

Book Reviews

The Criminalisation of Social Policy in Neoliberal Societies¹

Elizabeth Kiely and Katharina Swirak

Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022

ISBN: 978-1529203011, 248 pages, paperback, £29.99

This book provides a robust oversight of modern social policy, including recent political and potentially controversial events. The title of the book – *The Criminalisation of Social Policy in Neoliberal Societies* – immediately makes the reader consider the authors’ standpoint as to how social policy could be contextualised as a criminal sanction or seen from such a viewpoint. Focusing on a wide range of topics, including criminalising the poor, migrants and those who find themselves homeless via assumptions of welfare fraud, the book encourages readers to think critically regarding the etiology of such and potential solutions for avoiding the perpetuation of this type of unrelenting cycle. It also addresses the ‘policing of parenting’ and ‘disadvantaging’ the justice-involved, highlighting governmental ideology and values that place monitoring and surveillance at the forefront, rather than equity and due consideration for diversity. There is an interesting review of recent research on the development of criminalisation of social policy from its emergence in the 1980s and 1990s throughout consolidation in the 2000s and an increase in notable attention post 2007. With a wide scope, the authors insist that it is important not only to appreciate but to understand fully the depth and breadth of these changes in social policy approaches. The focus is mainly centred around the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) although other European work is mentioned.

Social welfare provision is attributed to capitalism and the hard work and discipline of the working class, rather than addressing poverty and inequality

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within criminal justice policy, which is aligned against subgroups such as race, class, gender and age. Those who are unfairly marginalised in our communities also include single mothers, the unemployed and those who suffer with addiction issues. On a more positive note, the authors call for us to reenvision alternative futures, with a focus on equity and embracing diversity. The authors successfully encourage readers to challenge dominant approaches and perspectives, such as the trend towards attempts to reduce crime and poverty being focused on 'fixing' individuals. Subjects including psychology, criminal justice, social policy and sociology are touched upon in a wider context to demonstrate the unequal distribution in terms of wealth, policymaking and welfare reform. Contributing to the evidence base, this book provides a thorough summary of existing literature in the field and calls for a greater integration of the various strands of social policy and the criminal justice system. The chapters pose potential questions to readers, asking them to consider how they might reclaim the best of 'social' in social policy for future generations.

A major strength of this book is the use of case-study examples to illustrate key points and messages. Recent notable events and occurrences are included, such as climate change, Brexit, hostility towards refugees, and the growing popularity of conservative ideals. The economic crisis of 2007 and the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent restrictions and their influence on social policy are also touched upon in later chapters. Post 2007, the economic crisis was reframed towards a culture of welfare dependency, which led to an increased resentment towards the poor or those from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors highlight critics such as Shiner (2009 and 2013) as the minority arguing that the Welfare Reform Act of 2012, which brought about the 'bedroom tax' alongside mandatory, futile job searches, was a new development designed to control and punish people, as opposed to improving conditions and opportunities. The authors are clear in demonstrating how restrictions in line with the pandemic highlighted the inequalities present in health services and suggest that the restrictions on movement and new modes of surveillance demonstrate unprecedented levels of control not seen before in terms of public health. They offer intuitive insights as to how a shift in paradigm might be achieved henceforth.

This thought-provoking book, set in an international context, is timely in that it details, explores and reflects on how different social policies historically intersect with crime control but also how change(s) have developed over time. It is a challenging read, which is best suited and will be of most interest

to criminal justice and social policy students, academics, lecturers and social policy researchers. The authors provide a critical review of legislation, policy and practices throughout the fields of criminal justice and social policy that will be of interest to practitioners employed in the private, public and voluntary sector(s). Discussion in relation to migrants and refugees is timely given the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has brought about a tighter net of regulatory and punitive measures on a wide scale. Their broad conceptualisation of criminalisation goes beyond legislation to fuel dominant ideologies and societal 'norms' – for example, being poor equates to being criminal. Measures to target anti-social behaviour were concentrated in particular areas of lower socio-economic status.

