

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract geometric pattern composed of black lines on a white background. The lines form various shapes, including triangles, squares, and rectangles, some of which are nested or overlapping, creating a sense of depth and complexity. The pattern is most dense in the upper left and lower right corners, with more open space in the center.

*Routledge Frontiers of Criminal Justice*

# **PREVENTING PRISON VIOLENCE**

**AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Edited by  
Armon J. Tamatea, Andrew J. Day,  
and David J. Cooke



# Preventing Prison Violence

*Preventing Prison Violence* introduces the idea of “prison ecologies”—a multi-layered perspective to understanding prison violence as a “product” of human, environment (social and physical), systemic, and societal influences—and how an ecological approach is helpful to prevention efforts.

Interpersonal violence is a global concern and a significant cause of death around the world. In prisons, the human, financial, and health burden of violence presents a significant social issue—as well as a “wicked problem” that does not permit simplistic solutions. Recent innovations in data capture means that questions about violence, gang affiliations, and prisons that could not be answered previously can now be explored. The central theme of this book is that prisons are “ecologies”—spaces where people, resources, and the built environment are interrelated—and that violence is a product of a complex of interpersonal and environmental factors that not only increase the likelihood of assault but also provide opportunities for solutions. Drawing on psychology, geography, indigenous knowledge, gang culture, and predictive modelling, this book expands beyond the conventional individual-focused “assessment–intervention–prevention” approach to research in this field towards a holistic and ecological way of thinking that recognises individual, organisational, and cultural factors, as well as the role of the physical environment itself in the facilitation and prohibition of aggression.

Providing a comprehensive resource for those who are interested in making prisons safer, firmly based on contemporary research and theory, *Preventing Prison Violence* will be of great interest to students and scholars of Penology, Violence, and Forensic Psychology, as well as to professionals working in criminal justice settings.

**Armon J. Tamatea** (Rongowhakāta; Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki), PhD., PGDipPsych (Clin) is a clinical psychologist who served as a clinician and senior research advisor for Ara Poutama Aotearoa/Department of Corrections (New Zealand) before being appointed senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. He has worked extensively in the assessment and treatment of violent and sexual offenders and contributed to the design and implementation of an experimental prison-based violence prevention programme for high-risk offenders diagnosed with psychopathy. His research interests include institutional violence, psychopathy, New Zealand gang communities, and exploring culturally informed approaches to offender management. Armon currently divides his professional time between research, teaching, supervision, and clinical practice in the criminal justice arena.

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**Edited by Armon J. Tamatea,  
Andrew J. Day, and David J. Cooke**

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# Foreword: Wicked Problems, Not Wicked People

*Shadd Maruna<sup>1</sup>*

Violence is endemic in prisons because prisons themselves are a form of violence. The pains of incarceration have been known since well before Sykes (1958) so elegantly outlined them over six decades ago. Moreover, these pains are not a bug in the system but rather are—for many voters, political leaders, and (especially) tabloid newspaper pundits—the whole point of the prison. As Todd Clear (1994) concisely put it, the “penal harm model” remains the dominant and most widely accepted “purpose of punishment” around the globe. Prisons continue to thrive, basically unchanged since Victorian times, despite decades of research showing their ineffectiveness at reducing recidivism, largely because they are outstanding at hurting people (and their families). If we accept the cliché that “hurt people hurt people”, then it becomes clear that the prison is an ecosystem of pain, a cycle of violence, whereby violators become the violated who become violators and on and on in a never-ending circle of retaliation and reprisal. It is that simple.

Then again, as this remarkable collection comprehensively demonstrates, very little about the subject of violence in prison is simple in any way. The authors here describe prison violence as a “wicked” problem—or one that is poorly understood and lacking in agreed-upon solutions. Even how we define and measure violence is a matter of contention and debate, with strongly diverging views from different actors within the complex system of the prison. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, prisons in England and Wales went into “lockdown”, with most prisoners confined to their cells for 23 hours per day for months. One result of this was a dramatic drop in official measures of violence inside the prisons, which had reached a record high in 2019. Cynically, elements within the political class and prison management heralded this as a “silver lining” of the pandemic—prisons had become “safer than ever” (see Maruna, McNaul, & O’Neill, 2022). However, when peer researchers interviewed over 1,400 of the people living in prison during this time of extreme mental and emotional distress, only one in five agreed that the prisons had become less violent and almost none felt safer in the locked-down prison (User Voice, 2022). Who defines what violence is in an environment with power differentials as extreme as the prison? To its credit, this book asks directly, “What do people in prison think about violence?” (Chapter 7), a question remarkably absent from so many previous analyses.

After all, violence is about nothing if it is not about power (and the lack thereof). Recognising this, the chapters in this volume problematise easy narratives about

predatory “gangs” and instead take a gendered approach, a public health lens, and a historical perspective to understanding prison violence (including a history of institutional violence) in its wider socio-political context. Indeed, it is a rare book on prison violence that raises the issue of settler colonialism playing a role as this one does at the outset of Part III. Yet, how could any holistic discussion of violence miss such a blatant utilisation of violence as the invasion and takeover of others’ communities?

Most of all, this book takes an ecological approach to violence with a focus on prison climate, complex systems, and the penal environment. This view frames the problem of prison violence as being “wicked,” but not one of individual “wickedness” on the parts of individual prisoners or staff. This is the central insight of the collection as a coherent work and as a catalyst for future research, in my view. After all, think about examples of prisons that have transformed (and this book strongly endorses a case study methodology for understanding violence, after all). Many of us in this field can think of prisons that have descended from reasonable, ordinary institutions into virtual hellholes of violence and predation. I can also think of at least a few examples of prisons that have transformed the other way, moving from highly dangerous and terrifying places into generally safe and functional (I will avoid “high performing”) environments where education and training can be facilitated to aid self-improvement. In none of these examples, in my own experience, was there any massive change in the *people* inside the prisons. The population of the prisons remained drawn from the same stigmatised groups and communities as ever—indeed, in some cases, the prisoners were exactly the same people if just a few years older.

Moreover, these changes are not the product of individual “risk levels” being miraculously lowered through curing or reforming “violent people”. Even the thought of an anger management or anti-violence intervention as the solution to reducing prison violence seems ludicrous—which is not to say that rehabilitative interventions play no part in violence reduction. They absolutely can and do, but they do so by changing the overall climate of a prison, creating a culture of self-improvement and an ethic of mutual aid. That is, the sorts of changes all of us have seen in prison violence occur at the ecological level, not the individual one.

It is a sad irony, then, that the social science of people-changing (rehabilitation and “treatment”) is so much better established than our social science of institutional change, or what one might call “climate change” inside our institutions and communities. These chapters represent a tremendous advance in that ecological science that I think has the potential to be simply “wicked” for psychologists and criminologists working in the penal sphere.

## Note

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# Terminology

Recent years have seen a move away from the use of language that may be perceived as either stigmatising or labelling those in receipt of criminal justice services. We acknowledge the importance of this and, in this book, have encouraged contributors to use person-first language in relation to justice-involved people.

For more information, please see:

Winder, B., Scott, S., Underwood, M., & Blagden, N. (2021). Recommended Terminology Concerning People with a Criminal Conviction. COPE Practice Brief 01/21. NTU Psychology, Nottingham Trent University.

# Introduction

## Steps to an Ecology of Prisons

*Armon Tamatea, Andrew Day,  
and David J. Cooke*

*Ruku i te pō, ruku i te ao<sup>1</sup>*

Plunge into the dark, emerge into the light

Prisons are like hospitals and schools ... and marriages. They are state-regulated, characterised by a notion of containment, promote growth (if healthy), and involve negotiations of power. It could also be said that each of these exemplars is an institution of *care*. However, prisons differ from hospitals and schools by virtue of being total institutions where security is a primary focus, and the boundaries between the institution and the external environment are less porous. Furthermore, violence is also a feature that is known to play out within these institutions. The consequences of aggression in prison spaces reverberate in the lives of prisoners and staff, their families, and the wider community. Prison violence is, if nothing else, a social issue.

Like other social issues, such as poverty, health, and inequality, prison violence is intractable and marked by a multitude of drivers. Accordingly, an understanding of prison violence requires an approach that recognises the range of factors that can come into play and contribute to intervention planning and preventive thinking. Community development guru, Jim Ife (2013), offers a number of frames for thinking about the nature of complex social issues and the implied responses to address them. For instance, a focus on the *individual* positions the person as the “victim” where individual pathology, psychological, biological, or moral defects become the focus. Therapy (behavioural, medical, moral) then forms the basis of solutions and is a favoured approach to correctional systems worldwide (Beaudry, Yu, Perry, & Fazel, 2021; McGuire, 2018). By widening the lens, another perspective involves examining *institutions* themselves – those services and agencies that have been set up to deal with specific society-level issues (e.g., hospitals, schools, courts, and law enforcement). Paradoxically, these very systems that have been developed to address problems can also inadvertently contribute to them by dis-advantaging parts of the populace due to rigid business rules, under-resourcing, or even access issues for service users. Solutions at this level typically involve reforming institutional policies, practices, or even the foundational philosophy to

facilitate improved resources, training, and service delivery. A third approach is to address the *system* itself – to target those spaces where structural disadvantage or oppression occurs and responds to the basis of that oppression. The efforts of abolitionist groups and social justice organisations would apply here as attempts to tackle harm in our prisons and promote alternative institutions or interventions. A fourth way is to challenge the *discourse*, or the language we use, to tackle the way in which knowledge is formed and accumulated and how understandings are shared. The solution at this level is to analyse and understand discourse, access understandings and challenge the “rules” that govern our perceptions. For instance, terms such as “inmate”, “prisoner”, and “people in our care” each carry connotations that are shaped by historical and political baggage, imply moral worth, and facilitate cultural meaning.

