Understanding Rehabilitation Work: Supporting Desistance and Recovery

Dr Hannah Graham
Lecturer in Criminology, University of Stirling.
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Context:
Tasmania, Australia
Research Questions:

1. What are the perspectives, experiences and cultures of practitioners working in the Tasmanian criminal justice field and alcohol and other drugs field?

2. How and why do these things shape rehabilitative processes of working with people with complex needs to support their desistance and recovery?
Research Design

- A six year (part-time) study at the University of Tasmania.
- 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews (13 men, 17 women).
- Interdisciplinary, detailed literature review.
- Secondary data analysis (workforce surveys, reports, policy documents).
- Standpoint of an ‘embedded’ researcher working in the two fields of interest.
The Book

- Rehabilitation: from paradigms (risk, desistance, recovery) to purposes;
- Tools and approaches in rehabilitation work;
- The study: analysis of two fields of rehabilitation work;
- Allies and adversaries: complexity and collaboration;
- Theorising rehabilitation work and the helping professions;
- Changing rehabilitation cultures.
Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Workforce

This study reflected on the findings of the Alcohol, Tobacco & other Drugs Council of Tasmania (ATDC) Workforce Surveys:

• A total of 209 respondents in 2012, and 229 in 2014.

• 23 organisations offering AOD services in the state in 2014.
• Most common types of work positions held in AOD specific services: case manager, social worker, support worker, counsellor.

• Feminisation of AOD workforce: 67% practitioners are women.

• Ageing workforce: 52% of workforce are aged 45 years or older, and a fifth (21%) are aged 55 years or over in 2014.
• Half of the workforce were employed with fixed term contracts, and nearly two thirds (63%) were employed full time.

• In 2010, 75% of practitioners surveyed said they did not intend to stay with their current employer beyond the next five years.

• In 2012, 50% of practitioners surveyed indicated that they planned to leave their current job within two years.
In 2012, 37% of those surveyed cited the need for better pay, and a significant number raised qualitative concerns about insecurity in funding cycles and not being supported or valued as factors which would affect their decision to leave their job and/or the sector.

Issues in the ATDC surveys are evident in this study.
In 2013, the Department of Justice initiated a workforce ‘absence management strategy’ across corrective services.
This study: empirical and theoretical reflections about two local fields involved in doing rehabilitation work.

Why are so many practitioners leaving the alcohol and other drugs field? Why are a disproportionate number of criminal justice practitioners on leave? Why do some practitioners stay and do good work in the same conditions and circumstances?
• When did rehabilitation become a ‘dirty word’? (Ward & Maruna, 2007)
• Do practitioners in these fields feel like they are ‘good people doing dirty work’? (Hughes, 1962; Mawby & Worrall, 2013)
• Technicians? Helping professionals? Identity crises may reflect status anxiety and issues of professional dominance, precaritisation, responsibilisation and punitive professionalisation – i.e. the stratification of their field of work.
Rehabilitation Work in Criminal Justice: Official discourses and what practitioners actually do in practice

- Using the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model of offender assessment and rehabilitation, including the LS/CMI tool in prison and probation.
- Using the Good Lives Model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation and strengths-based case management with some people.
- Pioneering the use of desistance-oriented approaches to sentence management and supporting reintegration;
- Collaborating with therapeutic jurisprudence-style problem-oriented court initiatives (including a drug court overseen by Community Corrections).
‘Initially, things were done to inmates. It was very administrative, they had a ‘you beaut’ tool in the LS/CMI, and they were going to use it according to the model, without very much consideration of the use of self and what the interviewer or practitioner can bring to the exchange… It was very much “Oh so this is a psychometric tool, so if we just ask all of the questions, we’ll get the result.”… It was not a pleasant experience for the interviewer or the inmate… It was so process-driven, so administrative, so done to the inmate. It was this mechanised process, and to some degree it still is, but I feel like we’ve now injected a kind of human quality into it that’s about respect, dignity, inclusion.’ (Senior practitioner)
• Practitioners as allies and helping professionals;

• Practitioners as advocates: risk, rights and resistance;

“We don’t do this work for the money because the money’s shit and we know that. We do it because we’ve got a genuine concern and a genuine interest in assisting complex clients.” (Frontline practitioner)
• **Issues of professionalisation ‘from above’ and responsibilisation:** the ‘dirty work’ of social control and being controlled, having some control over their own labour, but not control in the labour process (Svensson and Akström, 2013; Evetts, 2013).

