

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA20</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Prisons research: Measuring the quality of prison life</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) Research undertaken on prison quality and moral performance by the Cambridge Prisons Research Centre (PRC) has been used to develop the Measuring Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) and Staff Quality of Life (SQL) surveys for HM Prison Service. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has adopted the MQPL survey in routine performance and audit measurement of all 138 prison establishments in England and Wales. The survey is also used to assess prison quality abroad. The research underpinning the MQPL has enabled the implementation of HM Prison Service's 'decency agenda' for evaluating the treatment of prisoners. MQPL survey results influenced the development of HM Prison Service practices linked to a reduction in suicides in prisons.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) The MQPL and SQL surveys have been developed by Professor Alison Lieblich and colleagues in the Prisons Research Centre at the Cambridge University Institute of Criminology between 2000 and 2011. Lieblich has been an employee of the University since 2000, holding the position of Professor since 2007, and Director of PRC since 2000. Helen Arnold (Research Assistant) and Dr Ben Crewe (Director, Master of Studies Programme) have been employees of the University and members of the PRC since 2000 and 2001 respectively. The purpose of the research has been to develop quantitative measures of essential qualitative dimensions of prison life in order to evaluate prisons in terms of their moral performance.</p> <p>The research has two main approaches. The first involves 'appreciative inquiry', which is a methodology adapted from the literature on change in organisations. It concentrates on the strengths of an organisation, by articulating what is 'best' and life-giving about it (e.g., how prison officers operate at their best (Reference 4)). The research sought to identify inductively the 'key dimensions of prison life', in terms of relationships, personal development, and order and organisation.</p> <p>The second approach, arising from the first, has been the development and administration of detailed quality of life surveys for prisoners and staff. The surveys were originally developed in five prisons selected on advice from the Prison Service to provide a range of 'performance' and quality. The surveys had a highly standardised format, consisting of detailed 'tick box' questionnaires.</p> <p>Their main goals were authentic description of the moral, relational and social climate in individual prisons, and explanation of their differences. The innovative feature of the surveys was that they involved grounded theory explorations with staff and prisoners about what mattered most in prison (Reference 1). In the past, these important dimensions of prison life were considered too difficult to measure quantitatively. The methodology was 'ethnography-led measurement', combining generative dialogue with quantitative evaluation, fusing conceptual with empirical exploration. This unique approach led to highly convincing and reliable measurement (Reference 2). The methodology revealed considerable consensus as to the most important dimensions of prison life and quality. These included respect, humanity, staff-prisoner relationships, trust, well-being, safety, order and the use of authority by staff (References 1, 2 and 3).</p> <p>These methods were used to generate quantitative and qualitative data about the moral quality of life in the five prisons, and the relationship between quality and outcomes. This has allowed systematic comparisons to be made between prisons (both between and within different sectors) and over time. The results have enabled systematic evaluation of specific policy changes affecting prisons, and evaluation of efforts to implement improvements in prison policy, management and outcomes (e.g., Reference 6).</p> <p>The development of the research since 2000 means that empirical observations have been used</p>

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by Liebling and other researchers at the PRC and elsewhere to develop new theories and conceptual categories relevant to prison life and experience. These have generated better observations, and demonstrable links with important outcomes (e.g., personal development, and suicide and disorder prevention (References 5, 6)). The surveys have been extended to all prison institutions in England and Wales.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Liebling, A.; assisted by Arnold, H. (2004) *Prisons and their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Studies in Criminology, Oxford University Press. (Develops the methodology and its introduction into the prison sector; provides theoretical context and outlining the key findings).
2. Liebling, A., Crewe, B. and Hulley, S. (2011) 'Conceptualising and Measuring the Quality of Prison Life', in D. Gadd, S. Karstedt and S. F. Messner (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Criminological Research Methods*, London: Sage Publishing. (Outlines the methodological tool for the survey).
3. Crewe, B., Liebling, A. and Hulley, S. (2011) 'Staff Culture, Use of Authority and Prisoner Quality of Life in Public and Private Sector Prisons', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 44(1): 94-115.
4. Liebling, A., Price, D. and Shefer, G. (2011) *The Prison Officer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing. (Describes the first use of appreciative inquiry in a prison)
5. Ross, M. W., Diamond, P., Liebling, A. and Saylor, W. G. (2008) 'Measurement of Prison Social Climate: A comparison of an inmate measure in England and the USA', *Punishment and Society*, 10(4): 449-476.
6. Liebling, A., Durie, L., Stiles, A. and Tait, S. (2005) 'Revisiting prison suicide: the role of fairness and distress', in A. Liebling and S. Maruna (eds) *The Effects of Imprisonment*, Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, pp. 209-31.

### Evidence of the Quality of the Research

Scholarly recognition: Reference 1 above is published in a prestigious series of peer-reviewed research monographs in Criminology. It has attracted 182 citations in Google Scholar, which is a large number for the relatively small field of prisons research.

Scale and continuation of research grant support over 13 years: The first phase of the research during 2000-2002 was made possible by a competitive grant of £68,000 from the Home Office's *Innovative Research Challenge Fund*. The on-going research has continued to attract substantial funding from government agencies and the Research Councils: HM Prison Service funding of £60,000 (2001-2002); Home Office funding of £208,000 (2001-2004); ESRC funding of £399,000 (2007-2010) (the reported outcome from the ESRC study was rated "outstanding" by reviewers).

The PRC has enjoyed regular annual funding increases from HM Prison Service and NOMS, rising from £18,000 in 2000 to £220,000 annually in 2011, 2012 and 2013. In all, the research has been supported by over £1,188,000 in grants over 13 years.