### Defining “Violence”

Although more fully discussed elsewhere (see Polaschek & Daffern, this volume), our starting point for a definition of “violence” might be informed by the World Health Organisation, where violence is the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002, p. 5). This description recognises that violence is more than physical behaviour and has a number of negative outcomes that can reflect direct injury as well as include subtle, long-range abuse.

Once defined, the next task is to develop an understanding of the nature of the problem of prison violence – and not all problems are created equally. From here, the challenge is to uncover the factors, forces, and influences that will help to control, reduce, and prevent future violence. Much empirical research has identified a number of factors that relate to the incidence and prevalence of violent behaviours in prison (see Tamatea, this volume). However, these drivers are many and varied and don’t all apply to every situation or context. Indeed, prisons are dynamic spaces that reflect instability because of the ever-changing flow of humanity who move through these institutions – not to speak of the complex mental health, criminogenic, rehabilitative, social, and cultural needs that each person presents with. In this sense, single-factor and linear ways of studying and addressing violence can be inadequate if the problem is not sufficiently conceptualised.

In considering a different understanding of the problem of violence in prisons, a number of broad issues need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the *spectrum* of behaviours that would qualify as violent ranges from contact behaviour, such as assaults, fights, and sexual assault, to non-contact behaviour, such as threats and abuse. Secondly, the *scale* of violence may range from a single person who sends a threatening letter or damages their cell to a large number of participants in a riot. And thirdly, the contributing factors that facilitate prevailing conditions for violence will, to some extent, reflect histories (e.g., unit reputation), restrictions (e.g., whānau/family visits), provision of needs (e.g., living conditions, access to

culture), and social dynamics (e.g., tensions in the yard) that can be located in the person's *setting*. Variations across each of these dimensions (this is not an exhaustive list) can inform how violence is perceived, the level of priority, and the actions required. Whilst routinisation of procedures is common when managing challenging situations as they arise, not all elements that contribute to violence are readily apparent at the moment (e.g., external causes like problems, gang tensions in the community, or a relationship break-up) or can be hidden from assessment (e.g., a botched contraband drop), so comparisons between incidents are not easily made nor are go-to manualised solutions always appropriate.

Rittel and Webber's (1973) typology of "tame" and "wicked" problems provides a convenient scheme to categorise disruptions to order and whether or not they are considered to be reasonably solvable under current knowledge and practices. Put another way, the distinction between these classes of problems could be seen as a matter of certainty and uncertainty (see Table 0.1). *Tame* problems are not necessarily simple but can be resolved through routinised actions due to the likelihood of the situation having occurred before (i.e., limited uncertainty). In a sense, tame problems are like puzzles for which there is always a (usually elegant) answer. Wherever standard operating procedures have been found to be effective suggests the presence of a tame problem. In these cases, the task is to deploy an appropriate process to solve the problem. *Critical* problems, by contrast, require immediate action, not least because of the high stakes involved if a resolution is slow in coming (or not at all). Time for decision-making and action is minimal and swift actions that solve the problem are the priority. In prisons, fire-setting

Table 0.1 Typology of Problems and Implied Solutions

<i>Problem type</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Broad example</i>	<i>Prison example</i>	<i>Nature of solution</i>
<i>Tame</i>	Known causes and processes, predictable, routine, time to manage	Fixing a broken leg	Contraband detected on-site	Operational (rational), organise processes
<i>Critical</i>	Self-evident, short term, decisive action needed, minimal time for analysis	IT systems outage	Fire, structural damage	Tactical (coercive), provide answers
<i>Wicked</i>	Complex, messy, multiple causes, can't be <i>entirely</i> solved	Climate change, poverty, gender/ racial inequality	Violence, rioting	Strategic/experiment, ask questions

and structural damage, not to mention associated issues, such as the risk of burns and asphyxiation by smoke, present hazards that need to be managed quickly and decisively.

*Wicked* problems, however, are complex. They cannot be disentangled from their environment, nor can they be solved without impacting their environment. There is no clearly discernible relationship between cause and effect. Consequently, such problems are “troublesome”. For instance, trying to “fix” poverty on the basis of a scientific approach (on the assumption that it was a tame problem) might lead to solutions such as providing everyone with all services and resources they require based only on economic indicators and existing financial expertise. However, intertwined issues such as education, health, and crime would exert a demand for an increasing need to intervene to facilitate economically autonomous lifestyles but decreasing resources to fund it. There cannot be a tame solution to address wicked problems. The tension between finite resources against infinite demand is what characterises the inherently contested arenas where wicked problems are encountered.

Many of the problems that are seen in prisons – overcrowding, funding gaps, staff retention, mental health of staff and prisoners, contraband, and drug abuse – obscure deeply complex social problems that have relevance for government departments, institutions, and communities (all of which may have competing interests), so attempts to treat them through a single institutional framework are unlikely to be successful. Further, wicked problems often have no completion point (e.g., “there will be no more violence in prisons because we have solved it”), so it is not hard to see why they evade being solvable. The pressure for prison management to act decisively (e.g., during a riot) implies efforts to try to solve the problem as if it was a tame problem.

In the early 1990s, a Ministerial Inquiry reported on systematic violence towards prisoners at Mangaroa Prison (Logan, 1993; see also Tamatea & Wilson, this volume). The report attributed the use of excessive and inappropriate force applied by some of the staff against prisoners to a lack of preparation for the commissioning of the then-new prison, deficiencies in recruitment, induction, training, procedures, and supervision. The report recommendations emphasised practice alignment with the revised objectives of the Prison Service, constant vigilance and intolerance to violence by prison management, and installing reliable systems for monitoring behaviour and demonstrably fair procedures for managing complaints. Essentially, the recommendations conceptualised the problem at the level of the organisation, so management practices, organisation, and systems, as well as human resourcing issues, were the primary focus of the Inquiry. Accordingly, the solutions were aimed at the level of the organisation, such as emphasising ideological alignment with the then-new penal reforms and implementation of procedures (a tame response). Arguably, important elements that were not in the frame of the Inquiry included individual (e.g., distress), social (e.g., a gang-informed perspective), or even spatial (i.e., design features that allowed the use of isolation to separate prisoners from assistance) dimensions. However, each of the proposed solutions (i.e., training, staff support, implementation of new systems, and shifting professional

cultural values) was largely procedural, required time, and needed to be achievable within available budgets.

A point to consider here is that the conceptualisation of the problem(s) impacts and limits the conceptualisation of the solution(s). Problem conceptualisation is important because misdiagnosis of a situation can result in mismanagement. That being said, there is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem, but whatever conceptualisation one has of the problem (e.g., “violence”) will inform points of entry with which to address the issue – and conversely obscure others. Simplistic formulations (i.e., “violence is caused by difficult prisoners” or “violence is caused by punitive staff members”) emphasise simplistic solutions (e.g., deprivation of privileges for prisoners, staff discipline), none of which would address the drivers for violence at other levels of the system. In this sense, thinking about problems *ecologically* gives permission to accept and even embrace complexity as an inherent part of the problem.

### **Thinking about Prisons as Ecosystems**

An ecological perspective offers valuable insights into the study of prisons by emphasising the interconnectedness between the prison system and its broader social and environmental contexts. This perspective acknowledges that prisons do not exist in isolation but are shaped by and have an impact on the political, economic, cultural, and physical contexts in which they are situated. Identifying and understanding these complex interrelationships can help researchers, policymakers, prison authorities, and prison staff to develop more comprehensive and effective approaches to addressing the problems and challenges associated with the prison system, such as violence. Indeed, an ecological perspective can assist with understanding violence in prisons by examining the multiple levels of influence that contribute to violent behaviour among and towards prisoners and custodial staff.

The principle of interconnectedness recognises that wicked problems can be considered to be a symptom of *another* problem. For instance, violence towards staff by prisoners in a given unit may reflect frustrations felt by prisoners who are subjected to over-long cell time; the extensive locking down may have occurred due to safety concerns indicative of low staff numbers and absenteeism in the wider institution; the absenteeism, in turn, may reflect inadequate rostering practices that do not account for staff burnout and need for convalescence between shifts, not to mention community commitments and religious practices of other staff; a consequence being that remaining staff work longer shifts with increasingly surly and aggressive prisoners, which makes the workplace less safe and more stressful. As such, sick leave increases amongst this number – further adding to the problem of absenteeism, etc. Interconnectedness can help understand why an intended solution can pose additional problems. For example, a blanket response (e.g., prolonged lockdown and removal of recreational resources) may control disruptive and dangerous behaviour in the short term but also reduce the general quality of life in the longer term, not to mention punishing those who were not involved in the offending incident.

