

Early Career Academics Network Bulletin

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Introduction



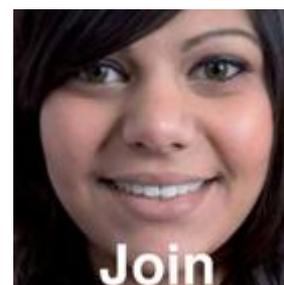
The Howard League has now been publishing the ECAN bulletin and developing the network for a year. More than 300 people now receive this bulletin but I am keen to see ECAN grow and become more vibrant next year.

I am planning to have more events and to develop a closer working relationship with the British Society of Criminology. We will be offering more research commissions and internships. Then there is this bulletin – I am always keen for your ideas and contributions. Please get in touch.

The next twelve months will be busy for all of us who are keen to see positive developments in penal practice. The Green Paper represents a chance for us all to add to the discussions and direction of penal policy. We will put all of our energy into achieving the change we think there should be. Look out for our work on short prison sentences, real work in prison and promoting really good community programmes. We would love for you all to get involved in our work.

Please encourage your colleagues and fellow students to sign up to ECAN so we can work together and create a dynamic and thoughtful forum for discussing new ideas, challenging old ideas and supporting the research and work of others.

Have a good break over the Christmas period and I look forward to meeting and corresponding with more of you in the new year.



News

Breaking the cycle

The most significant news item for the Howard League has been the publication of Kenneth Clarke's green paper with its tag line: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders. There was much for us to mull over, but to highlight just three issues ...

A key issue for the Howard League has been the issue of **real work in prison**. This was high on the green paper's agenda with proposals to "Make prisoners work hard through the discipline of regular working hours in prison and implementing the Prisoners' Earnings Act and other reforms to make offenders directly compensate victims of crime".



the Howard League for Penal Reform

Key points

- Work in prison can only be successful if it is provided within a supportive and positive regime. Prisons must ensure that they have systems in place that are appropriate for working with external employers and must include flexibility and a positive attitude among prison staff.
- Work in prison must be provided in a realistic work environment that is distinct from government being specific, thereby creating a differential between work and home that offers employment experience. Work in prison must also allow the prisoners to experience realistic working conditions, including a proper rate of pay for the work undertaken, a contractual agreement, and paying tax.
- The experience of Barbed employees demonstrated that the opportunity to engage in a real work environment supported positive change in both behaviour and attitudes in prison and on release. Not least it enabled a work ethos and demonstrated the possibility for a future without crime.
- The experience was equally the changing for those working with the prisoners, providing a greater understanding of the in-prison and the objectives that the regular prison regime needs to having a positive view on the on-release.
- Developing work in prison allows for greater community involvement and engagement.
- Work in prison, delivered following the principles underlying Barbed, can help prepare prisoners for a productive and crime free life on-release from prison.

There are many echoes of our demonstration project in Coldingley prison, Barbed, within the proposals. Yet there are also challenges for us to ensure that our vision of work in prison is adopted in the future. As Frances Crook commented, "The Howard League is particularly pleased that for the first time in a century some thought has gone into what long term prisoners will do all day with the introduction of real work, something the charity has pioneered and championed for a decade."

The Howard League has just published a follow up study, written and researched by Professor Penny Green, showing what happened to the men who

worked at Barbed and how the experience impacted on them. The report is free to [download here](#).

The intention to **strengthen community sentences** and a diminished role for short prison sentences chimes with much of our current work. Our own research into the reality of short prison sentences is due to report early in 2011 and will reveal the perspectives of prisoners and prison staff.

We have already published the early findings of our joint survey with the Prison Governors Association that showed that 81 per cent of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'short prison sentences serve to reform and rehabilitate the offender'. These findings can be [downloaded here](#).



But we are not just looking at the prison experience. Our current campaign, Community Sentences Cut Crime, is currently promoting good practice and



good schemes. The 2010 winners of our annual Community Programmes Awards are hosting open days. The first was with Together Women in Sheffield where parliamentarians and practitioners came together with students and others interested in what Together Women was achieving. Next year more open days are planned which will give a real sense of what can be achieved to ensure that community sentences are effective as well as being designed to make amends to victims and local communities.

