Centre are able to make daily telephone calls to their families and receive weekly visits. Those on remand are able to receive visits on a more regular basis, which is most desirable because, as already stated, being on remand can cause particular personal distress and can increase the risk of self-harm. McArthur *et al.* (1999a) argue that to reduce the stress of the prison environment, new prisoners should receive an induction programme. They give an example of one such programme in Australia where prisoners receive basic information on prison routine, support services and safety issues. Additionally it is widely acknowledged that the provision of a television reduces incidences of self-harm as it decreases feelings of boredom and isolation (McArthur *et al.* 1999a; Department of Justice 1999). Each cell in the Dóchas Centre has a television. Schemes such as the Befriender Scheme, which is run in the Dóchas Centre, where volunteers visit those who have few visitors are beneficial in reducing feelings of isolation and allowing prisoners to feel they belong to the wider community.

Heney (1990) reports that many female prisoners support each other informally following self-harm, which includes taking care of wounds to avoid detection by prison management. Some prisons in Britain, Australia and the US have placed this arrangement on a more formal basis through a peer support programme. In Britain and Northern Ireland a listening scheme is operated in some prisons by the Samaritans. At least 10 to 12 long-term prisoners, who have no substance-use issues, are trained as listeners. They listen and provide support to other prisoners in crisis and may also share their cell with them if required. The Samaritans run weekly group sessions for the listeners. Davies (1994) found that the listener scheme in Swansea reduced self-harm by 50%. It would undoubtedly be difficult to implement such a scheme amongst female offenders in Ireland because both of the prisons catering for women have an insufficient pool of long-term prisoners at any one time. Nevertheless, it might be possible to introduce a modified version of the scheme.

Best practice when self-harm occurs

Kapur (2005) argues that when self-harm occurs there should be a move from a risk assessment of further self-harm to a needs assessment, which would identify psychosocial factors that might explain the act of self-harm and help develop a plan to counteract the problem. Some prisons in New South Wales, Australia investigate and address each case of self-harm using a number of treatment options, including immediate referral to counselling, increased family visits and special accommodation such as shared cells and peer support.

International practice is moving away from the use of strip cells for those exhibiting self-harm behaviour, as research indicates self-harm is more likely to occur when alone. Being placed alone in a cell can increase feelings of isolation and therefore, if circumstances allow, it is preferable to let the prisoner share a cell with someone else. However, Coid *et al.* (2003) acknowledge that if the individual also poses a management problem there may be few alternatives to the strip cell. The *Report of the National Steering Group on Deaths in Prison* (1999) states that the strip cell allows a person to overcome an immediate crisis but does not solve the problem of self-harm. In circumstances where there is no alternative but to use a strip cell, every effort should be made to resolve the issues facing the prisoner so as to end the time spent there as soon as possible. The report also argues that high-support units for those exhibiting self-harm behaviour would be more suitable. These units would have the advantage of being staffed by dedicated personnel with specialist training, however, it could be argued that such units might cause a cluster of self-harming incidents to occur. Liebling (1994) argues:

> . . . prison staff and other specialists on the other hand, may be better placed to resolve some of the immediate problems precipitating the crisis. Access to social service agencies, legal aid, probation officer or other sources of advice and practical assistance may be a more effective and humane response to distress than referral to a psychiatrist or isolation in a prison hospital. Prison staff and other prisoners may also be able to offer the support, company and diversion that is required (p. 7).

It is essential, therefore, that a multi-disciplinary approach is adopted in dealing with crisis situations. The team should include a nurse,

psychologist, probation officer, psychiatrist, a member of prison management and a prison officer who has a lot of contact with the prisoner (McArthur *et al.* 1999a). Prisoners who are considered at risk of self-harm in Ireland are placed on a special observation list and are checked every 15 minutes. In the case of the Dóchas Centre, these lists are reviewed on a regular basis.

Problem-solving skills

Biggam and Power (2005) express support for the use of problem-solving interventions for mental health issues and self-harm. They assert that:

> . . . from a mental health perspective, problem solving serves as a general coping strategy that allows an individual to generate, select and implement a whole host of effective behaviours which will enhance general well-being in psychological and social terms and protect the individual from possible maladaptation (p. 147).

Biggam and Power argue that such interventions could be offered to vulnerable prisoners who have difficulties in adjusting to prison. These should be integrated with other programmes such as drug rehabilitation programmes. They say that the problem-solving intervention for mental health is a brief form of intervention and therefore can be offered to those with short sentences. Problem-solving interventions for mental health can be used to prepare individuals for other programmes aimed at reducing recidivism. The goal of the problem-solving training should be to equip prisoners with generalised skills that they can use in any context and not just in prison. More research is needed to establish whether problem-solving skills reduce self-harm amongst female offenders in both the short and long terms.

Conclusion

Self-harm is a serious problem amongst female prisoners and will most likely worsen because of the ongoing rise in the number of females imprisoned. In order to address the problem, general self-harm prevention policies are indicated, utilising existing support networks. Every prisoner should be the subject of a risk and needs assessment with

multi-disciplinary case management and should be encouraged to partake in the pro-social activities in the prison and to maintain family contacts. Additionally, those who feel isolated should be referred to a Befriender Scheme. As prison officers are most likely to be in the vicinity when a crisis occurs, it might be appropriate for certain prison officers with extra training to provide a key worker role to long-term prisoners and repeat offenders. Those who self-harm should receive appropriate counselling and every attempt should be made to alleviate their personal distress and other underlying problems so as to help counteract their self-destructive tendencies. It might also be beneficial to provide problem-solving interventions for mental health issues and self-harm within the prisons. These can also be used to prepare prisoners for programmes aimed at reducing recidivism.

Coid *et al.* (1993) highlight the increasing number of people who were previously treated in the psychiatric services and who are now coming into contact with prison services. In this regard it is likely that there will be more people with personality disorders being incarcerated. In view of the fact that this particular group has a high incidence of self-harm and present management problems in custody, it is imperative that priority is given to putting the necessary services in place. If protective factors against self-harm are strengthened in the prisons, it is likely that it will lead to an improvement of the behaviour of the prisoners involved and a reduction in their levels of offending on release.

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Effective Practice in Probation Supervision

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Summary: This article presents the research on effective approaches in working with offenders on supervision from three interlinked perspectives: personal effectiveness, effective interventions and organisational effectiveness. It suggests that such a holistic approach to effective practice provides guidance to probation organisations in relation to the official goals of public protection and achieving a reduction in offending as well as what might be termed the instrumental goals of probation officers and offenders. It concludes that elements of traditional social work, when at its best, are part of the effective package.

Keywords: Effective practice, personal effectiveness, effective interventions.

Introduction

There is a robust and growing body of research that offers guidance on effective approaches or practices in working with offenders on probation supervision. Use of research findings as a primary source of knowledge for practice is referred to as empirical practice. Empirical practice in probation involves a worker employing his/her knowledge of what the research findings reveal about which practices are effective in engaging offenders, assisting them to desist from crime and responding to their needs. Knowledge about which approaches work enables probation officers to achieve improved outcomes, that is, less offending, better compliance with supervision and ultimately a better service to offenders and other stakeholders (Home Office 1998).

