CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Forgotten or neglected? The prison officer in existing penal research and the case for Irish explorations of prison work
Authors	Barry, Colette
Publication date	2013-06-01
Original Citation	Barry, C. (2013) 'Forgotten or neglected? The prison officer in existing penal research and the case for Irish explorations of prison work', CCJHR Legal Research Working Papers series, No. 4, Cork: CCJHR, University College Cork
Type of publication	Report
Link to publisher's version	http://www.ucc.ie/en/ccjhr
Rights	© Colette Barry, 2013
Download date	2026-11-07 15:18:45
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/6962

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

School of Law
Scoil an Dlí

SHAPING A JUST SOCIETY
SINCE 1849



Legal Research Series

Working Paper No.4

Forgotten or Neglected? The Prison Officer in Existing Penal Research and the Case for Irish Explorations of Prison Work

Colette Barry

June 2013

CCJHR

Copyright © Colette Barry, 2013

Centre for Criminal Justice & Human Rights (CCJHR)

School of Law

University College Cork

Cork, Ireland

www.ucc.ie/en/ccjhr

The views expressed in this work are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the CCJHR or the School of Law, UCC.

CCJHR Working Papers Series

1. 'Exclusion from Refugee Status: Asylum Seekers and Terrorism in the UK', Sarah Singer, December 2012
2. 'The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Ireland: Will it Make a Difference?', Claire-Michelle Smyth, December 2012
3. 'The Content and Value of a Feminist Perspective on Criminal Law Legislative Reform', Ilona Cairns, December 2012
4. 'Forgotten or Neglected? The Prison Officer in Existing Penal Research and the Case for Irish Explorations of Prison Work', Colette Barry, June 2013
5. 'Accounting for Considerations of Legal Capacity of Children in Legal Proceedings', Sarah Jane Judge, June 2013
6. 'The League of Arab States: The Role of Regional Institutions in the Protection of Human Rights', Hajer Almanea, August 2018
7. 'The Securitisation of Migration: Leaving Protection Behind? The "Hotspot Approach" and the Identification of Potential Victims of Human Trafficking', Noemi Magugliani, August 2018
8. 'Examining Measures Facilitating Participation of Female Child Victims in the Prosecution of Sexual Abuse Cases in Uganda's Criminal Justice System', Daisy Nabasitu, September 2018
9. 'Re-thinking the Right to Water: Enhancing Service Provider Accountability through Participatory Rights and Strategic Public Interest Litigation – South African and Irish Experiences', Sahara Nankan, September 2018

FORGOTTEN OR NEGLECTED? THE PRISON OFFICER IN EXISTING PENAL RESEARCH AND THE CASE FOR IRISH EXPLORATIONS OF PRISON WORK

Colette Barry*

Abstract:
The role of the modern prison officer is undoubtedly one of considerable significance within prisons and across prison systems. While officers occupy important roles in the context of the implementation of policy and the legitimacy of the prison, a paucity of robust prison officer research has persisted for many years. Described in existing literature as the 'invisible ghosts of penality', prison officers and their culture have not been subjected to the same rigours of empirical analysis as the institution of the prison and the prisoners who reside within it. Recent years have seen a burgeoning body of research emerge internationally. Irish scholarship in this area has not begun to flourish in a similar fashion, however. Using existing research as a starting point, this paper seeks to advocate for the need for Irish studies of prison officers and their cultures, experiences and perceptions. The paper will commence with a discussion of the importance and value of prison officer research. An outline of existing research will be presented, highlighting in particular recent empirical work on prison officer culture. Following this, the paper will move to consider the Irish context, beginning with a discussion of the lack of research interest and the primarily descriptive focus of previous academic endeavours in this area. Finally, the need for robust Irish research in this area will be articulated, emphasising the significance of future Irish scholarship as a contribution to existing knowledge of prison officers and criminological research more generally.