The last aspect of the green paper to flag up is the proposal to reform the indeterminate sentence of **Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP)**. We believe this is a positive move. We believe that the IPP is both ill-conceived and flawed in its current form. In 2007 we undertook some illustrative research which can be [downloaded here](#).

There is also much to be questioned in the green paper, not least the motivation for some of the proposals, and the Howard League is particularly disappointed that "...the package is only designed to reduce the prison population by 3,000 men, women and children. As Kenneth Clarke has repeatedly pointed out, there are now 40,000 more people in prison than when he was last in charge of the justice system but the reoffending rate has stayed stubbornly the same."

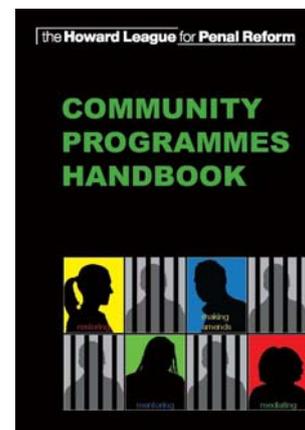
The Howard League will be making a full submission to the green paper in the new year.

Effectiveness of different disposals and interventions

Ministry of Justice figures have just been released that compare all short custodial sentences (under twelve months) and court order commencements under probation supervision in 2007. The figures showed that court orders were more effective (by 7 percentage points) at reducing one-year proven reoffending rates than custodial sentences of less than twelve months for similar offenders. The full information is [published on the MoJ website](#).

Circles of support

[Circles UK](#) is a charity which is based on ideas and work that was initially developed in Canada where its approach suggested that it had a significant impact on re-offending amongst its target group – sex offenders. Circles UK has been working here since 2002 and is now rolling out its programme across Yorkshire. The Howard League has been supportive of the circles approach with the scheme winning one of our Community Programme Awards a few years ago. Circles is based on the premise that some people do not have friends and family to return to when they



come out of prison and are potentially isolated and therefore more likely to re-offend. Circles provides a network of five to six volunteers to meet with an individual weekly where they talk about everything from what could lead to re-offending to finding work and fitting back into society. The Howard League published information about how the scheme works and what makes it effective in our Community Programmes Handbook which can be [ordered here](#).

Deaths in custody – natural causes

Every year the Howard League publishes information about the number of deaths in custody during the calendar year including self inflicted deaths. These figures are due to be published at the turn of the year.

We are concerned about the number of people who die in prison each year – so called deaths by natural causes. Some may die of old age, others from acute illnesses. We monitor them all. It is noticeable that a significant number die from circulatory diseases. The Prisons and Probations Ombudsman has recently published a report reviewing 115 investigations into deaths from circulatory diseases in the prisons of England, Wales and Guernsey between 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2009. It paid particular attention to the care provided for 82 of the prisoners whose deaths were from ischaemic heart diseases (71 per cent of all deaths from circulatory diseases), and to the 63 cases where the death or collapse leading to death occurred in the cell. It also revealed that the average age at death from all circulatory diseases was 53 years. Thirty per cent of these deaths were of prisoners aged less than 45 years (34 of 115).

Features

A revolution or more of the same? Probation's prospects under the coalition government

Lawrence Burke



The coalition government's green paper outlining its plans for a 'rehabilitation revolution' is likely to herald another period of significant change and uncertainty for the probation service. My intention in this piece is to attempt to highlight the potential challenges facing the organisation within the broader context of substantial reductions in public sector funding. In doing so, I also want to draw attention to the legacy – good and bad – left by the previous labour administration.

Organisational challenges

Under New Labour, the probation service moved from a confederated structure of locally based services to a heavily centralised national service, only to be quickly subsumed into the National Offender Management Service as a result of the Carter Report in 2003. This has ultimately resulted in what has in effect been a 'hostile takeover' by the prison service, leaving the probation service without adequate representation or support at the centre of government policy making. In addition, this structural transformation has brought with it a new set of concepts that the service has had to adapt to such as contestability, offender management and a purchaser/provider split, which together have fundamentally changed the nature of probation practice.