Appraising the research evidence provides a context in which probation staff and management can discuss and clarify their goals and

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determine the most effective strategies to achieve them. Furthermore, a commitment on the part of the probation organisation to evidence-based practice enables it to respond more confidently to demands for accountability and public scrutiny.

Effective practice in supervision may be looked at from three perspectives:
1. Personal effectiveness in working with offenders.
2. Effective interventions and programmes.
3. Organisational effectiveness in working with offenders.

These three interlinked perspectives provide a useful framework for the presentation of the research findings.

Personal effectiveness in working with offenders

There has been a growth in interest in effective approaches to practice, and in personal effectiveness in particular, that assist probation officers to supervise offenders effectively. A number of researchers have explored what it is that offenders valued about the supervision they received (Beaumont and Mistry 1996; Mair and May 1997; Rex 1999; Calverley *et al.* 2004). All of these studies gave out consistent messages that offenders appear to value having someone to talk to about their problems, receiving practical help or advice, being treated with respect and being helped to keep out of trouble and to avoid reoffending. What also emerges from these and other studies is a description of the personal characteristics of the probation officer that assist in helping offenders engage in supervision and desist from crime. Probation officers who establish relationships characterised by loyalty and optimism, which are active, participative, purposeful, pro-social and explicit in their negotiation of role boundaries and mutual expectations, are more effective. Trotter (1993) emphasises the need to harness relationship skills in a specific manner with criminal justice clients. He states that in addition to relationship skills, as outlined above, three key practices of the effective probation officer are role clarification, pro-social skills and problem-solving skills.

- Role clarification
  The dual role of the probation officer as helper and social controller with responsibility for public protection can be difficult for offenders to understand and exploring the implications of a statement such as

'My job involves making sure you carry out the conditions of the court order. It is also an equally important part of my work to help you with any problems which might have caused you to be put on probation' can assist understanding (Trotter 1999, p. 50). The effective probation officer:

– Balances the investigator and helper roles and is careful not to adopt an exclusively forensic role or an exclusively helping role.
– Talks about his/her role in managing a court order and in particular emphasises the aim of helping the offender to address the problems that have caused him/her to be put on probation.
– Discusses expectations – what is negotiable and what is not.
– Discusses his/her authority and how it can be used.

• Pro-social skills
The use of pro-social modelling was consistently, strongly and significantly correlated with lower offence and imprisonment rates in Trotter's 1993 study and is viewed as a core competence for practice by all people who work in probation (Home Office 2000). The effective probation officer:

– Models pro-social behaviours and comments.
– Encourages and rewards the comments and/or behaviours that he/she wishes to promote.
– Challenges pro-criminal rationalisations and behaviours, not in a critical or judgmental way but with a focus on why the offender feels and acts that way and on positive ways of dealing with the situation.
– Aims for four positives or rewards to every negative or challenging comment.

• Problem-solving skills
The effective probation officer:

– Encourages the offender to define the specific and real problems which he/she faces – with a focus on the problems which have led to being on probation.
– Reaches agreement with the offender on the problems to be addressed.
– Reaches agreement with the offender on goals and ways to achieve them.
– Has ongoing contact with the offender and if referrals are made, they are made as part of a problem-solving process.

In Trotter's 1993 study probation officers who used these practices had better outcomes in terms of higher rates of compliance on probation supervision orders and lower rates of recidivism and subsequent imprisonment over a four-year period.

Bonta (2004) also emphasises the importance of relationship skills and of structuring skills in bringing about change in offenders. Structuring skills include pro-social modelling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, problem solving and community advocacy. Many of these structuring skills are essentially the effective practices outlined by Trotter; for example Bonta's 'effective disapproval' mirrors Trotter's key practice of identifying, discouraging or confronting anti-social comments or behaviours by balancing at least four positives to every negative or confrontational comment. Community advocacy, however, is an emerging area that has to do with managing referrals and can be described as giving information about resources, monitoring use of resources, following up with the resources agencies and providing assistance to overcome obstacles.

Much of the research on personal effectiveness in working with offenders is not new to probation officers. What is important therefore is the commitment at both personal and organisational levels to applying the findings consistently. Bonta looked at probation officer interventions over six months using his structuring skills criteria. He discovered that probation officers had reasonably high relationship skills but did not engage in the structuring skills that the research suggests are important. In about two-thirds of cases he found appropriate reinforcement being given, however, there were very few instances of pro-social modelling. Probation officers linked people into community resources but offered little follow-up support for use of these.

The mobilising of resources and in particular what is described as the 'building of social capital' for offenders is a key theme in the desistance research of Farrall (2004). In Farrall's research, motivation and the social and personal contexts of the offenders are dominant forces in determining whether the obstacles which they face are resolved. There is evidence that probation officers can improve offenders' chances of success by supporting changes in their employment and family relationships, in particular, and by enhancing their personal motivation.

Case management and case planning are critical to orchestrating the various strands of the supervision programme. Huxley (1993) describes

a co-ordinating model of case management which encompasses assessment, planning, referral, some advocacy, direct casework, support and reassessment. In the context of the Probation Service (PS), the case management approach adopted is one where the probation officer works directly on some problems with the offender, while linking with in-house providers of groupwork programmes and/or outside agencies in relation to other offender needs. The probation officer plans and co-ordinates the various interventions ensuring that needs/risks are addressed over time. Case management is sometimes referred to as 'casework' in the PS and in other social work agencies.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2002) suggests that case management involves tackling the multiple risk factors for criminal behaviour – such as drug abuse, homelessness and unemployment – which characterise most supervised offenders. The evidence from the United Kingdom indicates that programmes or structured probation interventions will not work unless delivered in the context of effective case management (Kemshall *et al.* 2002).

Case management involves having a case-management plan with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) objectives that are reviewed at regular intervals with the client and that are monitored by the organisation. Kemshall *et al.* (2001), in their study of the implementation of effective practice, looked at 297 case-files and described how the supervision plans lacked focus on objectives and outcomes, with staff confusing objectives with descriptions of the routes that lead to achieving them.

Motivational interviewing skills have proven effectiveness in the engagement of offenders in changing their behaviour (Trotter 2000). In order to engage offenders to make the necessary changes, their motivation has to be identified and tackled. Although probation officers are aware of this need, Kemshall *et al.* (2002) suggest that insufficient attention is being given to motivating clients in the early stages of case management and there is a need to be explicit in supervision plans about how motivation is going to be enhanced and encouraged.

Positive approaches to securing compliance are receiving increasing attention. Offenders tend to be poor completers, thus it makes sense to deploy the full range of strategies for promoting compliance and to avoid over-focusing on coercive threat. Bottoms (2001) outlines a number of strategies that probation officers could utilise proactively:

- Make attendance the norm: Trotter's practice of 'clarifying what is negotiable and what is not' is paired with efforts to make attendance the norm such as arranging appointments to coincide with other activities such as 'signing on' and exploring and reducing possible obstacles to attendance.
- Reward compliance: This involves reducing restrictions or lessening the demands that the overall community supervision imposes, for instance fewer ongoing appointments conditional on progress.
- Offer a graduated system of positive rewards: These may include early termination of supervision for good behaviour.