Thinking about prisons in an ecological sense recognises that violence in these sites is not solely the result of individual factors, such as personality disorder, emotional dysregulation, or other psychological traits, but is also shaped by social, cultural, political, and environmental factors. For example, an ecological perspective may consider how the physical design and layout of a prison, as well as the quality of the living conditions and access to resources, can impact the likelihood of violent behaviour (See Wener, 2012). Additionally, this perspective may examine how broader social and cultural factors, such as the normalisation of violence within the prison subculture or the influence of gang affiliations, can contribute to social climates that facilitate aggression. By taking a comprehensive, multi-level approach (e.g., Johnstone & Cooke, 2008; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020), an ecological perspective can help identify the root causes of violence in prisons and inform the development of more effective interventions to prevent or reduce it.

Drawing this all together, we will illustrate violence in a “prison ecology” with a popcorn metaphor (Folger & Starlicki, 1998) where the pan represents the institution itself, the oil denotes organisational policies and institutional procedures, the heat applied to the pan reflects pressures (external), and stressors (internal) as they apply to staff and prisoners and the kernels symbolise the staff and prisoners themselves. For anyone who has made popcorn in this way will know that the kernels do not “pop” simultaneously – some pop early, others later, and some not at all – so the time it takes to “pop” can reflect individual resiliency as well as susceptibility to stress or situational factors that contribute to aggression. In this way, violence is seen as a “product” of an interaction of elements rather than the sole preserve of prisoners, staff, or even the prison itself. It also recognises that drivers of prison violence are many and varied.

### **The Present Volume**

The present volume reflects the combined efforts of a research team who have undertaken a multi-year funded project to understand and reduce violence in New Zealand prisons.<sup>2</sup> The authors reflect an international team with research and applied experience and expertise in prisons and criminal justice systems across a number of jurisdictions, such as Australia, Canada, Barbados, Scotland, England, and, of course, Aotearoa-New Zealand.

This book was conceived at a time when Ara Poutama – the New Zealand Department of Corrections – was undergoing seismic change in the form of its current national strategy: *Hōkai Rangi*. This strategy signalled a change from a risk-centric view of persons defined by their assessed level of dangerousness and those factors presumed to impact that risk. The current view is informed from a health and cultural perspective that recognises the positive qualities of people in prison – so formerly silent issues such as growth, healing, and family (whānau) integrity are now foregrounded and usher in new ways of practising and engaging people. In other words, prisons are more closely construed to being positioned as institutions of *care* (even describing persons formerly known as “prisoners” to be recognised as people in their “care”). This change in language, perception, and – perhaps – culture is a long way from the earlier view that deemed the effects of

imprisonment as merely a behavioural and psychological “deep-freeze” (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 152) where the outside behaviour of prisoners is stored until their release.

The core message of the present volume is that narrow, single-variable explanations will offer incomplete accounts of institutional violence. Simplistic problematising leads to simplistic solutions to manage difficult behaviour. The ecological view emphasised in this volume recognises, first and foremost, that prisons are *complex* – prisons are places of physical, emotional, lateral, structural, and cultural violence. Each of these kinds of violence reflects the varying challenges and demands that exist – often in high intensity – in prison spaces. To understand prison violence, conceptualising the problem appropriately and adequately, beyond single suspect variables, provides opportunities to consider a wider spectrum of drivers that contribute to violence and disorder. Secondly, prisons operate like other *ecosystems*. In this sense, an all-encompassing, albeit permeable, environment that shapes – and is shaped by – ongoing transactions between those spaces as well as those who work and reside within them. An understanding of prison violence means confronting complexity. Complexity reflects the real world on its own terms.

## Notes

- 1 This whakataukī (proverb) is from Rongowhākāta Iwi, whose traditional land is the Gisborne area on the East Coast of New Zealand. The allusions to light and shadow reflect dynamic tensions – disorder and adaptation, conflict and reconciliation, separation and reconnection – that are resonant with our research journey of which the present volume is a part.
- 2 The authors wish to acknowledge the generous support from Ara Poutama Aotearoa and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) without whom this work and the wider project of which it is a part would not have been possible.

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**Part I**

**Key Knowledge**



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# 1 Understanding Prison Violence

## An Ecological Perspective

*Armon Tamatea*

Prisoner violence was considered the past-time of the 1970s. Back then some of the screws and governors encouraged it. They thought it was akin to a bloody good football match. It kept the prison population busy and gave them something to think about.

(Mark “Chopper” Read, *From the Inside*, 1991)

Interpersonal violence is a global concern and has even been considered a leading cause of death around the world (Mitis & Sethi, 2015). However, not all cases of violence result in death or even present to the hospital, so many instances go largely unreported. In prison contexts, where the State is responsible for the care and wellbeing of incarcerated men, many of whom will have histories of, and an ongoing capacity for, physical aggression means that the manpower, financial, and health burden of violence becomes a salient issue for correctional agencies (Steiner, 2009).

Violence permeates every level of our environment and society, from effects on the individual and family to violence in neighbourhoods, communities, and the broader culture. The environment in which violence occurs shapes the impact of—and response to—such violence. The ability to mobilise resources, support victims, address social norms, and recognise the role of prevention and early intervention varies across contexts and places. On the one hand, the presence of protective factors (e.g., resilience) can facilitate less damaging impact and faster recovery. On the other, settings that are already fragile from struggle are likely to see more devastating effects of violence and become trapped in repeated cycles of violence. However, the broad range of potential influences on violence exposure and perpetration can be difficult to organise and assess. One way of capturing the complex array of violent acts and interactive effects is with an ecological model that illustrates the influences that occur at different levels of an individual’s environment.

Violent behaviour in prison settings is influenced as much by structural determinants (institutional, environmental, political, economic, and social) as it is by individual factors (biological, psychological, and physical). As De Viggiani (2007) notes, prison violence may therefore be better understood with greater insight into how people respond to the experience of *imprisonment*—the psychological pressures of incarceration, the social world of prison, being dislocated from society,

and the impact of the institution itself with its regime, as well as architecture and location. As spaces designed to administer judicial consequences in a contained environment, prisons are also agencies of disempowerment and deprivation and epitomise the antithesis of a healthy setting for prisoners and present a toxic workspace for staff.

Traditionally, explaining prison violence has been largely prisoner-focused and involved strong pathologising connotations. This is still evident from the extent to which prison violence research continues to focus primarily on prisoner characteristics and psychiatric morbidity within the prison population (Abbiati et al., 2019; Krebs et al., 2020). Such studies are valuable in highlighting the prevalence and severity of violence in prisons and confirm that prisoners perpetuate—and experience—generally greater levels of physical aggression and violence than the general population. However, the problematisation of prison violence in this way has resulted in a heavy focus on criminogenic programmes and prison health services to respond primarily to immediate, short-term, and decontextualised problems rather than longer-term and, arguably, more sustainable and effective systemic safety and wellness priorities. This is particularly evident from the management of drug abuse, suicide/self-harm, etc., where energy has been directed at containment and treatment rather than prevention (De Viggiani, 2007). Statistical research is undeniably important in terms of tracking and monitoring the state of prison safety with regard to interpersonal violence, yet the heavy emphasis on criminogenic and psychiatric morbidity reinforces and legitimises a reductionist, pathological approach to prisoner behaviour, research, and practice, while the broader cultural, health, and social needs of prisoners remain obscured. However, some exceptions to this trend include qualitative studies that have explored the behaviour, experiences, and needs of prisoners and custodial staff (Kelman et al., 2022; Rocheleau, 2015) and shown that prisoners have extensive and diverse cultural and social needs that prisons are rarely able to address (Awenat et al., 2018). Given that much prison violence research has resulted in the emergence of a one-sided picture, it may be more appropriate then, in seeking to explain why violence occurs in prisons, to explore factors, conditions, or determinants beyond the individual that prevail within prisons and facilitate violence; the former raising the issue of a suitable *theory* of prison violence and the latter addressing risk assessment and *management*. This chapter provides a brief overview of theories of prison violence and presents an ecological perspective as a logical next step in understanding this troubling behaviour.

### **Perspectives on Prison Violence**

Since the mid-twentieth century, three perspectives have emerged to explain and organise research on prisoner misconduct. The most conspicuous difference has been the attribution or source of factors that are considered to most highly contribute to violence in carceral settings. These models, in turn, apportion the causal factors for violence within the *deprived* conditions of the institution itself (Sykes, 1958), the *imported* behaviours of prisoners themselves (Irwin & Cressey, 1962), or specific properties of *situations* where violence occurs (Endler & Magnusson,

1976). As these perspectives are dealt with more fully elsewhere in this volume, they will only be briefly addressed here.

### ***The Deprivation Perspective***

It has been widely recognised that the experience of imprisonment is characterised as physically hazardous and emotionally harmful, not least because it deprives individuals of basic human rights and needs, brings people into contact with social harm and exposure to a violent subculture, all of which serves to disempower and institutionalise those individuals who reside there (Clemmer, 1958; Cohen, 1979; Foucault, 1975/1977; Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). Sim (1990) has argued that prison is effectively a “double punishment” as it not only deprives the prisoners of their liberty but also causes them significant psychological and physical distress. The deprivation perspective addresses the possibility that certain aspects of the prison environment itself may foster misconduct. Due to the confined and dispossessed nature of prison life, prisoners may act out in order to fulfil their various social, emotional, and materialistic needs, or as Sykes (1958) put it, “the system of rewards and punishments in the prison is defective because the reward side of the picture has been largely stripped away” (p. 51). This perspective is based on two key assumptions: (1) that imprisonment is synonymous with deprivation and (2) that prison deprivations have significant physical, psychological, emotional, and social repercussions for individuals. Sykes (1958) argued that imprisonment deprives individuals of particular rights and possessions, which include liberty, goods, and services, heterosexual relationships, security, and autonomy. These “deprivations” facilitate pain and hardship to prisoners and threaten their sense of personal worth, self-esteem, and identity.