Within the organisation there have also been significant changes. The probation service saw a 50% real term increase in funding between 2000 and 2008 (Oldfield and Grimshaw, 2008). But much of the increased expenditure was taken up by the costs of implementing the structural changes outlined above and the resultant increased bureaucracy, rather than frontline service delivery. During the same period, probation workloads rose by 39% whilst in the past three years the number of frontline staff has decreased to its pre-2003 level. All the indications are that probation staff are working harder than ever in terms of the number of reports produced and orders supervised but have less time to develop the supervisory relationships which were traditionally the bedrock of traditional probation practice, and which the recent literature on desistance has highlighted as crucial to successful outcomes in terms of crime reduction and developing pro-social attitudes.

The Ministry of Justice has by its own calculations admitted that just 24% of practitioners' time was spent on face-to-face work with those on supervision, a fact highlighted by Lord Ramsbotham in his impassioned plea to the House of Lords (Ramsbotham, 2010) that 'people are not things' and should therefore not be treated as commodities to meet government targets and satisfy an often misplaced and misrepresented demands for increased punitiveness.

The more rehabilitative elements of community orders are being displaced by community payback. A more intensive form of this disposal has recently been proposed by an influential rightwing think tank to be run by private agencies rather than the probation service (Policy Exchange, 2010). There are now more probation service officers (PSOs) employed by the service than probation officers and, as a result, more less qualified staff are having to deal with an increasing number of offenders. The cumulative result of these trends is that the rehabilitation of an offender utilising the skills of a qualified probation officer can no longer be taken for granted as the primary task of the organisation.

Ideological challenges

The Justice Secretary's first major speech regarding criminal justice reform shortly after the 2010 election condemned the record growth in prison numbers that had occurred under the New Labour government and highlighted the need for greater use of community based sentences especially in relation to the ineffectiveness of short-term prison sentences. One would expect such liberalising sentiments to be a source of optimism for the probation service given its long standing and, until recently, monopoly position as provider of community sentences. However, there was no mention of the probation service in either Kenneth Clarke's speech or in the subsequent draft structural reform plan issued by the Ministry of Justice (2010). Instead there has been the continued promotion of the use of the private sector based on a vague 'payment by results' system that in many respects appears to be a continuation of the damaging policy of contestability, largely unproven in terms of its effectiveness, pursued by the previous administration. In this 'new world' of offender services, private organisations and individuals will be paid a dividend for their initial investment schemes should they achieve a reduction in recidivism rates amongst those subject in the schemes. How this will work in practice is as yet unclear. It is widely accepted that reconviction rates alone are a notoriously limited measure of effectiveness and will take considerable time to measure given the most common timescale of two years used.



The initial pilot at HMP Peterborough involves the provision of services on release to those prisoners serving less than 12 months, so they are not currently subject to statutory supervision by the Probation Service. It is clear that this is likely to be viewed as model for the future delivery of many tasks currently undertaken by the Probation Service. Amongst the Coalition's main priorities for the Ministry of Justice is that it 'will no longer provide rehabilitation services directly without testing where voluntary or private sectors can provide it more effectively and efficiently' (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Such moves relegate the probation service to merely another provider among many. A key challenge facing the probation service therefore will

undoubtedly be how it is able to demonstrate the 'added value' it brings to the supervision process amongst a range of potential providers.

Legislative challenges

New Labour's approach to law and order often vacillated between paternalistic care and greater control and surveillance and in turn resulted in a significant expansion in both the use of custody and also community penalties leading to a bloated criminal justice system. The perceived need for community sentences as credible alternatives to custody led to more stringent enforcement measures and ultimately had the unintended consequences of actually contributing to an increase in the prison population. It is good that the green paper acknowledges this and is proposing an end to recall to prison of those who breach their licences for technical reasons. It will be interesting to see though how successful the government will be in reconciling this with its promotion of 'tough' community sentences and whether or not it will be able to convince the more hostile sections of the national press. It also remains to be seen whether or not the populist faction within the Conservative Party which has virulently opposed penal reform will be resisted.



As Cedric Fullwood (2010) has noted, probation practitioners (never mind the public) became overwhelmed, if not confused and dispirited, by the plethora of legislation introduced between 1997 and 2010. Legislative changes introduced by the previous Labour Government such as the introduction of new community orders, in which sentencers could 'pick and mix' from the various requirements (of which supervision was one), have merely compounded the situation. The thinking behind the orders that the various requirements could be supervised by different individuals and organisations has, it could be argued, not only undermined the overall coherence of the traditional probation order but failed to convince sentencers that these new disposals are any more an effective alternative to custody than those sanctions that preceded them (Mair and Mills, 2009).