The above examination of the key effective practices and characteristics of the probation officer that assist in implementing the effective supervision of offenders reveals that elements of traditional work are part of the effective package. The majority of these elements are drawn largely, though not exclusively, from the helping or social work research and literature.

Effective interventions and programmes

When the goals of intervention have been outlined, it is important to pay attention to how they are addressed. The guidelines for effective programmes outlined below apply to structured one-to-one programmes as well as to groupwork programmes run by probation officers.

- Respond to the learning style of offenders. The learning styles of most offenders require active, participatory methods of working rather than a didactic mode on the one hand or an unstructured experiential mode on the other (McGuire 1995).
- Have a clear model of change backed by research evidence. Probation officers should specify which risk factor a programme or intervention will reduce and how it will do so. A theoretical model or evidence from existing research should support the methods used (Antonwicz and Ross 1994). A programme, whether one-to-one or group, is described by Chapman and Hough (1998) as:

> A planned series of interventions over a specified and bounded time period which can be demonstrated to positively change attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and social circumstances, designed to achieve clearly defined objectives based on an identifiable model or empirical evidence (p. 8).

Thus, an individual probation officer who wishes to target a risk factor such as drug addiction will look to the research evidence on effective interventions with drug users and design the series of interventions accordingly or access an accredited or evaluated programme. There will be occasions when probation officers are piloting new approaches which have not hitherto been researched or evaluated. In such circumstances it is important to state the gap in the research evidence, to outline why the particular approach is being adopted and to commit to evaluate the new approach thoroughly.

- Target criminogenic needs which are identified in the risk assessment. Probation officers in the PS use a risk assessment tool, the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R) with adults and the Youth Level of Service – Case Management Inventory (YLS-CMI) with juveniles, to help identify criminogenic needs. In using these tools probation officers assess and address risk factors under the following key potential areas of risk known as criminogenic needs: education and employment, financial management, family, accommodation, use of leisure, companions, alcohol and drug use, mental health and attitudes (Andrews *et al.* 1990). The risk assessment instrument assists the probation officer to make more accurate assessments of the likelihood that an offender will reoffend and the interventions required to address the offending. Offenders with high levels of risk or of criminogenic needs will require a high level of intervention and those with low levels of risk or of criminogenic needs will require little or no intervention (Andrews *et al.* 1990).

- Use methods drawn from behavioural, cognitive or cognitive–behavioural sources in order to achieve cognitive and behavioural change. Research confirms the effectiveness of cognitive–behavioural interventions when change in anti-social thinking and behaviour is the goal (Lipsey 1992; Losel 1995; Andrews 1995). Many practitioners believe that using relationship skills and facilitating insight will effect the necessary behavioural changes. It has been suggested that while psychotherapeutic-type strategies may be effective for other problems, there is little evidence that their continued use in offence-focused work with offenders is rewarded by useful outcomes (McGuire 1995). Nevertheless, relationship-building skills, structuring skills and motivational skills are important for engaging the client and maintaining his/her participation in cognitive–behavioural and other interventions (Andrews 2000).

- Use methods which are multi-modal (Lipsey 1992; Losel 1995), that is, methods which incorporate a wide range of components or techniques aimed at a number of different targets. This recognises that changing behaviour is a complex task and needs to be broken down into parts to be worked on, using a range of techniques. For example, McMurran and Hollin (1993) identified the relevant components of intervention for young offenders who are substance abusers as behavioural self-control training, problem-solving skills training, emotion control training, social skills training, relapse prevention and general lifestyle modification.
- Use skills-oriented methods which are designed to enhance skills in such areas as problem solving, relapse prevention, conflict management and employment (Lipsey 1992; Losel 1995). In order to learn new skills in these and other areas in which offenders have difficulties, there is a need to offer opportunities for structured learning in one-to-one or in group situations (Golstein and Keller 1987). The requisite skills are described, demonstrated, practiced and reinforced by the probation officer in a structured, sequential manner. Roleplay, role rehearsal, coaching and modelling are useful methods of teaching new skills.
- Recognise that offenders have multiple problems including inter-personal and internal difficulties as well as external pressures (Palmer 1992). Thus, notwithstanding the effectiveness and importance of cognitive–behavioural interventions for targeting offending behaviour, there is a need to draw on other social work methods and techniques such as linking, task-centred work, solution-focused therapy, crisis intervention, advocacy, case management and family counselling, in order to address behaviour in the context of family and community (McGuire 1995; Ross *et al.* 1995). This is not to suggest an unconsidered 'scattergun' approach and probation officers will need to think clearly about which methods are likely to be effective.
- Consider personal effectiveness in working with offenders (as outlined above).
- Attend to programme integrity, which involves attention to the delivery of a programme as stated in its design (Hollin 1995). Evaluate what was delivered against a plan that specified what was intended.
- Evaluate the outcomes. Work needs to be monitored and evaluated in order to assess its effectiveness. Evaluation is itself a critical and inseparable part of being an effective practitioner and the use of a risk

assessment tool such as LSI-R offers the opportunity to re-apply the risk assessment on completing the intervention in order to evaluate the outcomes.

Organisational effectiveness in working with offenders

It has been suggested that effectiveness can be achieved when practice is directed and supported by effective management and information systems (Roberts 1996; Losel 1995). To be effective, organisations working with offenders need to:

- Have accurate risk assessment and review the validity and reliability of the instrument on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure that there are supervision plans in place in which the offender is involved.
- Provide what is needed internally and make requisite connections to ensure external provision. Hence the importance of partnership arrangements and agreements with other agencies. Many plans encourage the notion of referral but do not emphasise following through on referral and helping people across thresholds.
- Have case managers who have clear roles and responsibilities and are supervised.
- Have case managers who have case-management plans, which are reviewed and modified according to progress, with consideration for early terminating for good progress.
- Specify what constitutes good practice and monitor that it is in place.

The implementation of effective practice requires a strategic and whole-system approach in which attention is given to supporting the mechanisms and processes required to ensure effective delivery. Evidence-based practice should be seen as a continuing inter-relationship between research and practice. A probation service which has a culture of evidence-based practice is more likely to evaluate and test models of good practice. Much research remains to be done and many complex questions regarding effective responses to the problems of offending remain to be answered.