Keywords: Prisons, prison officers, Ireland

A. INTRODUCTION

The role of the prison officer is undoubtedly one of considerable significance within the modern prison. While officers occupy important functions in the context of policy implementation and the legitimacy of the prison, a paucity of robust research on the culture and working lives of prison officers has persisted for many years. Described in existing literature as the 'invisible ghosts of penality',[1] prison officers have historically been 'neglected in research, in policy decision-making and in the public's imagination'.[2] Recent years have seen academics begin to recognise the extensive gaps that exist in our knowledge of the prison officer, and a burgeoning body of research focused on the views and experiences of those working in our prisons has begun to emerge internationally. Irish scholarship in this area has unfortunately not begun to flourish in a similar fashion however, and very little is currently known about prison officers in this jurisdiction.

∗ Colette Barry, PhD Candidate, School of Languages, Law and Society, Dublin Institute of Technology. Funding received from the Irish Research Council, as part of the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme. Email: colette.barry@mydit.ie This paper was presented at the UCC Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (CCJHR) North-South Irish Criminology Conference, 20-21st June 2013.

[1] A Liebling, 'Prison Officers, Policing and the Use of Discretion' (2000) 4 *Theoretical Criminology* 333, 337.

[2] H Arnold, A Liebling & S Tait, 'Prison Officers and Prison Culture' in Y Jewkes, (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons* (Willan Publishing 2007) 492.

Using existing research as a starting point, this paper seeks to advocate for the need for Irish studies of prison officers. Commencing with a discussion of the importance and value of prison officer research, the paper will then move to outline emerging international scholarship and reflect on the impetus behind the recent growth in academic interest in officers. Following this, the paper will consider the Irish context, beginning with a discussion of the lack of research interest and the primarily descriptive focus of previous academic endeavours in this area. Finally, the need for robust Irish research in this area will be articulated and a current study of Irish prison officers' experiences of prisoner fatalities will be highlighted. The paper will conclude by emphasising the potential contribution of future Irish research to prison officer literature.

B. THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF PRISION OFFICER RESEARCH

It is submitted that the exploration of the working lives of prison officers is a valuable endeavour, particularly as the sociology of criminal justice occupations becomes an increasingly significant area within socio-legal and criminological research with the advent of the expansive scholarship on the culture and occupational styles of police officers.[3] While the importance of a comprehensive body of prison officer research is a discussion that is most certainly beyond the scope of the current paper, it is useful at this point to briefly highlight the value of examinations of officers' perceptions and experiences.

The significance of prison officer research lies in officers' central role in the implementation of penal policy.[4] Officers are among the 'street-level bureaucrats'[5] of the criminal justice system, responsible for implementing new policies on prison wings and landings. This role places them among the primary bearers of penal culture, those who 'do the most to transform cultural conceptions into penal actions' and whose social history, education and training are 'a key determinant of penal practice'.[6] Accordingly, examinations of officers' experiences of their work will shed much-needed light on the policy process. A robust body of prison officer research is also important in the context of legitimacy in prisons. Power in prisons flows through the officers, and their discretion in utilising this power is an essential factor in a prison's legitimacy.[7] As officers' use of power and discretion can significantly impact prisoners' quality of life and programme implementation throughout the prison,[8] it is imperative that officers' behaviour in this context is the subject of empirical analysis.

C. RECENT EMPIRICAL EXAMINATIONS OF PRISON OFFICERS AND THEIR WORK

Recent years have seen a number of studies of the working lives of prison officers emerge as academics begin to recognise the importance of such research and identify gaps within existing knowledge. Much of this scholarship has been undertaken with officers working in England and Wales, a jurisdiction in which, with the exception of an earlier descriptive account of prison work by Thomas,[9] scholarly explorations of prison work