Financial challenges

Like most public sector organisations, the Probation Service is facing a prolonged period of funding uncertainty. As a result of the spending review in October, the Ministry of Justice will have to reduce its current spending by 23% and its capital spending by 50% (BBC, 2010). It is hard to see how this can be achieved by efficiency savings alone and is undoubtedly likely to impact on front-line services in terms of a loss of posts and a reduction in the range and number of offender programmes provided. Hard decisions will no doubt have to be taken at the local level regarding what tasks will be prioritised. The likely outcome is that high risk work attracting more resources as a result of political expediency will take precedence over the development of exactly those innovative community based resources that the government

hopes will lessen the need for highly expensive and largely ineffective short-term sentences. It is unlikely, certainly in the short term, that new providers will be able to fill this void. There is the danger therefore of repeating the 'unintended consequences' of further increasing the prison population which was an emblematic feature of so much new Labour policy making and legislation, as outlined in the previous section.

Future prospects

Under the Coalition there appears to be a political commitment – albeit as yet it would seem largely unformed – to sentencing reform based on a recognition of the failure of prison sentences to change offending behaviour matched by a pragmatic motivation to cut costs by using community based sanctions. This is to be welcomed and supported but there is a danger that these good intentions will be undermined by the government's insistence on promoting the private sector as a solution to record levels of imprisonment. This appears as much motivated by ideological imperatives as economic necessity and fails to fully appreciate the potential issues involved in terms of regulation, control and accountability.

There is nothing new in pursuing marketisation as a solution to criminal justice problems. The government's plans can be seen merely as an extension of the failed attempts to achieve this by both previous Labour and Conservative governments. Indeed the general tenor of the green paper in talking tough whilst acknowledging the economic constraints upon prison expansion, in many respects, harks back to the earlier policies of the 1980s during which the present Justice Secretary was a senior member of the government. As such, it could be argued that it is less revolutionary and more of the same! With its established infrastructure, trained and highly skilled staff, and unparalleled experience of working with those who commit offences, the Probation Service ought to be at the forefront of what has been viewed as a change of political direction; however this is far from certain and in all probability highly unlikely due to a continued lack of political support and antipathy towards public service.

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Challenging the individualised approach to young peoples' resettlement needs

Dr Patricia Gray



I am currently engaged in research into resettlement issues generally, as well as the problems and difficulties facing young people as they leave custody. Standards are embedded in international agreements, such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and are often used as benchmarks to assess the extent to which youth justice policy and practice protect the rights of young people below the age of 18 years. The failure to use youth custody in England and Wales as a 'measure of last resort' and the failure to protect young people in custody from 'inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment' is a major source of critical commentary and research. My research specifically focuses on the failure of resettlement provision to protect the 'best interests of the child' or address the personal and social needs of these young people – an area often given less attention by children's rights organisations (with the exception of the Howard League).

Research after research has highlighted the high levels of personal and socio-economic disadvantage experienced by these young people and the likelihood that this may undermine their motivation to successfully resettle in the community upon their release from custody. In recent years the Youth Justice Board has invested substantial resources and set in place several new initiatives to improve welfare provision for this target group. Improvements in this field have been supported by broader changes brought about by the 'every child matters' agenda which sought to develop a more holistic, welfare-orientated and child-friendly approach to the delivery of children's services. The 'every child matters' vision was translated into resettlement policy through the Youth Crime Action Plan 2008. In this Plan mainstream children's services were expected to take an active role in providing 'a more comprehensive package of support for children leaving custody to give them the best chance to turn their lives around' (Ministry of Justice, 2008: 59 and 9). This was mainly to be achieved by improving existing partnership arrangements and 'joined up' working between the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and a diverse range of other children's services delivering support to help with accommodation, health, mental health, substance misuse, education, training and employment (ETE) and family problems under the umbrella of the Children's Trusts.