Summarising recent research from Ireland, the UK and further afield, the majority of chapters provide the reader with a good insight into the historical elements of this topic, and illustrate how social policy has not addressed the issues but rather been a catalyst for further criminalisation. The authors reiterate that policymakers unfortunately reinforce the reality that the focus is on meeting 'middle class' norms, and the quest for more co-ordination and communication between professionals and organisations is critical. With that being at the forefront of social policy, the emphasis is taken away from individuals themselves. The authors acknowledge the limits of areas covered and include additional and/or alternative references for ease. The final chapter ends with a sense of hope and encourages readers to really challenge their views of society and social policy today, but equally urges them to actively consider how real change could be affected in the future.

References

- Shiner, M. (2009), 'Theorising criminal law reform', *Criminal Law and Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp 167–86
- Shiner, M. (2013), 'British drug policy and the modern state: Reconsidering the criminalisation thesis', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp 623–43

Probation and Parole in Ireland: Law and Practice²

Vivian Geiran and Shane McCarthy

Dublin: Clarus Press Ltd, 2022

ISBN: 978-1-911611-60-8, 380 pages, paperback, €45

The Preface to this recent publication sets the scene by reflecting on the complexities of working within probation and parole. The authors outline how practitioners bring a range of values, knowledge and skills to their work, in an effort to foster public safety and facilitate offender rehabilitation through implementing court orders, while recognising the rights and autonomy of the individual and their inherent potential. Simultaneously, professional practice is underpinned by principles of human rights and the rule of law, and is informed through research findings and practice methods.

The rationale for this text is to provide a single comprehensive, accessible reference guide – one that clearly details Irish probation and parole systems and includes tables on relevant legislation and case law. This book will be of interest to practitioners working within the fields of probation, parole, legal practice and law enforcement. Where it really comes into its own is as an invaluable resource and reference guide to students of social work, law, psychology and criminology. It will also be useful to practitioners engaged with criminal-justice-involved people as part of addiction/mental health service delivery and in community-based organisations.

Probation and Parole in Ireland contextualises the complexities of both probation and parole by utilising clear and accessible language that facilitates the reader's learning. The structure and flow of the text is well thought out, and the sequencing enables the reader to follow the journey of the service-user while also dipping in and out of standalone chapters of interest.

As a practitioner with a working knowledge of the offender's journey and the nuances of current professional practice, this reviewer was particularly drawn to the initial historical overview and the account of the evolution of probation and parole in the modern criminal justice system. The late nineteenth century saw a shift away from harsh deterrence towards offender correction, culminating in a rehabilitative model which proved influential for the twentieth century. Crofton's model of post-release supervision, developed in 1854 and utilised until the late nineteenth century, influenced

² Reviewed by Tara Kane, Senior Probation Officer working in Dublin North Inner City (email: tmkane@probation.ie).

modern penal policy, and we are indebted to James P. Organ whose work is acknowledged as the forerunner to current supervision practice

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of offender assessment. Beginning by contextualising offender assessments from a macro-perspective in terms of how it informs sentencing and case-management decisions, it then moves to the micro by reviewing international standards, the definition of risk, and specific risk-assessment instruments used in Ireland. The conclusion highlights the potential pitfalls, with the authors stating that 'it is vital for all key stakeholders to understand not only the role and purpose of these instruments but also their limitations' (p. 79).

This reviewer particularly enjoyed Chapter 4: Probation Work, in which probation is usefully conceptualised in three ways, namely (i) Court-imposed sanction of a probation bond; (ii) Probation practice – what Probation Officers do; and (iii) the organisational probation system. The authors subsequently discuss probation work from the perspective of these three categories, detailing how social work – values, principles and practice methods – underpins probation work, and the evolution of the Probation Service and probation practice in Ireland. Taking account of the partnership with community-based organisations, this section reviews the breadth of probation practice, including models, principles, statutory measures and approaches such as:

- RNR – Risk, Need and Responsivity model and what works
- Desistance and the Good Lives model
- Core correctional practices
- International standards
- The law on probation
- Other legislation
- Supervision during deferment of penalty
- Suspended sentences with probation supervision and other measures
- Low-intensity supervision
- Non-mandated supervision

With a focus on community service in Chapter 5, there is reference to Guilfoyle's research which summarised that, at its core, the Community Service Order had three functions: (i) as an alternative to imprisonment; (ii) as punishment; and (iii) reparative. The authors track the impact of 'value for money' and strategic reviews on the expansion of practice and the development of post-release community service (known as 'Community

Return') and conclude with discussion on challenges and dilemmas, both nationally and internationally.