[3] E Crawley, *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers* (Willan Publishing 2004).
[4] M Vuolo & C Kruttschnitt, 'Prisoners' adjustment, correctional officers, and context: The foreground and background of punishment in late modernity' (2008) 42 *Law and Society Review* 307.
[5] M Lipsky, *Street-level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public services* (Russell Sage Foundation 1980).
[6] D Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (University of Chicago Press 1990) 210.
[7] R Sparks, A Hay & W Bottoms, *Prisons and the Problem of Order* (Clarendon Press 1996).
[8] AE Lerman & J Page, 'The state of the job: An embedded work role perspective on prison officer attitudes' (2012) 14 *Punishment and Society* 503.
[9] JE Thomas, *The English Prison Officers Since 1850* (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972).

were largely absent.[10] Research from Crawley[11] and Liebling *et al*[12] are the most comprehensive of these contemporary studies of prison officers. Both studies extensively examine concepts such as prison officer culture, staff-prisoner relationships, discretion, and power, with Crawley presenting additional analysis of the domestic and emotional character of prisons. Liebling's earlier sociological study of prisons generally[13] also provides some valuable insights into prison officer culture. Prison staff were once again the subject of consideration in Arnold's examination of the effects of prison work on officers.[14] Other recent studies to emerge from this area have covered topics such as officers' roles as care providers,[15] training,[16] industrial relations,[17] the importance of staff-prisoner relationships to achieving legitimacy,[18] the working personalities of officers,[19] and differences between public and private sector staff cultures.[20]

These encouraging developments in recent scholarship are not restricted to the United Kingdom, however. The United States has also made a valuable contribution to contemporary prison officer research, producing a number of quantitative studies addressing themes such as officers' experiences of overcrowding,[21] work-related stress,[22] organisational justice and fairness among officers,[23] gender differences in officer

[10] A Liebling, D Price & G Shefer, *The Prison Officer* (Willan Publishing 2011).
[11] E Crawley, *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers* (Willan Publishing 2004)
[12] Liebling, Price & Shefer, *The Prison Officer* (n.10).
[13] A Liebling, *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A study of values, quality and prison life* (Oxford University Press 2004).
[14] H Arnold, 'The effects of prison work' in A Liebling & S Maruna (eds), *The Effects of Imprisonment* (Willan Publishing 2005).
[15] S Tait, 'Care and the prison officer: beyond 'turnkeys' and 'carebears'' (2008) 180 *Prison Service Journal* 3; S Tait, 'A Typology of Prison Officer Approaches to Care' (2011) 8 *European Journal of Criminology* 440.
[16] H Arnold, 'The experience of prison officer training' in J Bennett, B Crewe & A Wahidin (eds), *Understanding Prison Staff* (Willan Publishing 2008).
[17] J Bennett & A Wahidin, 'Industrial relations in prisons' in Bennett, Crewe & Wahidin, *Understanding Prison Staff ibid*.
[18] B Crewe, *The Prisoner Society* (Oxford University Press 2009); B Crewe, 'Soft Power in Prison: Implications for Staff-Prisoner Relationships, Liberty and Legitimacy' (2011) 8 *European Journal of Criminology* 455; A Liebling, 'Distinctions and distinctiveness in the work of prison officers: Legitimacy and authority revisited' (2011) 8 *European Journal of Criminology* 484.
[19] D Scott, 'Guarding the ghosts of time: Working personalities and the prison officer-prisoner relationship' (2012) 201 *Prison Service Journal* 18.
[20] McClean & A Liebling 'Prison staff in the public and private sector' in Bennett, Crewe & Wahidin, *Understanding Prison Staff* (n.16).
[21] J Martin, B Lichtenstein, R Jenkot & D Forde, 'They can take us over any time they want: Correctional officers' responses to prison crowding' (2012) 92 *The Prison Journal* 88.
[22] K Cheeseman-Dial, R Downy & W Goodlin, 'The job in the joint: The impact of generation and gender on work stress in prison' (2010) 39 *Journal of Criminal Justice* 609.
[23] F Taxman & J Gordon, 'Do fairness and equity matter? An examination of organisational justice among correctional officers in adult prisons' (2009) 36 *Criminal Justice and Behaviour* 695.