Despite this apparently genuine commitment to improving resettlement provision, Solomon and Garside's (2008) audit of the youth justice system showed quite clearly that most resettlement policies and programmes were failing to meet their targets and overall were having only limited success in addressing the personal and social problems facing young offenders leaving custody. They concluded that:

... a youth justice system that was designed with the intention of providing effective multi-agency provision ... is in practice struggling to meet the complex needs of a group of vulnerable children and young people who require carefully co-ordinated specialist support. (Solomon and Garside, 2008: 64)

Solomon and Garside's damning research findings are supported by a range of other research studies in, for example, the fields of ETE (Cooper et al., 2007; Ofsted, 2010; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2010) and mental health (Harrington and Bailey, 2005; Edgar and Rickford, 2009).

Research tends to highlight three main reasons why resettlement policies and programmes are having such little success in meeting the personal and social needs of young people on release from custody. First, research attributes at least part of the blame to deficiencies in the delivery, quality and quantity of resettlement resources. The second factor identified by research relates to ineffective management and co-operation. This is because most of the resettlement initiatives mentioned earlier rely on complex multi-agency partnership arrangements between children's services, YOTs and the secure estate. However, research indicates that many of these agencies have quite different and often contradictory targets and cultures which make it very difficult for them to work effectively in partnership (Souhami, 2007). This means that YOTs are often unable to access key social support services to address young peoples' wider resettlement needs (Youth Justice Board, 2010).

Thirdly, my own research analyses the failure from a totally different viewpoint by questioning the way in which young offenders' resettlement needs have been interpreted in the current 'punitive' law and order climate. In such a climate, the welfarist, child friendly vision of 'every child matters' has, as Goldson and Muncie (2006: 214) argue, been replaced by that of 'punitive correctionalism'. Addressing young peoples' resettlement needs are now only of interest in so much as they are relevant in reducing their risk of reoffending. The end product of this narrow way of thinking is that young peoples' resettlement problems have been individualised and pathologised or equated with correcting personal shortcomings in their attitudes and social skills (Gray 2007, 2009). Meanwhile broader structural needs arising from poverty and socio-economic deprivation which frequently limit young peoples' choices and motivation to stop offending have been set aside as being less relevant targets of change. The consequences of this individualisation of need are illustrated by the outcome of ETE programmes which have been heavily supported by the Youth Justice Board as a means of reducing reoffending. In these programmes young peoples' failure to progress in ETE has primarily been portrayed as an



individual pathology arising from deficiencies in their attitudes and 'employability' skills. Hence ETE programmes have centred on making young people 'employment ready' by strengthening their attitudes to work, educational qualifications and work habits (Cooper et al., 2007). However, research on the outcomes of these programmes challenge the assumption that the problem derives from individual deficits rather than structural changes to youth labour markets in advanced European economies which have severely reduced the employment prospects of those leaving custody and their ability to obtain stable and sustainable work (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2008).

Overall my research stems from a belief in social justice whereby the rights, problems and needs of young people leaving custody need to be more successfully and equitably addressed. This could be achieved by ensuring that the rights promulgated in the 1989 UNCRC and other such international agreements are made legally enforceable in UK courts and provide checks on the standards and quality of resettlement outcomes available to young offenders on release from custody. To this end the Law and Criminal Justice Research Centre at the University of Plymouth is holding a youth justice conference in the early summer of 2011 entitled Youth Custody and Human Rights. The conference is being run in association with the British Society of Criminology Youth Criminology / Youth Justice Network (YC / YJN) and the South West Branch of the British Society of Criminology. The conference has three broad themes: 'Youth Custody as a Last Resort'; 'Conditions Inside Custody'; and 'Resettlement and Social Exclusion'. The keynote speakers are drawn from eminent academics, researchers, policymakers and practitioners in the youth justice field. Details will be posted at the University of Plymouth Law and Criminal Justice Research Centre website in the next few weeks.

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"Last year a new Law and Criminal Justice Research Centre was established in the School of Law at the University of Plymouth. The Director is Dr. Dan Gilling and I am one of the Associate Directors. Members of the Centre have a diverse range of research interests in the criminal justice field supported by a vibrant research environment. Key research areas include anti social behaviour; crime prevention and community safety; gender and criminal justice; gypsy and traveller issues; surveillance, police and policing; probation policy and practice; race and ethnicity; science, technology and crime; and victimology. My own research centres on youth justice; penalty and social exclusion; and restorative youth justice from both a national and international perspective."