Restorative justice and victim engagement as emerging areas of work are the focus of Chapter 6. As with Chapters 3 and 4, the reader is provided with a comprehensive overview of the development of restorative justice and its potential for integration in probation practice. Following a discussion on the key stakeholders and models, the authors place restorative justice within the broader context of international standards and European developments. What was important for this reviewer were the concluding comments referencing the Council of Europe guidelines on training probation and prison staff, which indicated that 'the core components of specialist training for Probation Officers should include mediation, restorative justice and work with victims' (p. 190).

Chapter 7 discusses the history of parole in Ireland, with an interesting focus on parole as a component of rehabilitative policy, 'offering prisoners hope as well as an opportunity to change' (p. 193). Given the enactment of the 2019 Parole Act and its commencement on 30 July 2021, significant consideration is given to the principal functions of the Interim Parole Board (advisory), the introduction of the Parole Act placing the Parole Board on a statutory basis, and the related changes in both legislation and practice. The authors review the supervisory role of the Probation Service in relation to parole, as well as the role and purpose of parole conditions in Ireland, before detailing breaches of parole and the recall process.

Chapter 8 commences with an overview of temporary release, before moving to focus on court-ordered post-release supervision – where legislation, prison and probation interact. The authors take the opportunity to highlight the challenges for reintegration post release.

The focus of the last three chapters of the book is on specific categories of service-users, the issues, trends and challenges. For those working with children and young people, Chapter 9 is an important resource. Definitions and terminology are initially addressed before the authors review international standards, legislation, current policies and the Probation Service's organisational response to working with this group.

The history and development of Electronic Monitoring (EM) receives considerable attention in Chapter 10. This was quite a demanding chapter to get through, but important in highlighting how technology can enhance and effectively interface with the supervisory relationship.

The final chapter attempts to capture a number of issues that impact on probation and parole, some of which are external to probation, parole and the

criminal justice system. This reviewer agrees that the criminal justice system in itself cannot address offending and victimisation and foster social justice without interagency collaboration and engagement with local communities. A number of key areas that require cross-sectoral partnerships are discussed in brief, including substance misuse, homelessness, mental health, diversity, women who offend, and emerging trends such as extremism and cybercrime.

Probation and Parole in Ireland aimed to provide a single, comprehensive, accessible reference guide to the Irish probation and parole systems. It has achieved its objective. A familiar thread throughout this book is its accessibility, its use of plain language, and its ability to contextualise broad concepts while seamlessly interweaving professional practice with legal/statutory obligations. Not only is this a well-researched scholarly piece of literature, but the reader also gets a sense of the authors' extensive practice experience and wisdom. Finally, as noted by Professor Shane Kilcommins in his Foreword, the book 'will be an excellent contribution to criminal justice knowledge in Ireland'.

The Logic of Violence, An Ethnography of Dublin's Illegal Drug Trade³

Brendan Marsh

London: Routledge, 2020

ISBN: 978-0367-77730-2, 144 pages, paperback, £36.99

This book is based on an ethnographic study of those involved in Dublin's illegal drug market, carried out by Brendan Marsh in the period 2011–14. It describes, in stark terms, the economic and sociological milieu that enabled this market to flourish, and explores the causes, dynamics and functions of violence in a trade where only the strong survive.