aggression,[24] and job satisfaction.[25] Academic interest in prison officers has also spread further afield, with research emerging from Sweden,[26] Norway,[27] Israel,[28] and Nigeria.[29]

D. EXPLAINING THE RECENT GROWTH OF ACADEMIC INTEREST IN PRISON OFFICERS AND THEIR WORK

It is interesting to reflect on the impetus driving this recent momentum in prison officer research. Academic curiosity and the recognition of a gap in existing scholarship appear to be highly significant in this context. Throughout the literature, the lack of information on prison staff is frequently cited by researchers as the factor that piqued their interest in this area of study.[30] The priorities and focus of prison authorities also appear to be relevant, and their ability to grant access to researchers and to provide funding for studies is quite influential. The work of Liebling *et al*[31] arose out of several pieces of research commissioned by the Prison Service of England and Wales, with the original book published in 2001 proving so popular that the authors were approached by the Prison Service to produce a second updated edition.

Additionally, the enduring influence of individual academics and research institutes within this field of study must not be discounted when seeking to explain the emergence of recent scholarship. In this regard, the research of Professor Alison Liebling on the culture and working lives of prison officers is undoubtedly a strong guiding force in other contemporary studies. Her work in this area is expansive and covers a number of topics such as officer discretion,[32] staff-prisoner relationships,[33] and prison staff culture.[34] Most other recent studies of prison officers contain numerous references to her expansive research in this area, and her contribution to existing research may certainly be responsible for sparking a curiosity amongst other academics and researchers. Professor Liebling is also the director of the Prisons Research Centre at the University of Cambridge, and her stewardship of this institute has seen research undertaken on the topics of staff-prisoner relationships, quality of life for both prisoners and officers, and public and private prison cultures.

---

[24] R Tewksbury & S Carter Collins, 'Aggression levels among correctional officers: Reassessing sex differences' (2006) 86 *Prison Journal* 327.

[25] L Liep & J Stinchcomb, 'Should I stay or should I go? Job satisfaction and turnover intent of jail staff throughout the United States' (2013) 38 *Criminal Justice Review* 226.

[26] P-Å Nylander, O Lindberg & A Bruhn, 'Emotional Labour and Emotional Strain among Swedish Prison Officers' (2011) 8 *European Journal of Criminology* 469; A Bruhn, O Lindberg & P-Å Nylander, 'A harsher prison climate and a cultural heritage working against it: Subcultural divisions among Swedish prison officers' in T Ugelvik & J Dullum (eds.) *Penal Exceptionalism? Nordic Prison Policy and Practice* (Routledge 2012).

[27] B Johnsen, P Granheim & J Helgesen, 'Exceptional prison conditions and the quality of prison life: Prison size and prison culture in Norwegian closed prisons' (2011) 8 *European Journal of Criminology* 515.

[28] G Keinan & A Malach-Pines, 'Stress and burnout among prison personnel: Sources, outcomes and intervention strategies' (2007) 34 *Criminal Justice and Behaviour* 380.

[29] A Jefferson, 'Prison officer training and practice in Nigeria: Contention, contradiction and re-imagining reform strategies' (2007) 9 *Punishment and Society* 253.

[30] K Kauffman, *Prison Officers and their World* (Harvard University Press 1988); E Crawley, *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers* (Willan Publishing 2004); Liebling, Price & Shefer, *The Prison Officer* (n.10).

[31] Liebling, Price & Shefer, *ibid*.

[32] A Liebling, 'Prison Officers, Policing and the Use of Discretion' (2000) 4 *Theoretical Criminology* 333.