Clemmer (1958) coined the term “prisonisation” to describe how individuals became increasingly regimented and habitual in their conduct and subscribed to a fixed system of values that were reinforced by the inflexible regime. Individuals would become so immersed in the life of the prison that they would begin to adopt “in greater or less degree ... the folkways, mores, customs and general culture of the penitentiary [and become] more deeply criminal [and] antisocial” (p. 299). Sykes (1958) referred to these “alienative modes” as “survival strategies” in the sense that they enabled individuals to assimilate with and fit into the prison community. But it is unlikely that such responses brought positive benefits for prisoners, given that they effectively reinforced a social hierarchy based on exploitation and victimisation. The social order could thus bring significant negative health repercussions for prisoners. Linked to the notion of prisonisation is the argument that prison social life is organised around a normative “prison code”. A considerable literature has debated the significance of the notion of a code that is presumed to shape the norms, mores, customs, and behaviour of the prison community (Bronson, 2006; Cloward, 1960; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Jacobs, 1977; Mears et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2017; Trammell, 2009), or as Wieder (1974) has argued, provides a reference point against which individuals identify in terms of explaining or articulating their personal conduct and place within the prison social environment. Commonly, the

code is described as a normative value system to which some prisoners subscribe and which is evident in their attitudes and behaviours, which include violence.

Conversely, in response to the monolithic conceptualisation of the deprivation perspective, positive social relations can and often do exist among prisoners, which can bring benefits such as positive outcomes with regard to health, mental health, and social connection. Prisons also vary enormously in terms of security category, ethos, and architecture—and even locality (with accompanying variations in cultural practices and socio-political attitudes) (see Cooke, this volume)—and their populations are often highly varied, heterogeneous, and transient, which means it may be erroneous to conceptualise prison life in terms of prison cultures or subgroups. In this regard, some critics (Hughes & Huby, 2000; Morris & Morris, 1963) have argued that the deprivation perspective is overly simplistic, given the diversity, high mobility, and transient nature of prison populations. Furthermore, the effects of other predictors have proven to be less consistent in supporting deprivation theories (e.g., higher security level facilities, and sentence length). Prior imprisonment and earlier institutional infringements appear to be the best indicators for a person's likelihood of committing a disciplinary infraction—not their current offence (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Gover, Pérez, & Jennings, 2008)—suggesting that acculturation and exposure to prison life are important predictors of disciplinary infractions in the existing literature. However, although the previously mentioned characteristics are shown to be important indicators of disciplinary infractions, they do not account for all variations in institutional misconduct (Tewksbury, Connor, & Denney, 2014). For instance, factors associated with deprivation may be *situational* and institution-specific, such as an institutional change to a policy and/or privilege, which can have subsequent aggressive/violent reactions from prisoners (McCorkle et al., 1995).

### *The Importation Perspective*

The importation perspective, by contrast, concerns the view that prisoner communities exhibit and share the cultural norms and values of their communities of origin (Ditchfield, 1990). This view holds that misconduct occurs due to individual characteristics that inmates possess prior to their incarceration, such as subculture ideologies, lifelong economic deprivation, and race-specific experiences/discrimination (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Schrag, 1961; Thomas, 1977). In other words, prisoners “import” into the prison environment the values, attitudes, beliefs, and social norms from their respective communities in the free world. This view recognises that modern prisons are not completely closed systems or “total institutions” (*a la* Goffman, 1961) but instead possess permeable boundaries and transient populations that reflect moral and cultural elements of the wider community. Prisoners' aptitudes, resilience, and backgrounds, therefore, contribute to their ability to cope (or not) with, and survive the experiences of, imprisonment. For instance, if a person has an existing drug problem or personality disorder, their ability to maintain a hassle-free existence in prison may be compromised due to addiction issues (e.g., withdrawals) or an escalating pattern of dysfunctional interactions with others (e.g., narcissism).

However, the evidence is sporadic in places. Strong predictors of institutional misconduct and violence that have been found to support importation theory include criminal history (i.e., those with a history of violent offences are more likely to engage in disciplinary infractions; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006), age (i.e., younger prisoners are more likely to receive disciplinary infractions. As prisoners become older, they are less likely to commit disciplinary infractions; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006), and gang affiliation (Drury & DeLisi, 2011; see Tamatea & Henry, this volume). Marital status has been revealed to have a negative reaction to violence perpetration (Jiang & Winfree, 2006), whereas education level has revealed a mixed relationship (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2006; Wright, 1989), as does race/ethnicity (e.g., Finn, 1995; Steiner & Woolredge, 2008). This latter issue may reflect actual or potential biases in custodial staff (Tewksbury, Connor & Denney, 2014).

### *The Situational Perspective*

The situational perspective of prison misconduct focuses on the dynamic factors of prison life that may be present during any given misconduct incident. Situational explanations of misconduct suggest that the specific context in which an event occurs may be more important than individual prisoner characteristics or environmental factors alone. In this sense, this view recognises that the sources of a violent incident are not necessarily exclusive to deprivation or importation factors and that situational opportunities can explain some of the variances. Also, certain areas of prisons can facilitate violent misconduct more than others. Incidents occur most often in places of unstructured congregations, such as work and recreation areas (Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Steinke, 1991; See also Wener, 2012 and Wortley, 2004). Further, Steinke (1991) uncovered a relationship between ambient temperature and violent misconduct, with incidents more likely to occur during times of high temperatures. Situational factors such as these may create environments favourable to aggression, resulting in violent misconduct. So, supervision, surveillance, and physical design become key factors in addressing violence.

In summary, these perspectives draw attention to the evidence that indicates factors intrinsic and extrinsic to prison play an important role in the incidence of violence and the safety of prisoners. The deprivation view holds environmental determinism assumptions where the environment is more or less fixed and “dictates” how people adapt. It is noted that “deprivation”, however defined, is rarely absolute, and the perceived severity may depend to some extent on a range of other factors, such as sentence length, overcrowding, and the presence of meaningful activities. Furthermore, environments invariably change, and individual difference variables show that people can live differently in the same environment. Conversely, the importation view holds culture (e.g., “inmate code”) itself is a determining factor, and the environment is a constraint. An ecological perspective is an alternative to importation, deprivation, and situational perspectives by encouraging exploring beyond simple correlations in time and/or space by focusing on *connection*. Table 1.1 reflects the core differences between these perspectives.

Table 1.1 Summary of Perspectives of Institutional Misconduct

<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Deprivation</i>	<i>Importation</i>	<i>Situational</i>	<i>Ecological</i>
<i>Attributed to</i>	Sykes (1958)	Irwin and Cressey (1962)	Endler and Magnusson (1976)	
<i>Metaphor</i>	Bad barrels and barrel-makers	Bad apples	Bad luck	Bad ecosystem
<i>Central idea (i.e., violence is about...)</i>	Coping with confinement	Continuity of criminal code	Controlling crises	Complex contexts
<i>Object of blame</i>	The prison	The prisoner	The predicament	Plural factors (The milieu)
<i>Theoretical focus</i>	Conditions (impact)	Characteristics (influence)	Circumstances (incident)	Connections (interrelationships)
<i>Risk factors</i>	Conditions of confinement (“pains of imprisonment”) (e.g., overcrowding and aggression)	Individual characteristics that predate confinement (e.g., demographics and community)	Happenstance (i.e., accident, coincidence, and flashpoint)	Relationships between combinations of factors—no single source/attribution
	Prison environment	Criminal history	Timing	
	Prisonisation	Prison culture (“inmate code”)	Location (e.g., cell and yard)	
<i>Mechanism promoting violence</i>	Norm of prisoners adapting to harsh environment	Pre-prison values and behaviours influencing behaviour in prison	Situational aspects of an event (when, where, with whom, etc.)	Risks inherent in strategic relations between people, groups and systems, as well as constraints imposed by the environment
<i>Assumed function of violence</i>	Meet needs through redress of resentment due to impaired status (demasculinisation, boredom, anxiety)	Reinforcement of existing pro-criminal beliefs, status, code, and redress transgressions	Rectify crisis (e.g., neutralise threat, and resolve antagonism)	Reconstruct order at individual, social, environmental, systemic, and/or societal levels of the ecosystem
<i>Hypothesised principles of change</i>	Consciousness-raising and correction	Counter-conditioning and cognition	Contingency management and culture	Co-ordination and connectedness
<i>Interventions</i>	Direct supervision, use of non-institutional (“normal”) environments	Behaviour management (Isolation, punitive regimes)	Supervision, surveillance, design	Multilevel interventions that involve targeting the linkages between environment, families, staff, prisoners, etc. and violence/wellbeing

Each perspective is assumed to represent a different form of influence over prisoner behaviour that can be said to increase the likelihood of institutional misconduct. Such a view can be seen as reductionistic (Lee, 2019). As Wooldredge (2003) explains, each of the three perspectives must be considered together to explicate the reciprocal relationship between them. For instance, the impact of IQ score on prison misconduct might be seen to operate within the importation and deprivation perspectives (Diamond, Morris & Barnes, 2012).