External recognition by end-users and policy-makers: In recognition of the robustness of the research, Liebling and members of the PRC are frequently asked by HM Prison Service to advise on matters relating to the quality of prison life: e.g., the training and selection of senior managers (2010-12); the training and remuneration of prison officers (2012); the specification and operation of constructive prison environments (2010-12); and the relative performance of specific prisons, or entire sections of the prison estate (2008-2013). Liebling has been a member of a British Academy Policy study on 'Crime, Punishment and the Prison' (2011-13) and is an adviser to the Global Evidence-Based Corrections Research Centre at the University of Griffith in Queensland.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research has had three main impacts.

#### *i. Use of the MQPL survey by HM Prison Service, and internationally*

The MQPL survey was first adopted for use by HM Prison Service Standards Audit Unit in 2004 as

one factor in its Prison Rating System. It has since been extended by the Audit and Corporate Assurance Directorate of NOMS, and remains in use to the present day. MQPL scores from annual surveys are used in moderating the Performance Rating of a prison in terms of its decency and safety, and as part of an equality score (Sources 1, 4, and 9).

Since 2007, the SQL data has been used by HM Prison Service in assessing the performance and quality of establishments, and in understanding attempts to improve prison culture. For example, since 2011 it has been used to develop the 'every contact matters' agenda in shaping the public sector's bids to operate prisons as efficiently and effectively as possible in a competitive environment (Source 4).

In May 2013, the Home Office Youth Justice Board implemented a three-year commitment to extend the MQPL survey to young persons' establishments. Information derived from the MPQL surveys is now used in the Board's performance management framework (Source 4, 2). Since 2012, the National Audit Office has been in discussion with NOMS and the PRC to develop plans for using MQPL in evaluating NOMS policy on the closing, opening, extending and changing the function of prisons: (Sources 4, 2).

The research has been used to make significant decisions about the management of contracts with both public and private sector prisons, including the decision to end the rectification notice on HMP Rye Hill in 2009 (Source 7).

The research has had international impact. Since 2010, the PRC has trained personnel and overseen the use of MQPL in other jurisdictions, including the Irish Prison Service, and the Norwegian Correctional Research department, both of whom have now adopted the measure (Source 4). Since 2012, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (an NGO in Kosovo) has used MQPL to identify ill-treatment of prisoners: (Source 8).

## ***ii. Influence on the 'decency agenda'.***

The 'decency agenda' emerged in 2000-2001 as a key theme in the development of HM Prison Service's measures of prison quality. From 2004 to the present, the use of the MQPL surveys by HM Prison Service has generated a body of qualitative and quantitative information that has enabled the practical implementation of the 'decency agenda' in prisons. The MPQL surveys provided a language and a methodology for evaluating and comparing the accomplishment of the general aims of 'decency' and 'performance' in prisons.

The MQPL survey generated empirically valid information about the moral practices and of prison staff, and the experiences and survival or change trajectory of prisoners which were specific to individual prisons. Senior managers were able to use that information as they planned policies, introduced cultural changes, and set or supplemented performance targets in their own institutions: (Sources 1, 4 and 6). Some specific examples are: (i) in 2010 a HM Prison Service Deputy Director of Custody set 'human flourishing' targets for all of her Governors in the South West Area (Source 6); (ii) since 2011, the PRC team have been contracted to conduct 'MQPL-plus' surveys (including interviews and observation) in 'operationally important' sites undergoing significant reorganisation (Sources 1, 4, 9).

## ***iii. Prison suicides.***

Between 2001 and 2009, MQPL and SQL survey results influenced the development of HM Prison Service measures which were successful in reducing prison suicides. Between 2001 and 2004 the Prison Service commissioned Liebling and her colleagues to conduct MQPL and SQL surveys in 12 prisons where there was a higher than expected suicide risk (Sources 1, 4). The survey results identified which aspects of prison quality tended to reduce prisoner distress, which the research showed was highly correlated with three-year moving average suicide rates in individual prisons. Between 2005 and 2009, the results encouraged implementation of the national violence prevention strategy by the Safer Custody Group at NOMS Headquarters (Sources 1, 4). The period

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saw a sustained reduction in prison suicides, from 2005, which has continued. The number of suicides in 1999, 2000 and 2001 was 81-2 (125 per 100,000). Since the completed implementation of the Safer Custody Programme in 2009-10, the figure has fallen to 57 and 51 respectively (66-68 per 100,000), despite increases in the prison population: (Sources 1, 4, 5, 7).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Person 1, Director General Prison Service 2003-2010; previously DDG and Chief Operating Officer from 1999; now operational advisor to G4S.
2. Report by the Comptroller & Auditor-General, HC 431, Session 2009-10:  
<http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/0910431.pdf>
3. Minutes of the All-Party Penal Affairs Parliamentary Group (6 March 2012):  
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/PressPolicy/Parliament/AllPartyParliamentaryPenalAffairsGroup/PublicorprivatesectorprisonsMarch2012>
4. Person 2, Chief Executive, NOMS.
5. Ministry of Justice, Safety in Custody Statistics  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-in-custody>: Table 1.1 Deaths in prison custody and (1) rates by apparent cause (2) by calendar year, England and Wales, 1978-2012
6. Person 3, Deputy Director of Custody, South Central, NOMS.
7. Person 4, Deputy Director Custody, Kent and Sussex Prisons, NOMS; Head of the Office for National Commissioning.
8. Dubrava Quality of Prison Life Study (Preliminary Data Analysis, 2013)  
<http://dignityinstitute.org/programmes/europe/promoting-respect-for-human-rights-in-pretrial-detention-and-prisons.aspx>.
9. ESRC Impact Video, "How our Prisons Reform" (2011): Michael Spurr, discussing impact of MQPL:  
<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/videos/all-videos.aspx>