[33] A Liebling, D Price & C Elliott, 'Appreciative Inquiry and Relationships in Prison' (1999) 1 *Punishment and Society* 71; A Liebling & S Tait 'Improving staff-prisoner relationships' in G Dear (ed), *Preventing Suicide and Other Self-Harm in Prison* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2006).

[34] A Liebling, 'Why prison culture matters' in J Byrne, F Taxman & D Hummer, *The Culture of Prison Violence* (Allyn and Bacon 2008).

E. PRISON STAFF IN EXISTING IRISH LITERATURE: ABSENT VOICES

While scholarship has begun to flourish in other countries, academic interest in prison officers has remained almost non-existent in Ireland. There is a notable scarcity of robust empirical research, with the scant existing literature predominantly focused on producing descriptive accounts of prison work that reveal very little about Irish officers' culture and values. This descriptive work was largely published in the last quarter of the twentieth century and as such, there is a paucity of contemporary examinations of life as prison officer in modern Ireland. The first of these descriptive accounts of the role of the Irish prison officer was undertaken in 1976 by McGowan[35] at the request of Department of Justice. This research outlined a number of aspects of officers' working lives, including officers' interactions with prisoners, salary, and work conditions. While it is reported in the study that officers believed their work to be quite challenging, the reasons for this belief do not appear to have been probed further by the author. The study also briefly addressed prison officers' behaviour patterns; however this analysis was quite brief and confined only to the consideration of differences between officers working in open and closed prisons. Some years later in 1999, two articles on prison work in Ireland were published in the Irish journal *Studies*. The first of these, an account of the day-to-day work of Irish prison officers at that time, was written by Frank O'Donnell,[36] then president of the Prison Officers Association. Aside from a fleeting acknowledgement of prison officers' contribution to policy enactment, this article offers very little else other than a short outline of the role of the Irish prison officer. It fails to provide a significant contribution to our understanding of Irish officers' views and culture. Similar criticisms are made in the second article from this issue of *Studies* by Ian O'Donnell.[37] Written as a response to the first article, Ian O'Donnell asserts that the piece 'does not go far enough' and 'gives few insights into the challenges facing prison staff as they attempt to maintain security and good order'.[38]

In addition, prison officers seldom receive consideration within broader studies of the Irish prison system. Irish prison research has largely concentrated on prisoners, adhering to the prevailing tendency within penal scholarship to focus almost exclusively on those incarcerated within the prison, ignoring or forgetting those who work daily within the same institution.[39] References to prison staff are few and far between within the already sparse Irish literature on prisons, with mentions of officers only to be found in the work of O'Mahony,[40] Kilcommins *et al*,[41] and Rogan.[42] In his sociological profile of prisoners in Mountjoy, O'Mahony includes a short discussion of prisoners' beliefs about the behaviour and attitudes of prison officers, predominantly focusing on reporting prisoners' accounts of their relationships with officers. Kilcommins *et al* also briefly consider prison officers in their comprehensive account of the transformation of crime and punishment in Ireland. Their discussion of officers has quite a limited focus however, only addressing staff numbers and tensions regarding overtime, and as such offers very little insight into Irish officers' experiences of their work. Fleeting references to prison staff are also to be found throughout Rogan's comprehensive monograph on the Irish prison system since 1922; however material relating to Irish prison staff does not appear to have been collected as faithfully as some other sources in the book, prohibiting any deeper

[35] J McGowan, 'The role of the prison officer in the Irish Prison Service' (1980) 28 *Administration* 259.
[36] F O'Donnell, 'The Prison Officers' (1999) 88 *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 175.
[37] I O'Donnell, 'The Prison Officers: A Response' (1999) 88 *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 181.
[38] *ibid* 181.
[39] Arnold, Liebling & Tait, 'Prison Officers and Prison Culture' in Jewkes, *Handbook on Prisons* (n.2) 492.
[40] P O'Mahony, *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile* (Stationary Office 1997).
[41] S Kilcommins, I O'Donnell, E O'Sullivan & B Vaughan, *Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland* (Institute of Public Administration 2004).
[42] M Rogan, *Prison Policy in Ireland: Politics, Penal-welfarism and Political Imprisonment* (Routledge 2011).

explorations of Irish officers and their culture and perhaps reflecting a lack of recognition of officers' critical role in penal policy implementation.