Case study: Probation Service (PS)

In an earlier research study, I concluded that the PS was applying the research evidence in its practice but only to a limited extent (Connolly

2001). Since the introduction of risk assessment instruments in 2005, the integration of evidence-based practice has progressed apace, but much remains to be done. There are a number of key mechanisms, some of which are being put in place by PS management, which will assist the process of integrating the research evidence into practice:

- Communicate clearly what is required and what is no longer required. The publication of standards for practice presents an ideal opportunity to state clearly what is required.
- Integrate effective practices into the performance development objectives of PMDS (Performance Management Development System), for example incorporating such objectives as 'All staff contact with offenders will exhibit pro-social modelling' or 'All service delivery must contain SMART objectives as evidenced in case-management plans'.
- Include references to the research evidence where appropriate in policy and practice documents or alternatively research briefings should accompany the policy and practice documents.
- Communicate effectively with staff, face-to-face, in order to increase awareness of, and belief in, effective practice.
- Ensure quality assurance at key points of delivery by use of audits of case-management plans and discussions with customer panels which include offender perceptions.
- Establish a steering group which would identify and promote effective practice and establish 'champion' groups to focus on specific areas of work such as female offenders or sex offenders.
- Model the effective practices and actively reward good practice.

Conclusion

The research evidence provides a map for the probation officer in search of effectiveness and moves away from a practice culture characterised by individual probation officers practising forms of social work based on theoretical or personal preference. Raynor (1996) argues that the consequences of such individualistic practice can be biased outcomes for offenders.

Much of the research about personal effectiveness is derived largely from the field of social work whereas the research about effective interventions is drawn largely from the field of psychology. Utilising the

research evidence to address offending behaviour and promote compliance with supervision will involve probation staff using social work skills and values. The research literature confirms that much of what is considered good practice in social work is also good probation practice (Coulshed 1991; Trotter 1999).

Effective application of the research evidence also has implications for the work of projects and partnerships created between the probation organisation and the various agencies involved in community-based work with offenders. Where projects funded by the probation organisation have criminal justice aims, such as the integration and rehabilitation of offenders, the research knowledge provides guidelines in relation to appropriate interventions and clarity in relation to the respective roles of partner agencies. For example, Raynor (2004) suggests that projects which provide social integration are more likely to be associated with reductions in offending if they adopt a 'responsibility model'. Such a model views the offender as responsible for his/her behaviour and offending and as capable of making changes; viewing the offender as a victim of social circumstances is described as a 'deficit model'.

The research on effectiveness has become almost exclusively associated with the effectiveness of groupwork programmes. There is now a need to a have a broader approach that will ensure that all aspects of effectiveness are integrated into probation practice. The broader framework of research evidence outlined in this article provides guidance for probation organisations and for individual probation officers on how best to achieve the official goals of public protection and reduced offending and other person-related goals which are not as prominent in official documents but which are expressed by both probation officers and offenders (Robinson and McNeill 2004). These goals include such things as addressing housing, employment and support problems, many of which are instrumental in achieving the official goals. The research framework presented in this article allows for a holistic, personalised approach to the supervision of offenders that offers a realistic expectation of meeting both public and person-related goals.

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Women Offenders: The Development of a Policy and Strategy for Implementation by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland

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Summary: In late 2004 the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) established a Policy, Planning and Business Development Unit to co-ordinate policymaking and to include a focus on new business development. This article describes the experience of building an evidence base as part of the process of the development of a policy and strategy in relation to women offenders in Northern Ireland. It summarises the findings from research undertaken as part of this process and makes recommendations for the formulation of policy and strategy.

Keywords: Women offenders, policymaking, strategy, appropriate interventions.

Introduction

The PBNI's *Corporate Plan 2005–2008* and *Business Plan 2005–2006* note that the organisation's purpose is to 'protect the public by working with the courts, other agencies and partners to reduce re-offending and integrate offenders successfully back into the community' (www.pbni.org.uk). One corporate objective, under the strategic area of social inclusion in the *Corporate Plan 2005–2008*, is to 'develop and implement appropriate services for female offenders'. The first stage in the process of achieving this objective involved the development of a policy for women offenders and an accompanying strategy for implementation.

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Context

Women offenders represent a relatively small proportion of the overall offender population in Northern Ireland – 14% of those found guilty by the courts in 2001 were women (NIO 2004). In 2006 there are some 300 women being supervised by the PBNI on Custody Probation Orders, Probation Orders with or without requirements, Community Service Orders or Combination Orders. Some 10% of the total pre-sentence reports prepared for the courts by the PBNI are written on women.

Although numbers are small, this cannot be a justification for the lack of appropriate and effective interventions to reduce reoffending amongst women. Currently there is little in the way of interventions designed specifically for women offenders. In England and Wales there is one accredited programme, which is for acquisitive offending. The majority of interventions are based upon male characteristics and male offending and as such are rarely appropriate for women or easily adapted for their use. Consequently, women who receive additional requirements to Probation Orders that are designed for delivery through groupwork often end up completing the work on a one-to-one basis rather than within a group as intended, with resultant questionable effectiveness in terms of the goal of reducing reoffending.

The limited nature of appropriate specific interventions for women offenders in practice is also mirrored in criminological frameworks to explain women's offending. Gelsthorpe (2003) noted that there is a need to dismantle and reconstruct these frames of reference in relation to women. Davies (2003) shares this view, stating that old traditional theoretical models cannot simply be made to fit.

There is an assumption that there are differences between men and women when it comes to offending, and that those differences extend both to the motivation behind the offending and to how the punishment meted out for the crime is experienced. There is also a view that not enough is being done to recognise, explain and address those differences within the criminal justice process. Unrefined perceptions of women offenders – what Davies calls the 'mad' or 'bad' images – are still to be found.

Another image is that of the woman as victim rather than offender – the victim of her past, of dysfunctional relationships and so on. Rumgay (2004) refers to 'a clear differentiation between the totally innocent victim and the totally guilty offender' (p. 5) relied upon by the criminal

justice system. She goes on to point out though that while 'understanding the offender's plight as a victim smacks of collusion with excuses for crime and exoneration from personal responsibility . . . criminal justice responses that combine the offender's accountability with recognition of her status as a victim are possible' (p. 5). It is not surprising that women with experience of the victimisation resulting from violence and sexual abuse may, as Rumgay puts it, be constrained 'with relationships and lifestyles in which diminished personal resources, combined with cumulative psychological and physical damage, lead to readiness to contemplate alternative illegal solutions to a variety of problems' (p. 8).

A recent and optimistic picture is portrayed in the Home Office's annual review of the Women's Offending Reduction Programme in England and Wales for 2004/5. It notes that there is

> . . . a greater awareness now that achieving gender equality in the criminal justice system is not about treating women offenders the same as men, but about recognising differences between the factors which affect why women offend and making sure that there are the right interventions and services in place to address those factors (p. 4).

Building an evidence base

Having accepted that service provision for women offenders does require attention in Northern Ireland, a key stage in the development of a policy and strategy for implementation of services for women offenders was to build an evidence base to support that need. The *Strategy Survival Guide* published by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit identifies the importance of this stage of providing 'an objective factual foundation' (Cabinet Office 2004). *The Reintegration Needs of Women Prisoners in Northern Ireland* – a needs analysis completed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 2005 – is very informative about women prisoners (see article by Roberson and Radford in this issue). However, we needed to acquire more detailed knowledge about those under supervision in the community and those on whom the PBNI prepares reports for the courts. In doing this, two main sources of information were used:

1. Staff seminars with experienced probation staff. Each seminar considered the following areas:

- The criminological needs of women offenders.
- 'Presenting problems' in work with women offenders.
- What community interventions are deemed to work well?
- What interventions need to be more accessible to women, and how might this be achieved?
- What external resources are used for women and which work well?
- What structural alternatives for offender management should be considered in Northern Ireland?