Researching the link between homelessness and re-offending

Dr Vickie Cooper



My research to date has focused on how homeless groups are managed and documented through move-on support: from young offender institutions into supported accommodation and into their own tenancies, homelessness or re-imprisonment.

I have just been awarded an early academic research grant from Liverpool John Moores University in order to conduct a research study, working in collaboration with the Howard League for Penal Reform. The research project will critically examine the cyclical paths between homelessness and imprisonment and assess the extent to which current resettlement policy and practice can slow the revolving door between homelessness and imprisonment.

Housing, or lack of, plays a key part in people's paths in and out of prison; due to the 13 week 'housing benefit rule' and failure to pay rent while in prison, a high portion of prisoners are homeless upon entering and leaving prison. The Social Exclusion Unit estimated that 40 per cent of all rough sleepers have recently left prison. However, this statistic is vacuous given the tenuous and selective methods for counting rough sleepers across the UK. Nevertheless, over the past decade government policy has emphasised the significance of accommodation and resettlement for reducing re-offending. One example is the Supporting People programme which funds all resettlement and housing support services. This was introduced in 2003 (stemming housing benefit reforms made 1999-2003) while the Homelessness Act 2002 included ex-offenders as a new priority need group. Together, the Supporting People programme and the Homelessness Act 2002 anchored the significance of accommodation and housing for reducing reoffending and preventing homelessness.

This may be regarded as an attractive policy preventative initiative; resettlement support is holistic in principle as it addresses a whole host of support needs, including accommodation, education, training and employment, health, substance misuse, family relationships and finance management (YJB, 2004; Howard League for Penal Reform, 2006). While resettlement support is a non-statutory stream of support, it plays a fundamental role in fulfilling local government's statutory duty to prevent homelessness and reduce reoffending. This makes resettlement and housing support a highly politicised stream support as it brings voluntary sectors and housing associations ever closer to having an impact upon strategic policy decisions. Moreover, the housing *and* pastoral element of this support is worth considering given that the latent issues surrounding homelessness are now officially recognised as being 'more than a roof' and that reducing re-offending is partly related to having greater support with accommodation needs.

The new study will be carried out in Liverpool city and surrounding areas. Liverpool has piloted a range of resettlement projects as part of its homelessness prevention strategy: including 'move-on and move-in' and a prison discharge service that carried out homelessness assessments prior to people being released from prison. I will be interviewing between 40 and 60 participants; including men and women serving custodial sentences, ex-prisoners under probationary supervision and rough sleepers.

The key reason for working with the Howard League as my collaborating institution for this study is three fold. First, the charity's recent research activity has been concerned with local authority statutory duty of support and resettling ex-prisoners within the community; in 2006 it undertook a study focusing on the resettlement needs of men serving short-term prison sentences and in 2010 it published a study focusing on young people's experience of resettlement support while serving custodial sentences. Second, the experience and expertise of the research advisory group will help to inform my methodology and research design, research data and outputs. Third, the charity's institutional support is integral for generating social impact and for achieving wider recognition surrounding the cyclical paths between homelessness and imprisonment.



Young, Adult and No Support

The entitlements of young adults
to care in the community

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Vickie Cooper is Lecturer in Criminology at Liverpool John Moores University.

Member profile

Dr Helen Wells from Keele University, Staffordshire



Hi. I'm Dr Helen Wells and I'm a Lecturer in Criminology, as well as a member of the Centre for Criminological Research at Keele University, Staffordshire. I've been at Keele on-and-off since 1995 when I started my undergraduate degree in history and criminology. I've worked in the Magistrates' Courts Service where I was, amongst other things, responsible for determining the outcome of Legal Aid applications, as well as in Community Safety where I co-led the Oxford City response to the 2002 Street Crime Initiative. Both these roles reinforced my sense that only in academia would I be given the time to consider problems of crime and punishment in anything like the depth that I knew they deserved. As a result, I came back to Keele after both spells in the 'real world' to complete a Masters and then PhD in Criminology.