### **Towards an Ecological View of Prison Violence**

Ecological perspectives have made substantial progress in the field of health and wellbeing since the 1970s and 1980s. Proponents such as Stokols (1996) and Grzywacz and Fuqua (2000) argue that multidisciplinary and multilevel interventions are most effective for facilitating lasting improvements in health. An ecological view is an alternative way of understanding the structure and function of individuals' relationship with their environment (social, physical, political, cultural, etc.) over time. In contrast to the deprivation, importation, and situational perspectives, ecological models are sensitive to contextual factors in the environment and diverse social structures that operate from within (e.g., gangs) and outside (e.g., family) of the boundaries of the institution.

An ecological perspective of human behaviour was developed by Roger Barker (1968) and Herbert Wright (e.g., Barker & Wright, 1955), but the most popular conceptualisation in social psychology has arguably emerged from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979), who developed an ecological framework to examine child development in the context of relational, social, and cultural systems within which they are situated. In essence, this view examines human development from three aspects: (1) an individual's perspective of the environment; (2) the environment surrounding that individual; and (3) the dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment. Development, then, is defined as an ongoing change in the way a person perceives and deals with or adapts to the environment (Reifsnider, Gallagher, & Forgione, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualised human ecology as consisting of a set of nested relational zones. These structures represent the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Table 1.2 provides an overview of systemic levels as delineated by ecological theory and the corresponding constructs of interest to prisons.

In brief, the *microsystem* is defined as the complex of relationships between the person (i.e., prisoner) and other people in the immediate setting. Within the microsystem, proximal relationships may be seen as a primary force driving development (Arditti, 2005). In this case, family, gang connections, and relationship with custodial staff would be factors of interest. *Mesosystems* involve interrelations between contexts that contain the individual. In other words, a mesosystem is a "system of microsystems". The links between the contexts that contain the individual that are unique to prison (e.g., visiting areas, the gym, rehabilitation programmes) are important to consider.

Table 1.2 Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979; 1986) Human Ecological Model and Implications for Prison Violence

<i>Ecological level</i>	<i>Refers to ...</i>	<i>Everyday example</i>	<i>Implication for prisons</i>
<i>Individual</i>	The developing person	Demographic, biological, and intrapsychic attributes and qualities	Individual variables (e.g., personality, criminal history—typical <i>importation</i> variables)
<i>Microsystem</i>	Institutions and groups that most immediately impact the individual's development and functioning	Family, school, church, social circles/peers	Family, gang affiliations, custodial staff
<i>Mesosystem</i> <i>Exosystem</i>	Interconnections between <i>microsystems</i> Links between social settings that do not directly involve the individual	Peers/family; family/school; family/church Parent's experiences at work impacting on a child's experience at home (e.g., increased travel demands = tension and conflict at home + reduced presence of a role model)	Gang↔Family↔Police, gym, visits Family hardship (incl. access and utilisation of services)
<i>Macrosystem</i>	The predominant culture that influences the individual and the micro and mesosystems that are embedded within the culture. In other words, <i>context</i> .	Identity and heritage such as conservative/liberal social attitudes towards gender roles, ethnic minorities, etc.	Stigma about imprisonment and violence→shame on family Conditional tolerance about some forms of violence (e.g., snitches, authority, and botched drug drop)
<i>Chronosystem</i>	Pattern of environmental events and transitions over time (incl. sociohistorical circumstances)	Increase in dual-income families→changes in traditional family attitudes and patterns	History of violence→incarceration →single-parent family→poverty

An *exosystem* is an extension of the mesosystem in that it comprises other contexts and community factors that influence the prisoner. However, these settings do not necessarily contain the individual. This systemic level is particularly important in considering the implications of imprisonment for family members, spouses, and children who are left behind (Snell-Johns, Mendez, & Smith, 2004). For instance, a person in prison may also mean a parent who is no longer present in their family's daily lives and one less adult to help build and maintain a stable economic base in the household, which may have cascading difficulties for the family, such as accessing services. Exosystemic issues of interest include how imprisonment impinges upon, delimits, and even determines proximal microsystem processes in the home (Arditti, 2005).

The *macrosystem* refers to contextual patterns of systems (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem) that exist at the level of the culture or subculture as a whole. These contextual patterns are underpinned by belief systems, ideology, and language (Reifsnider, Gallagher, & Forgione, 2005). Such macrosystemic influence is of special importance in considering the impact of incarceration on families as it determines how children and their caretakers are treated and interact in different types of settings.

Lastly, the *chronosystem* adds a temporal dimension to the ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Here, the influence of relevant risk and protective factors found at each level can be tracked over the course of an individual's life.

Ecological theories conceptualise human development and behaviour in relation to context and the interdependent nature of multiple levels or systems of organisation. Bronfenbrenner (1977) described this approach to understanding development as the scientific study of dynamic interrelationships between the changing person and the changing environmental contexts within which a person lives. From this perspective, biological, psychological, and social contextual levels are combined and constitute the process of developmental change. Interdependence is of great significance with respect to incarceration because it points to multiple connections between contextual levels, such as the overlap between poverty and the creation of single-parent households via incarceration—that is, incarceration can be conceptualised as both an outcome of poverty and as a contributor to financial adversity (Watts & Nightingale, 1996). Thus, an ecological framework provides interpretive power in terms of contextualising violence in relation to the experience of imprisonment and highlighting the interrelatedness of social problems such as crime and poverty.

An ecological perspective (1) embraces deprivation/importation/situational theories of prison violence by recognising that forces that contribute to violence can come from a multiplicity of sources—not just the person (importation), the institution (deprivation), or a historic moment (situational); (2) accepts a holistic view that sees people and environments as interconnected totalities. This means that the universe is not seen as fixed, that people and the relationships between people and their environment are dynamic and are subject to change due to a range of factors that aren't always easily measured (impact of legislation, individual maturation, culture); and (3) recognises that identified risk factors for violence are indicative

of strategic relations that form (i) between people and (ii) with their environment as a means of organising existence. In this way, an ecological perspective is about contributing to and constructing a more complete and coherent account of prison violence by bringing together the environment, person, culture, and the wider context and considering new meanings about violence.

Adapting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework as an organising scheme for prison contexts, Table 1.3 summarises the individual and contextual factors and considers violence as the product of multiple levels of influence. An appreciation of the landscape of relevant variables can assist in identifying and understanding the relationship and roles these factors contribute to prison violence but also identify points of entry to develop programmes of change at the level of prevention, intervention, or postvention. An ecological framework also encourages a wider perspective of elements at the level of persons themselves (individual), social and cultural aspects (e.g., actual or perceived—microsystems), spatial elements, and physical features of a given site—the “silent” features (mesosystem), the role of aligned institutions (e.g., courts, police, and correctional agencies—exosystem), and the factors (norms, mores, tolerances, prohibitions) that contribute to violence in the general population (i.e., why people act violently in general? What are the wider societal values and attitudes that support violent behaviour?—macrosystem).

### **Utility of the Ecological Perspective**

An ecological perspective emphasises the multifaceted nature of violence and maintains that violence is a complex outcome of intersecting risk factors across the human lifespan, and no single factor can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk for violence than others (Lee, 2019). This model contrasts with reductionist views that approach violence, disease, or any other phenomenon that claims that its ultimate source is one basic cause. An ecological perspective offers several benefits to prison violence management and research:

- An ecological perspective attempts to bring together applied and basic research traditions to provide a single conceptual framework for understanding human behaviour. Because of the epistemic preference given to basic research over applied research in psychology more broadly—and prison violence research in particular—environmental, community, and applied social psychologies have been unfairly marginalised in psychological science and criminal justice research. The topics covered by these subjects are highly relevant to how individuals function in real-world prison settings.
- An ecological approach draws prison staff and management's attention to the violent consequences of phenomena that transcend different contexts (i.e., beyond the individual prisoner). This suggests that policies and practices that address resource barriers and points of stress across a range of ecological zones can attenuate tensions, increase coping, and promote reductions in violence. In this way, ecological approaches facilitate the design of targeted and multilevel violence reduction strategies, as well as circumvent barriers to resources and

Table 1.3 Summary of Contributions to Violence in the Prison Ecology: Prisoner-Involved Violence

<i>Ecological level/zone</i>	<i>Predisposing risk</i>	<i>Situational risk</i>	<i>Prevention, intervention, postvention</i>
<i>Macro: societal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antisocial parenting (i) intergenerational continuity of exposure to risk factors (poverty, neighbourhood, etc.), (ii) assortative mating (antisocial partner selection), (iii) intrafamilial influence, (iv) inconsistent discipline, poor parental supervision, (v) genetic mechanisms, (vi) labelling &gt; police bias against “criminal families”</li> <li>• Child-rearing (i) parental aggression (including harsh/punitive discipline), (ii) parental conflict</li> <li>• Child abuse (incl. shaking) and neglect</li> <li>• Broken families</li> <li>• Young mothers</li> <li>• Large families</li> <li>• Neighbourhood influences</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status</li> <li>• Maori over-representation in family violence statistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Alcohol intoxication</li> <li>• Substance abuse</li> <li>• Drug distribution</li> <li>• Weapon access</li> <li>• Provocation (i) aggression as discharge of emotions (ii) escalation of minor incidents</li> <li>• Motivation (i) hedonistic (excitement), (ii) utilitarian (planning, intimidation, weapons), (iii) communal (fights alone or with others), (iv) masculinity (demonstrate toughness)</li> <li>• Gang: Macro-aggression (i.e., gang initiates violence to benefit the gang itself)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused deterrence</li> <li>• Cognitive behavioural therapy: clinical psychological techniques to alter the distorted thinking and behaviour of criminal and juvenile offenders</li> <li>• Hot spots policing</li> <li>• Alcohol tax and licensing laws</li> <li>• Disorder (broken windows) policing</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