In reviewing this book, I was reminded that *IPJ* readers had access previously to the ethnographic mindset of the author through his article, 'Narrating desistance: Identity change and the 12-step script' (*Irish Probation Journal*, vol. 8, 2011). That article used qualitative research with five persistent drug-users to demonstrate the parallels between the narrative detailed in the desistance literature and narrative development through the self-help Narcotics Anonymous programmes. Ethnography is a well-established method

³ Reviewed by Ursula Fernée, Assistant Principal Probation Officer in the Probation Service, and Joint Editor of *Irish Probation Journal* (email: UGFerne@probation.ie).

for researching deviancy using the primary tool of the ethnographic interview, but it also requires a degree of enculturation when 'the researcher should spend time and effort getting to know and understand the culture of those he or she is seeking to learn from' (p. 5). The careful weaving of participant voices throughout the text, with as many as 130 quotes, clearly demonstrates the capacity of the author to build relationships with 35 participants, within a world that is characterised by suspicion, stealth and silences. He acknowledges that his personal biography as a working-class Dublin native afforded him a degree of credibility in leveraging access and in approaching this significant task with confidence and with a degree of authenticity that is evident to the reader.

Marsh carefully delineates the boundaries of the study – 'this is a study about the relationship between the consumer and the supplier, between the addict and the dealer, between the much-blighted community of dependent users and the profit-oriented dealers who benefit from their malady' (p. 2). The reader is well served by the 25-page introductory chapter that clarifies aims and methodology and also explores the context within which the research was conducted. The account of the emergence of the drug market is a salutary story that traces the beginning of the trade back to the late 1970s when heroin misuse took hold in communities sorely impacted by the economic recession. Marsh tracks the growth of the drug problem against the backdrop of 'The Troubles' arising from conflict in Northern Ireland, through the expansion of the drug scene in the 1990s, and the onset of drug-related violence, which in the minds of the general population was packaged away under the term 'gangland'. The murder of the journalist Veronica Guerin was a seminal moment for Irish society, which led to the introduction of targeted legislation and an increase in law-enforcement resources, with the aim of disrupting the supply chain and curtailing the power of the drug barons. That context is an important grounding in the face of a possible rush to moral judgments by the reader, but also serves to emphasise that the drug trade, with its related violence, did not just happen but developed from a series of complex and interrelated socio-economic factors within a 'society created by all'.

Marsh acknowledges the complexity of defining violence and references a range of definitions from literature. He concludes that, in the context of this study, it is most useful to distinguish between physical violence, on the one hand, causing death or injury with the purpose of achieving domination over others, and on the other hand, psychological violence, which aims to dominate others through intimidation and fear of the prospect of physical

assault (p. 27). In taking a closer look at violence that permeates organised crime, the researcher paints a graphic picture in Chapter 2 of the personal tendencies and dispositions of aggressors. While low self-esteem and societal alienation are frequently identified as 'risks' that lead to offending, the author explores a counternarrative that focuses on the gangster's strong sense of megalomania, the need for self-aggrandisement, and a level of narcissism that cannot tolerate any slight to position and reputation. We are reminded that, as with many behaviours, violence can be 'habit forming'. While many established drug dealers may use drugs recreationally, they are not, unlike those who buy and sell on the street, addicted to the substances. Chapter 2 also contains a very poignant exposition of the degraded existence of the drug-addicted dealer. In that world, few acts are unconscionable when the craving for narcotic intoxication must be satisfied.

Chapters 3 to 6 present the findings from the analysis of interview data and informal data collection. The accounts from participants demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between substance abuse and violence, revealing that those who are drug-dependent are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of violence and are less likely to be dominant actors in the market. The reader is drawn into a world that is characterised by desperation, hopelessness, betrayal, coercion and feelings of self-loathing. The level of strategic predation on vulnerable others carries through all of the accounts. In addition to direct quotes, the author uses case studies to immerse the reader further. The first is a study of a paranoid existence arising from years of drug dependency, a condition exacerbated by crack cocaine use (pp 55–9). The second case study (pp 75–8) describes the intimidation used strategically to collect outstanding debts in this credit-based business system, illustrating how family members become vulnerable to this net of control and coercion. Jennifer's account is the voice of one of the six females who participated in the study.

This relatively slim text is a powerful, poignant read that paints a bleak, at times horrifying, picture of the drug underworld. This is a book that rewards slow and careful reading, as it weaves together the lived experience of interviewees with relevant findings from an extensive range of research literature. The passage of time since the book was researched and published does not in any way undermine its pertinence for all who seek to go beyond the tabloid reports to get an insider view that increases awareness of the multifarious harms of the illegal drug trade.