2. A desktop study of a sample of 150 PSRs (pre-sentence reports written by probation officers for the courts) completed in the 2004/5 year was carried out. A random sample was drawn, representative of all field probation areas throughout Northern Ireland and covering all court types and a range of ages. The ages were banded into the following groupings: under 17, 17 to 19, 20 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, and 50 and over.

   All 150 PSRs were analysed using a predetermined monitoring form. From this information 143 PSRs were used to provide the profile, the remaining seven were excluded due to incompleteness of data. Seven staff, with a variety of skills and experience, took part in the monitoring exercise.

   The monitoring form was designed to record data on age, offences, number of previous convictions, and sentence proposal and outcome. It was also designed to help examine issues around both the personal and the criminogenic needs of women offenders, and particularly the balance between these as reflected in reports to the courts. It is recognised that women offenders often have a variety of personal and social problems in their lives alongside offending and we wanted to examine whether PSRs reflected a balance in the identification and analysis of these factors. We also assessed the level of detail present in each PSR in relation to both personal and criminogenic needs to see if differences arose in addressing these areas with women offenders. In addition we noted occasions when community supervision was ruled out by the report writer, and the reason given for this decision.

   We also wanted to form some idea of the extent of victimisation in these offenders' lives, for example experience of sexual abuse and/or physical abuse (including domestic violence). Research has illustrated the high numbers of women in the criminal justice system

with this kind of background; see, for example, Morris *et al.* (1995) and also the thematic review of women prisoners from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (1997). The presence of mental health problems was suspected to be significant, and we recorded references to these, as well as to physical health issues. A question was also included on children, primarily because children are affected by parental offending to the extent of separation if the parent is imprisoned. Research by Farrington (1994) drew this out. Finally, we noted the presence, if any, of co-accused, and the associated gender. We were interested to see if there were indications that some women offended as a result of pressure or undue influence from others.

We also took into account the aforementioned needs analysis (NIPS 2005) and ongoing work to develop the Northern Ireland Resettlement Strategy (in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Prison Service), which encompasses particular reference to services for women.

Findings

Feedback from the staff seminars evidenced the complexity of women's offending and can be summarised as follows:

- Programmes of work should be designed specifically for women offenders and require a balance between personal development and criminogenic need.
- Most women offenders do not fall into the high-risk category and interventions and resources targeted for high risk will therefore not necessarily apply.
- Women offenders experience stigma attached to this situation, seemingly to a much greater extent than their male counterparts, and care needs to be taken in service provision not to reinforce that feeling. Services should be easily accessible and childcare should be provided to make the process of supervision easier and more effective.
- Interfaces with other services (in particular mental health and addiction services) must be managed effectively to ensure access for women.
- Diversion from prosecution should be considered for those for whom it is appropriate.
- Mentoring should also be considered.

Much of the feedback from probation staff at the seminars was consistent with the information from the PSRs. There were a number of emerging issues from the profile created which provided a basis for the development of the strategy. PSR authors explored each of these issues in a very high level of detail. The key findings from the PSRs are summarised below. This overview is interesting in terms of what it tells us about how, for women, personal and criminogenic needs are interrelated, and how there is what Rumgay (2004) refers to as 'the tension in a contradictory identity as both victim and offender' (p. 5). When viewed from the life-cycle perspective, the necessary components of interventions for women offenders to reduce reoffending become clearer.

Offences and previous convictions
• The most common offence type fell into what is referred to in Northern Ireland as the 'other notifiable' category, which comprises drug offences, driving offences (driving while disqualified, driving with excess alcohol, driving with no insurance, dangerous driving causing grievous bodily harm), taking and driving away, disorderly behaviour and resisting arrest. Theft was the second most common offence type, followed closely by offences against the person.
• Defendants aged 20 to 29 years were the most prolific in the sample, and so most offence types featured in this age band. However, for the 'other notifiable offences' group mentioned above, just under half of those dealt with for offences of this type were in this age band. Violent offences were also more prolific in this age band.
• Fraud and forgery featured more predominantly for older age groups – particularly the 30 to 39 year olds.
• 40% had no previous convictions.
• Just under 25% had five or more previous convictions.

Children
• 99 out of the 143 women (69%) had children. It was interesting to note that as a woman progressed through the life cycle, she often took on additional responsibility for grandchildren and, on occasion, for other family members' children. Some women continued as carers for their own children who had progressed to adulthood; this was due to illness, both mental and physical.

Co-accused
- Co-accused were reported in 29 out of the 143 cases – 20% of the total.
- In the under 17 age group there were three co-accused; all were described as female friends, suggesting negative peer influence.
- In relation to the women aged 50 and over, there were no co-accused.
- Other age bands reflected a more variable picture of both male and female co-accused. There was evidence of offences committed under pressure. In some cases the pressure came from money-lenders seeking the repayment of debts. In others it was related to drugs, with the 'reward' being drugs for personal use. There was also evidence in the PSRs of the defendant reporting involvement of others in the offence – often men – who were not charged. One women offended in an effort to have a paramilitary threat against her husband removed; another through fear of reprisal from paramilitaries.
- The influence of others clearly was a factor in the offending of some of the women but by no means all.

Sentence proposal and outcome
- 8% of the outcomes were immediate custodial sentences. The majority of these were Custody Probation Orders,[1] with only two being straight prison sentences. With the exception of one case, all were either situations of very serious offending, often for the first time, or where there was a long history of past convictions, and therefore custody was not unexpected. The one case which stood out as an exception concerned a woman dealt with for theft (shoplifting) with four previous convictions, all of which were similar. It was noted in the accompanying documentation that the (female) Resident Magistrate had commented that she did not wish to deal with this defendant any differently to her male co-accused.
- There were no immediate custodial sentences in the age bands up to the age of 19.
- Suspended custody accounted for 22% of the disposals made. Seven out of the 31 suspended sentences were proposed as an appropriate

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[1] A Custody Probation Order is a period in custody followed by a period under supervision in the community. They are available where a period in custody over 12 months would otherwise be justified. The period under supervision must be more than 12 months and less than 3 years, but there is no limit to the time to be spent in custody.

outcome by the report author. It was also noticeable that where there was no proposal, and where community supervision was ruled out, a suspended sentence often resulted. While there was no sense in this sample of acceleration into custody in circumstances where a previous suspended sentence had been activated, there is an issue in relation to how report authors present situations where there does not appear to be an obvious and likely effective outcome.

• In the main, as with immediate custody, the Suspended Sentence Orders were made either in cases of serious offences or where there were extensive previous convictions.