My PhD focussed on the controversy around the use of speed cameras to enforce speed limits and came at the problem from a 'risk' perspective, as well as exploring the compatibility of automated enforcement with procedural justice. Since completing the PhD I have broadened my research interests to include surveillance and a focus on technology in criminal justice more generally. I also hope to obtain funding for a research project on the use of fixed penalties more generally, given that this expanding area of punishment is so neglected both theoretically and (especially) empirically. I am hoping to research the experience of being 'disposed of' by fixed penalty – an experience about which we know very little academically, yet an experience that looks set to become all the more common in the future, representing many people's only encounter with the criminal justice system in the role of 'problem'. Such encounters are of central significance in determining people's attitudes to authority and (in turn) compliance with law, yet we are inclined to exclude them from discussions about 'real' crime and punishment and pursue a strategy of fixed fines as though these are inconsequential punishments, and as though our prison population is not at least partly made up of fine defaulters.

I have recently joined the Howard League's Early Career Academic Network and (at the risk of making this sound like a lonely hearts ad) am very keen to meet and learn about the work of other early careers academics in similar fields. There are obviously going to be significant challenges ahead both as a result of direct cuts to the university sector and wider cuts in public spending and I hope that through networks such as this those of us embarking on the early stages of academic careers can find encouragement and exchange ideas to add value to the important research that so many of early career academics are involved in.

First Look

Doctoral research on the physical experience of imprisonment

Anastasia Chamberlen



My PhD research has the title: 'My body's a cage: an investigation into the bodily identities of incarcerated women'. It is a study about the physical experience of imprisonment. It is my intention to historically, theoretically and empirically research the physical (bodily) experience of imprisonment in open and closed prisons. I am interested in establishing the specific impact of punishment on the female body and I wish to determine the effect of different prison regimes and structures in the creation of bodily prisoner identities.

As an undergraduate student in sociology I developed a strong fascination with sociological theories of the body and found that the body is an important 'tool' with which social scientists can attempt to interpret our late modern societies. My interest in penology started with my first reading of Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. During my MPhil studies in criminology I explored a variety of existing research on imprisonment and soon realised that research in the sociology of prison life has mostly focused on the mental effects of imprisonment *and* covers largely men's experiences. I decided to look at the possibility of studying women's imprisonment from a more physical- embodied perspective.

Research Questions

My research has a twofold interest: it aims to investigate the female body's oppression/punishment and its resistance to punishment/control. These research questions are strongly influenced by sociological theories on the body and I have divided them into three theoretical traditions: the phenomenological, the social constructionist and the structuration theory approach:

- Derived from a phenomenological reading of the theory, I am concerned with the role of agency in assessing bodily experiences in prison so I am keen to explore: How is the experience of imprisonment portrayed through bodily identity. In other words, how does the female body experience punishment, confinement and incapacitation?
- With a social constructionist interest the second research question aims to evaluate the role of social structure on the female body. The research will ask: What is the impact of prison regimes in controlling, regulating and changing the female prisoner's body? Are there any differences between open and closed prison regime structures reflected on the prisoners' bodily identities?

- The third question grounded in structuration theory and it asks: What is more influential in the construction of the bodily identity of women prisoners, their imported characteristics and personal agency or the structural influences of the prison regime?

Methods

There are two phases to the research.

Theoretical and historical secondary analysis:

The research incorporates a secondary evaluation of existing sociological theories on the body and research on the sociologies of punishment and prison life. Through the evaluation of the theoretical ideas around the role of the body in society I concentrate on three pioneering traditions: the phenomenological, social constructionist and finally the structuration theory approach. I propose to test the relevance and validity of each of these theoretical approaches in the prison setting.

The historical part of my research is an evaluation of the changes in women's punishment. I analyse changes in prison policy regarding the regulation of women's bodies and discuss how changes in health promotion in prison have affected women prisoners' bodies and identities.

Empirical: Qualitative case study of one open and one closed prison:

I intend to conduct interviews with prisoners in one closed and one open prison in England. At the moment, I'm in the process of gaining access into the prisons.

Problems and Dilemmas

Overall the process of researching for a PhD can be an isolating and stressful one. At the first stages of my research I found it difficult to discuss my research with other PhD peers as I am studying under a Law department (i.e. not criminology/ sociology). As I became more confident in my own research ideas I found that I could discuss penology with other students as long as my own ideas were clear and comprehensive enough. This motivated me to put a better focus on my own research questions.