<i>Ecological level/zone</i>	<i>Predisposing risk</i>	<i>Situational risk</i>	<i>Prevention, intervention, postvention</i>
<i>Exo: institutional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colonisation &gt; breakdown of traditional Maori social structures &gt; patriarchal culture introduced &gt; changes in (i) gender role-norms (i.e., women as subservient), (ii) family structure (from whanau to nuclear), (iii) separation from hapu/iwi as base of support</li> <li>• Stricter prisons in starker environments</li> <li>• Continuity from juvenile justice to adult corrections (incl. possible Police targeting)</li> <li>• Prison officer training, de-escalation, hostage, riot, control, and restrain, use of segregation</li> <li>• Job stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative control not well organised</li> <li>• Procedural justice (fairness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing and communicating a system of rules that appears legitimate and justifiable to prisoners, and is enacted consistently and fairly with cohesion between officer staff and senior managers</li> <li>• Stability</li> <li>• High level of staff skills</li> <li>• Therapeutic communities</li> <li>• Violence prevention programmes targeting specific criminogenic needs</li> <li>• Risk-Need-Responsivity framework</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

<i>Ecological level/zone</i>	<i>Predisposing risk</i>	<i>Situational risk</i>	<i>Prevention, intervention, postvention</i>
<i>Meso: social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher security level</li> <li>• Little or no supervision (instrumental violence)</li> <li>• Highly supervised (explosive violence)</li> <li>• Poor prison management (i.e., coercive)</li> <li>• Staffing levels, staff training, attitudes, culture, and climate; gender of staff, workplace support and employee assistance, use of sick leave</li> <li>• Psychological and social work services and chaplaincy</li> <li>• Peer support and mentoring programme</li> <li>• Cultural programmes</li> <li>• Complaints procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer work assignments, structured routines, or levels of programme participation</li> <li>• Inconsistency in rank/discipline relationship</li> <li>• Prisoner experiences of higher levels of hardship</li> <li>• Deprivation of resources</li> <li>• Gang: Meso-aggression (i.e., gang clique violence)</li> <li>• Staff decisions seen as unfair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remunerative controls (employment)</li> <li>• Staff build positive and collaborative relationships with as many prisoners as possible</li> <li>• Prisoners involved in major decisions</li> <li>• Effective and supportive prison management</li> <li>• Focused deterrence</li> <li>• Indigenous-specific programmes (<i>NB: no hi-qual evidence</i>)</li> <li>• Safety and maintenance of therapeutic environment</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

<i>Ecological level/zone</i>	<i>Predisposing risk</i>	<i>Situational risk</i>	<i>Prevention, intervention, postvention</i>
<i>Meso: spatial</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time of day/day of the week (reduced activities)</li> <li>• Location (low presence of security?)</li> <li>• Crowding (NS, but compare with “density”) &gt; increased tension, stress, and likelihood of aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• Privacy and lack of control of privacy</li> <li>• Noise (i.e., intermittent, unpredictable and uncontrollable) &gt; stress, frustration, anxiety</li> <li>• Too little light/darkness &gt; impact circadian rhythms &gt; impair quality of sleep &gt; behaviour problems (also staff shifts can be affected by this)</li> <li>• Physically poor conditions</li> <li>• Separation of co-defendants</li> <li>• Availability of psychiatric and health services</li> <li>• Suicide policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low environmental controls</li> <li>• Spaces hidden from supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better physical conditions of the prison</li> <li>• Nature views (biophilic design)</li> <li>• Care in architectural design, modifications and refurbishments to improve acoustic, light, colour and other environmental features</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1.3 (Continued)

<i>Ecological level/zone</i>	<i>Predisposing risk</i>	<i>Situational risk</i>	<i>Prevention, intervention, postvention</i>
<i>Micro: social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolation (imposed) &gt; social deprivation &gt; removal from (i) normal mechanisms of coping with harshness of prison life and (ii) social contacts (a human need) “rhythms of life” and social interaction &gt; rumination, uncertainty, anxiety, and paranoia</li> <li>• Gang affiliations</li> <li>• Family visits, phones, access to cultural and spiritual resources</li> <li>• Peer influences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High proportion of prohibited groups (gangs, Security Threat Groups [STGs])</li> <li>• Visits (period after)</li> <li>• Higher level of control imposed on “chronic gang members”</li> <li>• Younger population</li> <li>• Competition for resources</li> <li>• Territoriality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits (period before)</li> <li>• Staff awareness of the concerns influencing prisoners’ everyday behaviour</li> <li>• Heterogeneous age mix</li> <li>• Positive/therapeutic social climate</li> <li>• Trust (staff/prisoner, prisoner/prisoner)</li> </ul>
<i>Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger age</li> <li>• Pre-existing record of violence in prison</li> <li>• Gang membership</li> <li>• Previous conviction for a violent offence</li> <li>• Racial/ethnic grouping</li> <li>• Shorter sentence length</li> <li>• Served less time</li> <li>• History of drug offences or abuse</li> <li>• Versatile offending history</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling threatened and unsafe</li> <li>• Mistreated by staff</li> <li>• Wrongfully accused or punished</li> <li>• Perceiving treatment as unjust</li> <li>• Perceiving that rules were under-enforced or that officers had less legitimacy</li> <li>• Requiring higher levels of security</li> <li>• Standing over others—perceive the prison as lax in control</li> <li>• Access to weapons</li> <li>• Acting macho</li> <li>• Stress/fatigue &gt; Irritability, frustration, aggressiveness, poor problem-solving</li> <li>• Isolation/withdrawn</li> <li>• Gang tension (violation of face/status)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement in purposeful activity (workshops, education classes, rehabilitation programmes)</li> <li>• Enhanced quality of life</li> <li>• Increased sense of autonomy</li> </ul>

Sources: Abt and Winship (2016); Auty, Cope and Leibling (2017); Dobbs and Eruera (2014); Farrington (2012); Gadon, Johnstone, and Cooke (2006); McGuire (2018); Perdacher, Kavanagh, and Sheffield (2019); Wener (2012).

opportunities to reduce violence by recognising the leverage points across different domains (e.g., increase in range of meaningful activities for prisoners and streamlined approvals for family visits).

- An ecological approach allows for explanations and predictions regarding people's adaptations to specific contexts. For example, the presence of gang members may contribute to problems with violence and its management in one unit but also help maintain order in another. So, in addition to seeking higher-level answers to questions about the relationship between gangs and violence, further hypotheses about whether affiliation to a gang offers an advantage in one type of unit rather than in another.
- In a broad way, an ecological approach encourages prison authorities, policy-makers, and researchers to be theoretically daring and macro-minded (Oishi & Graham, 2010). This perspective challenges the focus on methodological rigour with variables that could be easily manipulated rather than on the variables of real-world relevance.
- An ecological perspective provides an explanatory function for cultural factors. Although not all cultural differences could be reduced to any single social structural factor, by examining concrete, measurable socioecological factors, researchers will be able to distinguish the unique role of culture (practices, symbols, meanings, and ideas) from the role of the social ecology in the phenomenon under study. It is important to investigate the ways in which socioecological factors give rise to or evoke particular patterns of cultural ideas, images, practices, and representations and how those cultural factors may, in turn, affect socioecological factors (e.g., how cultural differences may lead to different rates of violence amongst different subgroups in prison). An ecological perspective helps bridge cultural values and historical prevalence rates (e.g., ecological moderators of gang affiliation differences in violent misconduct).

### **The Ecological Perspective: Some Caveats**

While the ecological perspective has conceptual promise to develop a wider and more complete understanding of violence in prisons, Lee (2019) argues that such an approach asserts that the only way to understand violence fully is to consider the parts in relation to the whole, and how the different levels of risk or protective factors interact with one another within the whole. Another issue of ecological models is that they can depict only a limited number of variables and dimensions, such that underlying, dynamic processes are not simultaneously visible (e.g., time). It is important to consider that, like other ecosystems, the perspective is fluid and suggestive of additional layers and factors rather than a definitive statement of reality. Lastly, the ecological perspective does not provide a parsimonious set of explanations that can be used to predict and change behaviour (Grzywacz & Fuqua, 2000). Given the multi-disciplinarian nature of working ecologically, the various data forms (e.g., official records, prisoner interviews,

and questionnaires) will not reconcile easily, and so theoretical integration becomes a central concern.

However, consistent with Graham-Bermann and Gross's (2008) view about adopting an ecological perspective in family harm studies that, despite the difficulties in measuring the presence of the broadest cultural risk factors, such as the acceptance of an atmosphere of violence, this is the kind of research challenge that needs attention if we are to continue exploring why some prison settings are more susceptible to—and severely affected by—violence than others. Studies that take a wide range of factors and relationships into account can shift the focus from the individual person as pathological to situating them in a complex network of contributing factors. This information can also be used to conceptualise the prison as a particular ecological niche with certain contextualised features of risk—and even protection.