• Instances where community disposals were ruled out by the report author were considered. This occurred in 37% of cases, which would not seem unexceptional given that 40% of the sample were first-time offenders. Reasons given were that such an outcome was inappropriate or unnecessary, there were mental health issues where psychiatric intervention was preferred, there was lack of consent or there had been a lack of positive response to previous supervision.

• Community service was ruled out in 24% of cases, and 57% of those were for reasons of childcare. In order to prevent lack of access to court disposals on the part of women the issue of childcare provision clearly needs to be addressed.

Lifestyle/life-setting issues

These issues varied as women progressed through the life cycle.

• For the youngest members of the sample, those under 17, there was a picture presented of dysfunctional home settings, disruptive relationships with parents and the education system, lack of stability and negative peer associations.

• For those slightly older, up to the age of 19, there were similarities with the younger cohort, but there was also evidence that some had moved on to abusive partners, temporary accommodation and abuse of alcohol and drugs, and there were emerging signs of mental health problems.

• As women moved into their 20s, domestic violence became part of some life settings. There was also evidence of a lack of parenting ability, and mental health issues were reported in 17 out of 51 PSRs prepared for this age group. Addictions were also evident, including to prescription drugs.

- Relevant issues which crept in for women in their 30s were debt and financial pressure, neglect of children, having to cope with loss of family members and having to cope as a single parent. Mental health problems were present in just under half of all cases in this age band, and there was also evidence of experience of physical abuse.
- For women in their 40s, the PSRs reflected histories of failed relationships, loss and addictions. Issues with older children were prevalent – learning difficulties, attempted suicide, teenage pregnancy, having (or choosing) to care for children of others. Isolation was also evident in the lives of some of these women.
- For those aged 50 and over, there was evidence of isolation, physical and mental health issues and offending linked to depression in an otherwise stable lifestyle. Financial pressures were present, as was the need to care for adult children.

Key features of the offences committed
- For those under 17, offending patterns demonstrated lack of self-control and aggression for some, but more deliberate offending for others, and appropriate levels of remorse and victim awareness were far from prevalent.
- For 17 to 19 year olds, there were additional elements present in their offending such as breach of trust, fear for personal safety, alcohol intake/misuse and offending for personal gain.
- For those in their 20s, the PSRs illustrated a fear of others for a variety of reasons in the committal of their offending. Addictions also clearly had a bearing on their lives.
- For women in their 30s, there was evidence of planning in relation to offences and also of deliberate fraud. A lack of ability to cope was reflected – stealing prescriptions, lack of self-control leading to violence, and excessive alcohol intake. The picture was similar for those in their 40s.
- The small sample aged 50 and over was suggestive of women reacting to situations by resorting to desperate measures. For example, one woman committed an eight-day shoplifting binge, and another committed an offence related to driving in an attempt to remove herself physically from a situation with which she could not cope.

Circumstances leading to offending
- Throughout the entire sample there was evidence of a number of themes: lack of self-control, retaliation, inability to deal with disruptive events, addictions, criminal associates, vulnerability, financial pressures, personal gain and dysfunctional relationships with partners and children.
- In most cases these issues were explored in a very detailed way, but levels overall were lower than those demonstrated in the discussion of lifestyle and life-setting issues in the PSRs, suggesting a lesser degree of certainty in addressing and analysing the offending behaviour of women.

The explanation provided in the PSRs for the offending, and where the explanation was placed
- In 31% of PSRs authors placed the emphasis on the criminogenic needs, in 47% it was placed on personal needs and 22% presented a balanced picture of both. Given the high level of personal needs that women offenders often have, the risk that this could predominate in PSRs was borne out in reality in this sample, with just under half of the PSRs placing the emphasis in this area. To exclude significant personal needs in favour of concentration on criminogenic needs is also inappropriate and the goal must be to present a balance in analysing offending.
- The study also found evidence of levels of victimisation in women's lives in all of the age bands. In 32 out of 43 cases (74.5%) physical abuse, past or present (and including domestic violence), was recorded. In 15 out of 143 PSRs (10.5%) women's experience of sexual abuse was noted.
- Mental health problems featured at a relatively high level and this was not unexpected. 52 out of 143 PSRs (36.5%) were found to contain references to the mental health of the defendant. Closer examination of some cases could question the appropriateness of prosecution in such circumstances.
- In relation to the presence of children, one important issue for the PBNI centres on the role of women as primary carers for children, and how there appears to be a perception on the part of probation officers that this commitment conflicts with carrying out community service. PSRs certainly seem to reflect this perception, and in the interests of the rights of women offenders to have access to all possible disposals

it is incumbent upon the PBNI to address the removal of this apparent barrier, both through staff training and through consideration of how childcare provision might be facilitated.

- The absence of specifically designed programmes and interventions for women in Northern Ireland may explain why approximately only 10% of Community Supervision Orders on women include additional requirements. The overall proportion for additional requirements in Northern Ireland is 30%. Programme development must be part of a strategy that will impact on future reoffending rates.
- PSRs generally illustrated the importance of case management, which should incorporate needs allied to the offending behaviour. Access to the many other interfaces relevant to the lives of women offenders, such as mental health, physical health, addictions and housing, could be made much more successful and effective by the bringing together of all involved. The one-stop-shop approach has demonstrable merits, as evidenced by such examples as the 218 Project in Glasgow (see www.scotland.gov.uk) and the Asha Centre in Worcester (Roberts 2004).

Elements which need to inform the policy and strategy for women offenders in Northern Ireland

Policy
1. Factors affecting women's offending must inform the development and implementation of appropriate interventions.
2. An essential outcome of the policy must be the availability of and access to appropriate interventions for women.

Strategy
3. Diversion: There are women offenders who for a variety of reasons would be better dealt with outside the formal criminal justice system. One category comprises those suffering from mental health issues – some 52 out of the entire sample of 143 women (36.5%). 40% of the sample were first-time offenders. In addition, diversion linked to restorative practices should be explored for this group.
4. PSRs: Just under half of the PSRs emphasised the personal needs of women offenders as an explanation for offending. A more balanced approach is required which also takes into account criminogenic

factors, and refresher training should be developed and implemented in the assessment of women offenders. Childcare provision should also be built in to ensure the smooth functioning of both the assessment process and case management.

5. Case management: The stigma felt by women being observed attending PBNI venues should be addressed through the use of a neutral, less easily identified venue. All the interfaces necessary should be easily accessible in a one-centre model of operation, for example mental health, physical health, housing, money management and so on, and such a centre could also include accommodation.

6. Programmes/interventions: These should be based on best practice. Programmes and interventions should incorporate the most prevalent offence groups such as drugs, driving, theft, fraud and violence. They should also address the allied issues emerging from this profile – self-control, addictions, associates, to name but some. The goal would be programme development that leads to accreditation. Project N&S (a cross-border project, jointly established by the PBNI and the Probation Service (PS) in the Republic of Ireland, to promote best practice in probation) has plans to include practice with women offenders in the next phase of its work. The percentage of women offenders supervised by the PS is higher than in Northern Ireland, however, as in Northern Ireland, there are no programmes running that are designed specifically for women. There is scope for joint work on profile comparisons and the development of effective interventions.