At the moment I am negotiating access into two prisons. This has unfortunately been a rather long and stressful process for me. I find that preparing to undertake empirical research involves much planning and a lot of luck. Hopefully I will be able to start my fieldwork by next December. I am quite excited to talk to prisoners about my research and I am curious to see whether my approach to the study of prisoner experience will be welcomed by them. During my MPhil fieldwork, prisoners explained that their bodies acquire almost a new role for them while in prison. I hope my current research will give women prisoners the chance to explore the function of their bodies in their prison experience and will provoke them to think about their identities from a new perspective.

Anastasia Chamberlen is studying for a PhD at King's College London.

Get involved

Supermax review

The Howard League was very pleased that many ECAN members did indeed get involved, joining us at our event at Birkbeck College, University of London, for an exclusive screening of excerpts from Dr Sharon Shalev's documentary film about supermax prisons in the US. ECAN member, **Craig Morrison**, reviewed the event:

"Deeply disturbing yet compelling viewing, Supermax looked at solitary confinement in some of America's toughest supermax prisons. The documentary focused mainly on Pelican Bay, 750 miles from Los Angeles where most of its inhabitants hail from. There, over 1,000 men are placed in solitary confinement for breaching prison rules.



And here solitary confinement means just that.

The closest contact with other humans is when one of the several officers escorting the prisoner to their thrice weekly visit to the tiny indoor exercise pen places the cuffs on through a hatch. The rest of the time is spent in a tiny windowless room, the only natural light coming from skylights high in the ceilings of the corridors outside.

Unlike the UK, where solitary is counted in days, weeks or months, here it is measured in years and decades. Shockingly these latter cases are not unusual.



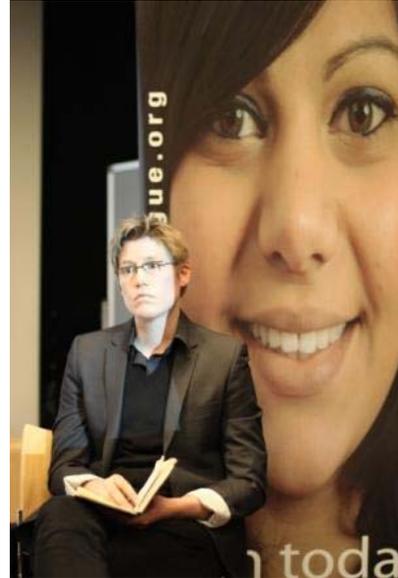
Many are mentally broken by this dehumanising experience and one cannot help but admire the spirit of those who have been enduring this regime for years yet seem on the surface to be coping with their lot. I say on the surface as the psychological damage being caused could not possibly be measured in the short term.

These levels of deprivation are nothing new and the film looks at past experiments which were abandoned when it became clear the mental damage that was being afflicted was detrimental to rehabilitation. Yet it seems less than a hundred years later the practice is rife and rehabilitation does not even come into the equation. The documentary showed 20 young men between the

ages of 14 and 18 enduring this regime, a fact and practice that makes the use of supermax prisons all the more shocking.

This rare insight into the unforgiving world of the North American prison system leaves the viewer wondering what place this could possibly have in a civilised society and stunned at what man can do to his fellow man in the name of 'justice'."

More ECAN events are planned for next year.



ECAN Facebook Group



The Howard League for Penal Reform is active on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Delicious](#). There is a special page dedicated to the Early Careers Academic Network that you can reach either by searching for us on facebook or by clicking on the button above.

We hope to use the Facebook site to generate discussions about current issues in the criminal justice system. If there are any topics that you would like to discuss, please start a discussion.

Guidelines for submissions

Style

Text should be readable and interesting. It should, as far as possible, be jargon-free, with minimal use of references. Of course, non-racist and non-sexist language is expected. References should be put at the end of the article. We reserve the right to edit where necessary.

Illustrations

We always welcome photographs, graphic or illustrations to accompany your article.

Authorship

Please append your name to the end of the article, together with your job description and any other relevant information (eg other voluntary roles, or publications etc).

Publication

Even where articles have been commissioned by the Howard League for Penal Reform, we cannot guarantee publication. An article may be held over until the next issue.

Format

Please send your submission by email to anita.dockley@howardleague.org.

Please note

Views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect Howard League for Penal Reform policy unless explicitly stated.