### Summary

The ecological perspective promotes the exploration of relationships between the individual and contextual factors and considers violence as the *product* of multiple levels of influence. Overall, the ecological perspective provides researchers and prison administrators with more robust conceptual principles with which they can investigate violence, its drivers, and consequences at multiple levels. It is argued here that the focus on multiple levels of influence results in a more complete and comprehensive understanding of human behaviour, which can be adapted to account for the varied, intertwined, and transactional forces that shape the lives of individuals who either are responsible for or have been exposed to violence and maltreatment in prison settings.

### Key Learning Points

- An ecological approach allows for explanations and predictions regarding people's adaptations to specific contexts that are not limited to simplistic conceptualisations of the problem as it exists in a given setting.
- An ecological perspective attempts to bring together applied and basic research traditions to provide a single conceptual framework for understanding human behaviour.
- An ecological approach facilitates the design of targeted and multilevel violence reduction strategies as well as circumvents barriers to resources and opportunities to reduce violence by recognising leverage points across different domains.

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## 2 Prison Violence

### Definition and Measurement

*Devon L. L. Polaschek and Michael Daffern*

#### **Defining Violence**

It has been argued that, at least in Western democracies, we live in the least violent age in our history (Pinker, 2011), and societal tolerance of violence is correspondingly lower than previously. But are these trends reflected in our prisons? Or is violence in prisons still viewed as acceptable, endemic, and inevitable? To address these questions requires an understanding of the nature and prevalence of violence in prison, which depends on measurement, which in turn requires us to define violence in prison.

Before we consider definitions of prison violence, we first review how violence is defined more generally, and determine the fit of these definitions to prison contexts. There are many definitions of violence; Howells and colleagues (2008) suggested there are over 200. The definitions vary depending on their context; we give three examples here. First, a legal approach defines violence using exemplars that mainly emphasise the *form* of violence (Hamby, 2017). Accordingly, violence is defined, for example, as various types of physical and sexual assault, homicide, robbery and so on. In most cases, legally defined forms of violence also require evidence of intent to harm. Legal definitions are used in legal and criminal justice processes, and they are important to the study of prison violence because they are commonly used to measure violence in official records, and to sanction violence in prison. Using legal definitions of violence appears straightforward because violent crimes are typically documented in legislation that may be decades old. But the bases for the categories in legislation and their associated penalties are not necessarily clear; what it is that results in the inclusion vs the exclusion of particular violent crimes from the legislature. What do specific categories of violent crime (e.g., “minor violence”) have in common that is not shared by crimes outside the category? Legally defined violence includes offences of different purported severity, but without explicitly indicating how the ordering of severity (e.g., in terms of penalties) is determined. Is it related to victim harm? If so, what is harmed? And if a pattern of behaviour is not illegal, in this way of thinking, does that mean it is not violence, and, therefore, should not be measured?

A contrasting approach to the definition comes from a public health perspective (Hamby, 2017). For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual,

against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 5). This is a widely inclusive definition, encompassing, for example, specific victim harms alongside harms to entire communities. In contrast to legal definitions, it looks at the effects on recipients of violence more than the specific details of the acts themselves. Accordingly, neglect and other acts of omission can be labelled as violent (Hamby, 2017). Explicit reference to power dynamics also brings threats and intimidation into the definition, although some of these forms of violence are legally defined as well. A strength of the WHO definition in contrast to legal definitions is that it implicitly promotes a systemic or ecological analysis of violence: consistent with the broader aims of this book (see Tamatea, this volume and Day et al., this volume). In a public health approach, violence is not simply the product of the actions of mentally ill or antisocial individuals toward other individuals but may include self-harm, or even the intentional neglect of organisations or businesses toward people in their care. Nevertheless, public health definitions are fuzzy and potentially overinclusive.

A third type of definition comes from psychology and related disciplines, where violence is defined as a subtype of the broader series of behaviours—many of which are not illegal—collectively referred to as aggression. In social psychology, for instance, aggression is defined as “behavior intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed” (DeWall et al., 2011, p. 246). Violence is then defined as aggression that is intended to produce extreme physical harm (e.g., serious injury; De Wall et al., 2011). Importantly, this definition restricts the scope of violence by excluding harm that is sought or at least tolerated by the victim (e.g., sexual masochism and dental procedures) and by requiring intent to harm. By contrast, some risk assessment instruments used routinely in psychology practice use definitions that do not require such intent. For example, in the Historical Clinical and Risk Management-20 (HCR-20), said to be the most frequently used violence risk assessment tool (Douglas et al., 2013), we find that the definition of violence is “actual, attempted, or threatened infliction of bodily harm of another person” (HCR<sup>V3</sup>: Douglas et al., 2013, p. 36). Because this definition includes verbal and psychological harm but requires no intent to harm, it has been described as “so broad ... as to be meaningless”, at least in some forensic contexts (Silva, 2020, p. 270). Nevertheless, despite being accused of being too broad, it is also too narrow: focusing on overt individual actions and ignoring acts of neglect and mistreatment perpetrated by individuals and systems that are considered within a broader public health approach. This brief review already highlights to the reader that the type of definition adopted significantly affects the scope of what is considered violent.

## **Defining Prison Violence**

### *Definitions and Examples of Violence Using a Legal Approach*

When people think of prison violence, they most often think of physical and sexual assaults perpetrated by prisoners on other prisoners or staff (Bennett, 2007). This view is consistent with legal definitions of violence, which are used to officially

record violent incidents. These records underpin much of the research on violence in prisons. Official records of violence in prison are designed to provide a formal record of prisoner behaviour for enquiries, adjudications and punishments, and to assist authorities to decide whether prisoners are suitable for release on parole. Research using archival incident forms to understand violence is therefore narrow in scope: inadvertently or intentionally reinforcing the idea that prison violence is limited to these particular acts. Often management and prevention efforts then focus on individual prisoners as the source of such behaviour.

For example, Wooldredge and Steiner (2014) conducted research on official records from several US state-level correctional jurisdictions using each jurisdiction's definitions of violence to understand the extent of prisoner violence. At the time of their research, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction defined violent offences as (1) causing, or attempting to cause, the death of another; (2) causing, or attempting to cause, serious physical harm to another; (3) causing, or attempting to cause, physical harm to another; and (4) causing, or attempting to cause, physical harm to another using a weapon. The definitions by Kentucky Department of Correction are slightly different, but again focus on individual acts of (mostly) physical aggression: (1) physical action or force against another inmate if no injury has occurred, (2) physical action against another inmate, (3) physical action resulting in injury to another inmate, and (4) physical action resulting in the death or serious injury of another inmate.

Prison-based legal definitions also usually include rioting, encouraging rioting in others, taking hostages, and committing sexual assaults as serious forms of prison violence. Specification of rioting as an act of violence highlights how definitions of violence may need to be adapted to consider the peculiarities of the prison context. Prison riots are probably the form of prison violence that captures the most community attention. One example of a legal definition of a prison riot comes from the US Washington State Legislature: "Whenever two or more inmates of a correctional institution assemble for any purpose, and act in such a manner as to disturb the good order of the institution and contrary to the commands of the officers of the institution, by the use of force or violence, or the threat thereof, and whether acting in concert or not, they shall be guilty of prison riot" (Washington State Legislature, n.d.). As is quickly evident, the definition of a riot in prison is distinctive because of the nature of prisons as a closed system where prisoners and staff work and live together. Legal definitions don't really capture the complex and sometimes sustained nature of prison riots, which may include a range of violent offences, along with a variety of other important actions, such as non-violent forms of protest. This complex context of riots in prison makes them better suited to a public health definition.

As they do more generally, legal definitions of prison violence neglect indirect actions that have harmful effects. Prisons can be intimidating environments, and neglect, exclusion and a variety of otherwise apparently subtle actions that carry the threat of serious harm may have serious psychological consequences but may escape legal definitions. But in prison, official forms of prison violence can include a variety of more minor types of violence that are not captured in

community legislation, including verbal aggression and insulting language. For instance, New Zealand Corrections recognises “behaves in an offensive, threatening, abusive, or intimidating manner” as an offence against discipline for prisoners, which may therefore result in misconduct charges. Similarly, in the UK, “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behavior” (Liebling, 2011, p. 58) are grounds for misconduct and punishment. Other legally defined forms of violence may be almost uniquely associated with the possibilities for harm afforded by a prison environment since they are rarely reported in the community. For example, colloquially known as “dashing” in US prisons, or “swilling” or “potting” in UK prisons, is the practice of assaulting prison staff or other prisoners with urine or faeces (Lahm, 2016).

Some correctional services also capture information about misconduct by staff associated with the physical abuse of prisoners; for example, the US Bureau of Prisons (Office of Internal Affairs, 2017) recognises: life threatening injury, serious injury, minor/slight injury, minor/no injury (harassment), and superficial injury (injuries associated with the normal use of restraints), though again, these focus on direct physical and verbal acts of aggression.

### ***Definitions and Examples of Violence Aligned with a Public Health Approach***

By using a public health approach, we can define violence by focusing on the physical and especially the psychological impacts of actions on recipients rather than being limited to a narrow range of legally defined perpetrator acts. In many ways, a public health approach offers better potential for capturing the breadth of violence in a prison context. When a person is sent to prison, the state effectively takes control over almost every aspect of their lives, including their health and safety, limits their ability to support themselves and their family financially, their access to social support and so on, in a context that is explicitly coercive (Crewe, 2009). So, in contrast to a legal approach, a public health approach opens the door to defining violence and measuring harms that may be inflicted by the state and its agents in the process of imprisonment.