7. Strategy development: Most of the more detailed evidence that has been amassed is outside the scope of this article, however it will have its place in the design of services. The main themes mentioned will dictate the strategy and a major task ahead will be service provision design.

Conclusion

The profile of women offenders in Northern Ireland that has emerged as part of the process of developing a policy and a strategy for implementation has many aspects which will not be surprising reading for those probation staff actively engaged in the management of women

offenders. As evidence from which to elicit key elements to incorporate into the PBNI's strategy for the future delivery of services for women offenders it has provided a firm foundation. Practice, and particularly the design of interventions, will build on this foundation to provide effective and meaningful ways of breaking the cycle of offending amongst women. In so doing we are recognising differences, and although solutions, as Hale (2005) noted, are harder to implement, we will have started down the pathway in Northern Ireland.

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The Reintegration Needs of Women Prisoners in Northern Ireland

Brigid Roberson and Eleanor Radford★

Summary: On 21 and 22 May 2005 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Resettlement Branch carried out needs analysis interviews with 25 women prisoners held in Ash House, Hydebank Wood Prison, Belfast. On the weekend of the survey, the women prisoners represented just 2.2% of the total prison population (27 out of a total of 1,248 prisoners). The interviews sought to ascertain the extent to which the women felt prepared for their release from prison and reintegration into the community. This article summarises the research findings.

Keywords: Reintegration needs, resettlement needs, women prisoners, needs analysis, reoffending.

Introduction

The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons carried out a joint unannounced inspection of the imprisonment of women in Northern Ireland at Ash House, Hydebank Wood Prison, Belfast in November 2004. Sections 9.12 and 9.13 of the resulting HMCI report recommended:
• A full analysis of the offending behaviour needs of women prisoners in Northern Ireland should be undertaken with an assessment of how those needs would be best met.
• An analysis of the reintegration needs of women prisoners in Northern Ireland should be undertaken and appropriate services provided.
In response to these recommendations the NIPS Resettlement Team

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carried out a needs analysis on 21 and 22 May 2005, followed up by full consultations with all those involved with working on this issue. The report analysed the women's impressions of how equipped they were to return to the community, and of whether their time in prison was helping them to prepare for this.

Research methodology

The Resettlement Branch, a joint partnership between NIPS and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, is required under its strategy implementation plan to identify and analyse the custody needs of women prisoners (action plan – 7c). To achieve this, we sent a personalised letter of introduction to each of the women in Hydebank Wood and arranged to meet them on an evening during their association time. At that meeting we explained that we would like to conduct individual, questionnaire-based interviews lasting up to 40 minutes and outlined the purpose of the research and its value to the women now and in the future. All the women agreed to participate and asked if we would come at a weekend, when they have little to do; two women were unavailable when the time came and chose not to be interviewed.

Key findings

The survey questionnaire was divided into sections covering the different themes relevant to reintegration issues. Twenty-five women were interviewed, over half of whom were released in the three months following the interviews. The findings are summarised below. Consultations with prison staff and professional organisations have confirmed that the areas of need identified are representative of women prisoners in general, and not solely relevant to those interviewed.

Offence and security issues
The women prisoners interviewed had been sentenced for a range of offences from defaulting on a fine to murder. Some of the respondents had only been in Hydebank Wood for a couple of weeks; others had served large portions of long sentences. The three most frequent offences were violence against the person, drug offences and motoring offences.
• 72% were serving a sentence and the rest were on remand.
• Approximately 44% of the sentenced respondents were serving a

sentence of one year or less; 33% were serving under two years and the
remaining 22% were serving two years and over.
- 50% of the sentenced respondents had received Custody Probation
Orders.
- 77% of sentenced respondents had not been in custody before.

Family relationships
Women prisoners in Hydebank Wood have access to their families during
visiting times, through dedicated child-centred visits, a telephone located
within the wing and compassionate temporary release and home leave
schemes. The shame and social stigma of serving a prison sentence
played a large role in their relationships with family; it is not clear that a
similar survey of male prisoners would provoke the same response.
Research confirms the importance of family in helping an offender to
return to the community and avoid reoffending and there seemed to be
scope for greater involvement of the respondents' families in the sentence
and in the reintegration process.
- 60% were mothers, and of those one-third were on remand.
- 96% had family support whilst in custody but 12% of those did not
expect to have family support on release.
- 64% were the first family members in custody, and of those 94%
received family support before and expected it after custody.

Health and wellbeing
We were shocked to discover the high percentage of women prisoners who
had experienced the death of someone close to them within the previous
five years. Some of the women were clearly in the first stages of grieving
when interviewed. We were also surprised by the multiple death
experiences of many of the women – some of whom were still in their 20s.
   A high proportion of the women prisoners had physical and mental
health issues, most of which they were receiving treatment for before
coming into prison. This reflects the situation in England and Wales,
where the Mental Health Foundation report that 66% of women
prisoners have depression or a similar disorder whereas the comparable
figure in the community is less than 20%.
- 76% had experienced the death of someone close to them within the
previous five years.
- 60% were taking some form of medication and with one exception

they had been receiving this or similar medication prior to coming into prison.

- 88% had experienced depression and 68% had received treatment for it.
- 68% had been referred for psychiatric assessment (the majority of these respondents had taken some form of medication prior to coming into prison).
- 72% had used drugs and/or alcohol (16% had used just drugs, 20% had used just alcohol and a further 36% had used both alcohol and drugs) and the majority of those felt their usage was to excess.
- 76% had experienced sleeping problems and 32% of those had received treatment for it.
- 60% had suffered from panic attacks and half of those had received treatment for it.

Benefits and finance

A high proportion of women had received social welfare benefits at some stage in their lives and almost one-quarter had outstanding debts, though few of significant amounts.

- 72% wanted support with their benefit claims prior to release.
- 68% felt able to manage their personal finances on release.
- 64% were receiving some form of social security benefits prior to coming into prison.
- 76% considered they would need benefits on release for financial support; many hoped this would be temporary.

Housing

Problems with accommodation (homelessness) are often linked to offending behaviour. Indeed, this is one of the contributory factors to offending behaviour outlined by Farrington (1994). A significant percentage of the women prisoners had experienced housing problems, homelessness, living in a hostel and/or living in care. This experience is often complicated by mental health issues as identified by both the psychology team and the probation service in Hydebank Wood.

- Prior to custody 52% were living with their family.
- 48% were in favour of a specialist housing advice service being integrated into the prison.
- 36% did not know where they were returning to on release.
- 44% had experience of living in a hostel.
- 32% had experience of living in care.

Table 1. Responses to the question 'What would you like help with?'