• **Four forms of rehabilitation/work?** (McNeill, 2012)

“The team are recruited under the Clerical and Admin award, so there is this automatic value placed on them that they are less professional, less important than programmes... Generic is equally as important as specialty” (Senior practitioner)
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<tr>
<th>Organisational Professionalism</th>
<th>Occupational Professionalism</th>
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<td>• Discourse as control used increasingly by managers in work organisations.</td>
<td>• Discourse constructed within professional groups.</td>
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<td>• Rational-legal forms of authority.</td>
<td>• Collegial authority.</td>
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<td>• Standardised procedures.</td>
<td>• Discretion and occupational control of the work.</td>
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<td>• Hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making.</td>
<td>• Practitioner trust by both clients and employers.</td>
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<td>• Managerialism.</td>
<td>• Controls operationalised by practitioners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Accountability and externalised forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review.</td>
<td>• Professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations.</td>
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<td>• Linked to Weberian models of organisation.</td>
<td>• Located in Durkheim’s model of occupations as moral communities.</td>
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Reference: Evetts (2013: 788)
‘Intrapreneurship’: Insider Innovation and Creativity

The criminal justice field offered more examples of practitioners involved in creative work and fruitful cultures of collaboration.

- Innovative initiatives and creative work, and systemic change.
- ‘Job crafting’ – creatively shaping work to pursue better results, to be proud of their work, with a positive knock-on effect for cultures.
Rehabilitation Work: Understanding how practitioners in both fields navigate difficult work and working conditions

Professional resilience, humour, fun and irony:

• Food, banter and camaraderie;
• Fancy dress and spontaneous surprises;
• Irony and developing a ‘black’ or ‘dark’ sense of insider humour;
• Animals in the workplace;
• Going for a walk/group walk, finding good excuses to be outdoors;
• Helping with good causes, e.g., children’s initiatives with parents in prison;
• Conserving hope – for self and others.
Rehabilitation Work in the Two Fields: Key findings

• Current funding and governance structuring of voluntary sector services negatively influence practitioners, cultures, and practices:
  • Short-termism: contractual/tendering and electoral;
  • Workforce conditions/turnover, inequalities, professional dominance;
• Professional and sectoral identity crisis in the AOD field of work.
  • However, practitioners want to ‘be the change’ instead of incessantly being subject to change (ie. ‘top down’ pressure to professionalise).
  • ‘More training’ implies blame of practitioners for workforce issues.
• Criminal justice practitioners want to change the established identity of their field to encompass more rehabilitative notions.
Rehabilitation Work in the Two Fields of Interest: Theorisation of field dynamics and working conditions

- Practitioners draw their sense of professional identity from their occupation and work of being a helping professional, not so much their organisation.

- There is considerable momentum among practitioners to develop a stronger desistance and recovery-orientation in their work. Official and political discourses and the field’s structures affect the extent of this.

- Hybridisation and ‘job crafting’ are common and fairly well accepted. There’s a lot we don’t know about how models and tools are actually used.

- More meaningful acknowledgement and time needed for collaboration.
• This study highlights the pressing need for more ‘pracademia’ and coproduced knowledge involve the expertise of practitioners and policymakers. This entails fostering more ‘working criminology’ and ‘making criminology work’ (theory and practice which interrogate one another to in a local context) to better understand how policies/models are implemented, in what conditions and to what effect (McNeill, 2000).

• Why does this matter? The sacrificial helping friend in Dickens’ novel.
Contact

Dr Hannah Graham
Email: h.m.graham@stir.ac.uk
Twitter: @DrHannahGraham