Irish research has also largely been unable to benefit from the published insights of serving and retired members of staff. While recent years have seen a number of prison officer autobiographies published in the United Kingdom,[43] autobiographical accounts of prison work in Ireland remain a rarity. This is perhaps unsurprising given the strict prohibition under the Official Secrets Act 1963, and related regulations and circulars, on the publication of work by civil servants which draws upon sources accessed in an official capacity or knowledge acquired in the course of official duties without the permission of the Head of the relevant Department.[44] Additionally, the publication of autobiographical accounts of prison work without Ministerial consent was forbidden under the 1947 Prison Rules,[45] which remained in force until 2007. This prohibition under the 1947 Prison Rules appears to have had a significant chilling effect on the emergence of autobiographical accounts from Irish prison officers and has been acknowledged as particularly significant in explaining the absence of historical narratives from officers.[46] The Department of Justice is also noted to have previously exhibited a 'prickly streak'[47] in response to published works from staff arising from their experiences working in the Irish Prison Service. The memoirs of Philip Bray,[48] a retired officer, and John Lonergan,[49] the long-time governor of Mountjoy, form Ireland's small contribution to this genre within prison literature. While both biographies provide interesting and much-needed insight into life as a prison officer in Ireland, their accounts of prison officer work can seem quite dated at times, particularly as both men joined the Irish Prison Service a number of decades ago and have since retired. This is particularly felt in John Lonergan's *The Governor*, as Lonergan's tenure as a prison officer ended in 1984 upon his promotion to governor.

F. THE IMPORTANCE OF FUTURE EXPLORATIONS OF PRISON WORKS IN IRLENAD: WHAT CAN AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE OFFER?

Ireland can no longer remain a spectator at this critical time of growth in prison officer research. While the studies emerging internationally are most certainly a welcome and overdue development, it is important that Irish scholarship in this area begins to thrive and that academics and researchers recognise the opportunities of insight that are presented by examinations of the working lives and cultures of Irish prison officers. Prison research centres and institutes similar to that at Cambridge must be established in this jurisdiction with a stated focus on exploring modern prison work in Ireland. It is not sufficient to simply view Irish prison staff through the lens of existing research from England and Wales and further afield, as prison systems, prison staff demographics and penal policy differ significantly across jurisdictions. One particularly distinctive feature of the Irish prison system that bolsters the case for Irish explorations of prison work is the abiding high ratio of prison officers to prisoners. Irish prisons have long enjoyed high ratios in this respect, beginning

[43] See recent examples: R Thompson, *Screwed: The Truth About Life as a Prison Officer* (Headline Review 2008); T Levy, *A Turnkey or Not?* (Apex Publishing 2011).
[44] Official Secrets Act 1963, s 4; Circular 15/1979 E109/161/78.
[45] Rule 93(2) Prison Rules 1947.
[46] E O'Sullivan & I O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement in Ireland: Patients, Prisoners and Penitents* (Manchester University Press 2012).
[47] M Rogan, 'Prison policy in Ireland, 1922-72: subversion, stagnation and social change' (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin 2008).
[48] P Bray, *Inside Man: Life as an Irish Prison Officer* (Gill and Macmillan 2008).
[49] J Lonergan, *The Governor* (Penguin Ireland 2010).