What would you like help with?	Now	On release
Housing	15 (60%)	11 (44%)
Drug/alcohol issues	11 (44%)	10 (40%)
Training	11 (44%)	9 (36%)
Psychological problems	11 (44%)	8 (32%)
Work experience	10 (40%)	9 (36%)
Career advice	9 (36%)	9 (36%)
Relationship with family	7 (28%)	6 (24%)
Advice on managing money	5 (20%)	5 (20%)
Medical issues	5 (20%)	4 (16%)
Relationships	4 (16%)	5 (20%)
Education	3 (12%)	4 (16%)

Education and employment

Although gainful employment is key to avoiding reoffending, people with chaotic lifestyles often have difficulty adapting to routine and structure. The survey was designed to explore the scope of these issues in relation to women prisoners and to identify any singular needs.

- 12% said they had problems with reading and writing.
- 72% had some form of qualifications.
- 52% were unemployed prior to custody.
- 28% were employed; of those, 57% thought they would be unemployed on release and 26% expressed a desire to return to employment.

Returning to the community

Many respondents had concerns about returning to the community. These women were genuinely fearful of their release, largely due to anxiety about making the transition out of the prison environment although social concerns also played a role. 50% of the sentenced women would be released with supervision, which meant that probation officers would supervise their transition out of prison and a substantial period after that release.

- 32% felt safe in their community before coming to Hydebank Wood and feel safe returning.
- 44% did not feel safe in their community before coming to Hydebank Wood and do not feel safe returning.

- 52% felt they were not encouraged at Hydebank Wood to think about and plan for their release.

Conclusion

This research was prompted by the 2004 HMCI report into Hydebank Wood, which found that the needs of the women prisoners were not being met fully. Our analysis identified the following priorities for future work:
- Additional support services.
- Further activity and employment opportunities.
- An alternative environment comprising a centre for women offenders to inform the future estates strategy for women prisoners.

Report availability

Copies of the report are available free of charge from:

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or download from the NIPS website:

www.niprisonservice.gov.uk

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Book Review

Transforming Behaviour: Pro-social Modelling in Practice.
A Handbook for Practitioners and Managers★
Sally Cherry
Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2005
ISBN 1-84392-166-9, 192 pages, paperback, £16.99

This book's straightforward and easy-to-follow style reflects the author's background as a practitioner within probation and as a trainer. It is set out in a structured and logical way and is designed to suit 'the busy practitioner who may not have time to read it as a whole' (p. 4). Each chapter can be read independently, but linked together they provide a framework that incorporates many of the different models and theories relevant to probation practice. This review highlights selected chapters that give a flavour of the book's style and content.

The introduction is comprehensive and defines pro-social modelling as 'the process by which the worker acts as a good motivating role model in order to bring out the best in people' (p. 2). Sally Cherry's motivation in this field of practice is evident from the book's engaging style, content and structure. From the outset she addresses the fundamental nature of the contact between worker and client and also poses a significant challenge to organisations to model best practice in relation to a pro-social approach: 'Pro-social modelling is for all staff and involves managers modelling to staff, colleagues modelling to one another, staff modelling to clients and clients being helped to behave pro-socially to one another' (p. 14). The structure, purpose and chapter overviews within the introduction as well as evidence supporting the model are clearly presented and inspire continued reading.

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Chapter 2 takes on the topic of empathetic relationships and provides examples of what these look like in practice. Cherry refers to the need to develop empathetic relationships without being perceived as colluding with unacceptable behaviour. This requires the ability to balance the relationship within the role and responsibility of a criminal justice agency to assess risk and protect the public. She explains that workers using a pro-social model need to promote pro-social, and discourage anti-social, behaviour and attitudes, and issues a pointed and timely reminder of the need to focus assessments on solutions rather than problems: 'pro-social practice is optimistic and solution focused' (p. 37). However, an example used in this chapter ought to be amended. Cherry refers to a possible discussion between a worker and an offender convicted of downloading pornographic pictures of children in which the worker comments, 'I understand what you are saying and I believe that you would never deliberately hurt a child. However . . .' (pp. 24–25). In order to illustrate more clearly the learning in relation to avoiding collusion, while at the same time demonstrating empathy, this should read: I understand what you are saying and *that you believe* you would never deliberately hurt a child.

Chapter 3 covers, among other issues, the legitimate use of authority and values. Cherry highlights the importance of agency values and how these relate to reinforcement and use of sanctions. Pro-social modelling is described as 'a positive, reward-driven model' where 'staff are encouraged to look out for every opportunity to reward behaviours that we want to encourage' (p. 48). Sanctions, we are reminded, should be transparent, consistent, just and open to appeal. Cherry goes on to identify and provide a useful list of what could be rewarded and encouraged and links the drive to reward to how team members relate to and work with each other. Applying the same principles of pro-social modelling with clients to working with each other helps to achieve a pro-social environment. This chapter will assist those working within a criminal justice setting to gain a better understanding of how to use authority in legitimate ways.

Chapter 5 deals with motivating unwilling clients. From my experience and knowledge of probation practice, individuals who resist probation intervention and change are not uncommon. Cherry explores motivation in an uncomplicated and practical way, skilfully linking different components from motivational interviewing, cycle of change and the decisional balance model within a pro-social framework. This

framework helps to demonstrate how the model integrates with practice, especially when the author links it to practical examples of helping people change. Cherry's training background can be detected in her commitment not only to telling what needs to be done but also to showing how to do something by way of example or demonstration. The usefulness of this strategy cannot be overstated when it comes to probation practice. The staged model to help people change offers a fresh look at work-planning with offenders, particularly where many issues linked to offending have been identified and where the offender may feel overwhelmed and unclear of where to begin.

Chapter 8 focuses on how workers respond to individual need and diversity. Its key message is about the need to take stock of diversity and to integrate it within pro-social practice. Simple challenges are presented such as getting the name right of someone who comes from a different cultural or ethnic background. Cherry encourages us to look at the language we use and to pay attention to the 'micro messages' or 'small messages, often unintentional and often unnoticed by the sender, which we constantly send and receive' (p. 127). She offers practical ways to manage these messages in a positive manner and her emphasis on the importance of taking issues of race, identity, gender, learning styles and literacy into account in our practice is to be welcomed.

Chapter 9 addresses the role of managers in an organisation and the importance of their contribution to the development of pro-social practice in any organisation: 'The pro-social manager not only equips the team members to work pro-socially but also uses the same principles in their own management practice' (p. 140). Cherry offers managers very practical activities, strategies and examples of how to develop as a pro-social manager. This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges facing criminal justice agencies and it will be exciting to see how the small seed sown by this book grows in future years. Cherry holds our interest right to the end of the book with the inclusion of a number of exercises that can be used within an organisation to develop pro-social practice.

Transforming Behaviour is suitable for all levels of staff within probation and in particular for those working in residential and hostel settings. It has something to offer criminal justice workers from across the different agencies. I recommend the book to any new probation worker and to students preparing for, or on, placement with a criminal justice agency. It covers most of the essential ingredients to help develop ethically sound and effective practice with offenders and I concur with Dr Chris Trotter's

statement in the foreword to the book that it 'makes a real contribution to our knowledge about how to do pro-social practice' (p. xiii). If there is a pro-social way to write about and present a model on pro-social practice, this is an excellent example.