What is Good Prison Research?

A PhD/Early Career Perspective

10th May 2018
My backgrounds

• PhD Researcher at UWE Bristol
  o Research topic
  o Funding
  o Keen interests in interdisciplinary elements of the project

• I previously worked as a Substance Misuse Commissioner at various local authorities in the South West of England for nearly 10 years. This included a prison remit.

• Prison research is still new to me
  o MSc Public Health
  o PhD – I recently completed the first phase of the research project.
What does good prison research look like?
Good prison research addresses the current sectoral concerns

• Good prison research is grounded in reality:
  – It is situated within the methodology of the research
  – It feeds policymaking processes and vice versa

• The process starts early and is continuous:
  – Planning for the research project
  – Putting together a research proposal
  – Formulating research questions
  – Gaining access to the field
  – Undertaking fieldwork
  – Disseminating the findings
Your research questions articulate some of the issues that we’ve all been skirting around. We know that there have been austerity measures, reductions in budget, and challenges in prison.

Participant 20
I think many of the people who we work with perhaps haven’t even considered the questions that you’re asking in your research. I think it’s kind of that – what’s the question policymakers need answering, what can academics do to help, and what can other supporting entities, like NGOs and international organisations, do to support that?

Participant 9
Good prison research should be relatable

- “Relatable” has many dimensions:
  - Funders (and the interviewer panel)
  - Department and faculty
  - Research participants
  - Members of the public
Working on the cold face of prison, it's a tedious thing, and it's important that we get to the bottom of why things [in prisons] are deteriorating. So this project appealed to me because it attempts to deal with the core problem I think that underlies much of what's been happening over the last eight years.

Participant 12
The impact of what happens in wider society on the criminal justice system and the prison systems [is] a very important issue that’s often neglected...a lot of people tend to view [it] as something completely separate and outside of normal society.

Participant 27
Link: https://www.facebook.com/prisonsunderausterity/
Prisons Under Austerity @prisonausterity · Apr 11
Prisoners at HMP Leicester and Gartree Prisons could be allowed to Skype families if they behave: bit.ly/2H8p0mc #prisons #prisoners #England #Skype #Leicestershire

Matilda @meejamrare · Apr 11
Contact with family should never be a bargaining tool based on behaviour the contact for families matters to

Tracey McMahon @MAFTC · Apr 11
Yes. Good plan, but the threat of 'behaving' spoils the initiative. Poor headlining there. It doesn’t encourage the public to get behind such schemes.

Link: https://twitter.com/prisonausterity
What are the barriers to good prison health research?
Finding and working with research collaborators

• How can we identify which organisations and individuals are interested in collaboration? What’s in it for them?

• Do they represent interdisciplinary variations?

• Do they get along with each other?

• In what ways can the collaborators support the research?

• How can the researchers give back to the institutions?
Thank you for listening!