in the 1970s when large numbers of new prison officers were recruited to the Irish Prison Service.[50] Staffing levels have since continued to soar and Ireland's officer to prisoner ratio is now among the highest in Europe with a rate of 1.4 prisoners per officer in 2011, surpassed only by Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino, and significantly higher than the Council of Europe average of 4.2 prisoners per officer.[51] Interestingly, the Irish situation is quite different to that of England and Wales, the jurisdiction from which much of the recent scholarship has emerged, where a rate of 2.8 prisoners per officer was recorded for 2011.[52] These discrepancies between prison officer to prisoner ratios are particularly significant in the context of existing research on staff-prisoner relationships and intimacy, as Irish officers may enjoy relationships of an entirely different nature to those discussed by Crewe[53] and Liebling,[54] among others, particularly as increased officer numbers relative to prisoners may strengthen the frequency and length of daily interactions between staff and prisoners. High staffing levels may also be significant in the context of staff solidarity and cohesion. It is imperative therefore that Irish research begins to explore the nature of relationships in Irish prisons. Additionally, the unique historical and political context in which Irish penal policy has developed[55] and the erratic stop-start nature of policymaking in this jurisdiction[56] provide significant potential for Irish studies of prison staff to add new and valuable insights into the penal policy process and officers' roles in policy implementation.

As international research develops, significant potential still exists for Ireland to make a valuable contribution to existing scholarship. While recent studies have considered a wide range of issues, a number of gaps in the literature remain. The performance and management of emotion by officers, officers' role in contributing to the domestic character of the prison, staff-prisoner intimacy and the impact of collective prisoner dissent on officers' perceptions of their work are among the myriad of themes ripe for further exploration. It is imperative that Irish research recognises these gaps and takes empirical action. To this end, a study of prison officers' experiences of prisoner fatalities has recently commenced in Ireland, seeking to address this 'curiously under-discussed'[57] area within prison officer research. In addition, it is submitted that the time is now opportune to begin to explore the occupational culture and lives of Irish prison officers as the prison system transitions through a period of considerable change. Accountability structures have been strengthened with the advent of improved procedures for the investigations of prisoner complaints and deaths in custody, investment is focused on improving conditions, performance targets have been introduced in a three-year strategic plan for the Prison Service,[58] and the 'almost bullish'[59] approach to prison policy that characterised the past two decades seems to have yielded to concerns of efficiency and value for money. These developments will undoubtedly result in a great number of changes in the daily work of Irish officers, many of who have occupied their positions for a considerable time. As Irish officers attempt to navigate the 'tension between tradition-based experience and future-oriented organisational development',[60] it is imperative that domestic research begins to robustly examine officers' culture, values and experiences in the

[50] Rogan, *Prison Policy in Ireland* (n.42).
[51] Council of Europe, *Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I* (University of Lausanne 2013).
[52] *ibid*.
[53] Crewe, *The Prisoner Society* (n.18); Crewe, 'Soft Power in Prison' (n.18).
[54] A Liebling, *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A study of values, quality and prison life* (Oxford University Press 2004).
[55] Rogan, 'Prison policy in Ireland, 1922-72' (n.47).
[56] I O'Donnell, 'Stagnation and Change in Irish Penal Policy' (2008) 47 *Howard Journal* 121; Kilcommins, O'Donnell, O'Sullivan & Vaughan, *Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland* (n.41); Rogan, *Prison Policy in Ireland* (n.42).
[57] Liebling, Price & Shefer, *The Prison Officer* (n.10) 95.
[58] Irish Prison Service, *Three-Year Strategic Plan 2012-2015* (Irish Prison Service 2012).
[59] M Rogan, 'Prison policy in times of austerity: Reflections from Ireland' (2013) 207 *Prison Service Journal* 9.
[60] Liebling, Price & Shefer, *The Prison* Officer (n.10) 185.

face of this significant occupational upheaval. Such research would represent a significant contribution to existing scholarship, opening for the first time a window into prison officers' working lives as they transition from the prison system of previous years which was largely focused on coping with expanding numbers and reacting to problems as they arose to one now turning its attention towards the pursuit of efficiency and long-term goals and strategies.