

Bill Davies

Prison research: expanding our network

The special edition of the *Journal of Criminal Psychology* that the Prison Research Network presents here is, as is usual for us, an eclectic collection of work that represents the scope of our member's interests. The title of our collection, "Prison Research: expanding our network" can be read as both an opportunity for us to showcase the growth of our network over the past year, and as a call for any interested parties to join our growing ranks.

As a network, we are still relatively small, with approximately 80 members, but this is a membership base that represents a vast array of academic and professional knowledge around the broad topic of imprisonment, be that the direct experiences of those at the front line, prisoners and staff; or those that are impacted by association, such as families of those associated with imprisonment.

To date, we have held three annual conferences, each with high-profile key note speakers. At our inaugural event in April 2015, Professor Nick Hardwick, then the Chief Inspector of Prisons, and now the Chair of the Parole Board, gave a speech on "The case for evidence based prison policy". This was followed a year later, when, in April 2016, we welcomed Frances Crook OBE, the Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform, who spoke about the ongoing problems with sentencing, politics and prisons. This year, we were joined by Professor Shadd Maruna from the University of Manchester who highlighted the new directions that desistance research is moving in. We are currently in the planning stages of the 2018 conferences and would welcome abstracts for papers and or membership enquiries to Dr Linda Asquith at l.m.asquith@leedsbeckett.ac.uk or through twitter @PRisoN_network.

The collection of papers within this edition begins with an examination, by Danks and Bradley, into prisoner and staff perspectives of mental well-being and barriers to accessing and providing support. From this starting point, we present work from Kelly and her ground-breaking research on the experiences of d/Deaf prisoners. At this point, we move to the work of Woodall and Kinsella, and their research on family visits. Moving away from the experiences of prisoners *per se*, we then discuss democratic therapeutic community prisons through the work of Bennett and Shuker. Towards the end of the edition, we look at autism through the work of Allely, before finishing with King's paper on cultural and convict criminology.

The first paper by Kara Danks and Alexandria Bradley is a qualitative paper that examines the lived experiences of how prisoners and staff within a category D male prison negotiate barriers to accessing and providing support for mental well-being. Through the use of focus groups with prisoners and interviews with staff, Danks and Bradley identify the need for greater information sharing, better peer support and updated policy as a start for how to move forward.

From mental well-being, and the issues that arise within prison, we move to the lived experiences and well-being of another demographic of prisoners, those who are d/Deaf. Prison is a strictly regimented environment where prisoners must follow orders. Kelly, through her research, shows us just how difficult following instructions can be when you cannot understand them or communicate with those who are giving them. The research shows that the prison service (as was) could not address effectively the additional pains of imprisonment that d/Deaf prisoners are subjected to over their hearing peers.

Staying with the survivability of prison, and what measures can be used to minimise the impact of imprisonment, Woodall and Kinsella show the scale of value that a prison visitor's centre has on the well-being of a prisoner, and on their wider family. The importance of prison visits for both the

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prisoner and their families is countered by a drop in the number of prisoners receiving family visits, and it is the reasons behind this that Woodall and Kinsella argue must be understood.

The next article remains within the theme of the well-being of a prison and its charges; we look at the work of Bennett and Shuker, and their discussion on social climate within a democratic therapeutic community. As prison managers, the work of Bennet and Shuker gives a professional academic viewpoint of creating a positive social climate within a prison setting. The paper puts forward an argument for a move towards a welfarist approach, rather than one of a punitive nature, and argues that positive social climates within prisons, driven by a particular set of values, should be the goal.

The penultimate paper in this collection is a preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis review into the management of individuals with autism spectrum disorder in secure psychiatric care. Within the paper, Allely shows how forensic services are struggling to manage individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Current measurement tools are biased against those who have poor literacy skills and staff awareness training needs to be made mandatory; only then can we begin to see an improvement.

Closing the collection is a paper by Anna King, which brings together what she identifies as two calls for action: one from cultural criminology and another from convict criminology. King uses the paper to propose that the tools for social change lie within the methodologies utilised by cultural and convict criminologists alike. It is put forward that by using traditional ethnographies, auto-ethnographies and virtual ethnographies, we are able to make the hidden visible.

On behalf of the Prison Research Network, I hope that you enjoy the collection.