Merely being imprisoned can be associated with myriad negative health outcomes (Weidner & Schultz, 2019); prisoners’ identities and mental health can be harmed by capricious, verbally abusive, and degrading treatment by staff (Liebling, 2011b). Failure to protect prisoners from harm inflicted by other prisoners, keeping prisoners in involuntary administrative segregation for long periods, providing inadequate food or clothing, and delaying the provision of medical care or medication may all be viewed as violence through a public health lens (Morgan et al., 2019). Scholars have argued that prisons are ubiquitously harmful (Wolff, 2018), creating both interpersonal harm—psychological, physical, and economic harm resulting from the actions of other prisoners or staff—and welfare harm: defined by Wolfe (2018, p. 4) as “the loss in well-being caused by confinement conditions, processes, or practices that deprive or threaten to deprive confined people of a stable, physically and psychologically safe, and humane living environment”. Broadening the definition of violence brings these potentially harmful actions to light, supports investigation of their impacts and, hopefully, leads to change in prison policies and practices.

## **Measuring Prison Violence**

Reliable, replicable measurement of violence in prisons has been difficult to achieve but is a necessary step in seeking to understand variation in the prevalence of violence in prisons (Steiner, 2016), in determining the extent of the problem, and as a foundation for intervention. Defining should be the precursor to measuring any phenomenon, but the difficulties associated with obtaining data in prisons can lead to a reliance on information collected for other purposes (e.g., official records), which in turn forces the adoption of the definitions associated with those purposes. This next section explores different measurement methods and the results of indicative studies employing each method.

### *Using Information Recorded for Disciplinary Purposes*

Most studies of prison violence rely on officially recorded data: usually, databases of incidents or adjudicated violations (i.e., misconducts) covering prisoner-to-staff assaults (Lahm, 2009; Sorensen et al., 2011), violence between prisoners (Sorensen & Cunningham, 2010; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020), and sexual violence between prisoners (Morash et al., 2010). For researchers, the advantages of using official records include the availability of very large datasets at a relatively low cost, and the capacity to align these data with various other officially recorded variables to develop prediction models.

As with any officially recorded field data, though, there are also important limitations. These include variable rates of detection by or disclosure to staff. Prisoners may not report victimisation to staff if they believe there will be no meaningful result or in fear of reprisal from other prisoners or staff (Gear, 2007), affecting in often unknown ways the number and type of incidents that are recorded. In a UK study, only 10% of those prisoners who were victimised by threats, assault or theft reported the behaviour to staff (Edgar et al., 2002). Further attrition occurs as a result of staff discretion about recording, but even after the events are recorded by prison staff, there can be significant attrition. For example, one New Zealand prison inspectorate report noted that a lack of available prosecutors led to 60% of the misconducts generated in a 12-month period being withdrawn and another 10% being cancelled (Office of the Inspectorate, 2021).

Studies using official sources rarely include non-physical violence. Even though these data may be available, acts of verbal aggression may be studied much less often because a recording is more discretionary than physical violence. Verbal aggression may also be normalised, making recording even more dependent on the context and orientation of both prisoners and staff to such infringements (Liebling et al., 2011). There is also a well-established tension between staff accurately recording and sanctioning minor infringements by prisoners and their perceptions that staff are “over-policing”. Effective prison officers recognise that selective underenforcement of more minor infringements can be beneficial to the overall prison climate (Liebling, 2011a).

In the community, sexual assault is often imagined to be a common form of victimisation in prison, especially in the US (Edgar et al., 2002). Although prisoner

surveys suggest that contact sexual assaults are not that common (e.g., Warren & Jackson, 2012), prevalence is probably even less well represented through official incident forms than for verbal or physical assault because of the stigma and feelings of shame associated with disclosure (Wolff, 2018).

Differences in official definitions across systems and changes in reporting methods make comparisons difficult. For example, changes in the effort required for staff to complete a report—changes in software, for instance, or the amount of information to be recorded—may lead to spurious differences in recording that do not actually reflect changes in the underlying phenomenon (Bennett, 2007; see also Briggs et al., 2003).

Few studies focus on violence perpetrated by correctional officers, and official records are likely only to reveal certain types of violence perpetrated by staff. If one embraces a broader public health definition of violence, then the harms caused by routine prison procedures and acts of neglect (e.g., failing to protect vulnerable prisoners from assaults by other prisoners, see the chapter on Staff) will not show up in the official records except perhaps in prisoners' reports of grievances. Prison staff violence may also be under-measured and under-researched because enquiry undermines perceptions of the professionalisation of prison staff. Prison management and staff may also see neglect and psychological harms, in particular, as a legitimate exercise of the prison's functioning, and excessive use of physical force by staff also may be normalised (Edgar et al., 2002; Novisky & Peralta, 2020; Rembert & Henderson, 2014) and even glorified (Crewe, 2009; Toch, 1992). Finally, the legal implications associated with staff violence also make official disciplinary records for these forms of violence relatively inaccessible. Some organisations routinely report publicly on prison employee investigations into excessive use of force (e.g., the US Federal Bureau of Prisons<sup>3</sup>). But other correctional agencies may settle such cases privately through a pay-out that includes a confidentiality requirement to protect the defendant (Harding, 2007).

### ***Using Information Gathered by Auditing, Reporting and Inspectorate Functions***

Official information routinely reported in audits, annual reports, and through inspectorate and ombudsman functions—depending on jurisdiction—can inform about violence but is less often used in research. Some of the most informative reports are compiled in response to sentinel events or some form of crisis. Routine reports such as those done by internal prison inspectorates also provide a window to prison violence. But for the most part, they are not directly suited to large-scale research on violence.

### ***Surveys***

Surveys are an important complement to official records of incidents and misconduct in determining the prevalence of violence. Victimisation surveys are the most common method for prison violence studies (Arbach-Lucioni et al., 2012; Kuo

et al., 2014; Wolff et al., 2009). Perpetration surveys also have been conducted (Bosma et al., 2020; Edgar et al., 2002), and sometimes both types of information are collected in the same study (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). Most surveys simply establish whether a prisoner has been victimised or not (or committed a violent act or not) in the time since they came into prison on the current sentence, regardless of sentence duration. Few victimisation studies have distinguished between perpetrators as prisoners or staff (but see Wolff et al., 2007).

Self-reported data usually yield higher rates of victimisation and perpetration than official records but also have limitations. Only some of those eligible to respond voluntarily completed surveys, and it may be difficult to evaluate whether those who did were representative of the wider population. Self-report also suffers from recall biases, and forms of violence that are normalised may not even be recognised as violence by the respondent. Furthermore, the wording of surveys is associated with variations in the reporting rates (Wolff, 2018). For instance, Wolff et al. (2009) found that a general question about whether prisoners had been physically assaulted yielded half the prevalence rate of more specific questions about forms of violent acts (e.g., slapped, hit, and kicked). This pattern was seen regardless of whether the perpetrator was another prisoner or a staff member. Whether wording affects the rates of reported perpetration is unclear, but it is likely that it does.

### ***Comparisons of Self-Report and Official Records***

Some studies have compared self-reports of victimisation or violent misconduct with official records: no easy task when events are unlikely to be recorded in the same way across the sources. A review of this research found that only about 10–20% of assaults reported by other means were captured in official prison records (Byrne & Hummer, 2007a). The gap between the two methods may be due to various factors. In one study in Nebraska, the discrepancy between self-report and official reports of fighting was significantly smaller in the women's prison than in three men's prisons. Women were more open than male prisoners about reporting violent behaviour and less concerned with the consequences of "snitching" than men, and less effort was made to conceal fights, so they were detected by staff more often (Trammell et al., 2012). Steiner and Wooldredge (2014) compared self-report and official records of misconduct with an emphasis on prison environmental factors. Of 46 facilities surveyed, for more than half, there was "no meaningful difference" (p. 1088) between the number of assaults that were officially reported and self-reported by prisoners. They found significant relationships between self-reported and officially reported assaults in facilities with linear designs and cells (rather than dormitories), "close security or higher" facilities, larger populations, prisons that were designed to be larger, and higher ratios of prisoners to design capacity (i.e., more crowding).

What little research has compared self-report and officially recorded incidents of prisoner verbal abuse suggests a gap between the two sources that is similar

in size or larger than that for physical violence. Bosma et al. (2020) found that self-report rates were about six times higher than the very low rates of officially recorded verbal misconduct. They suggested that staff tolerance, and difficulties in identifying abusive communication relative to norms for that environment were even greater determinants of reporting than for physical abuse. Verbal abuse is often seen as routine and may be used in apparent humour (Edgar et al. 2002). But equally, words can be abusive, harmful and provoking solely through what they imply, particularly if targeted at a known weakness of the victim. As Clemmer (1940; cited in Edgar et al., 2002) noted, talking about another prisoner's mother, girlfriend or any female family member could, and still can, be seen as a significant affront by another prisoner. Hate speech also falls into this category. For that reason, Edgar et al. obtained a more complete picture of abusive language by asking prisoners about experiences of "hurtful verbal abuse" as distinct from "threats of violence" (2002, p. 30).

### ***Psychometric Questionnaire and Rating Scale Measures***

Alongside bespoke surveys for specific studies, existing surveys and questionnaires have sometimes been used to measure perpetration and victimisation in prison (Auty et al., 2017), particularly for ubiquitous types of violence such as bullying (e.g., the Direct and Indirect Prisoner Behaviour Checklist; DIPC; Ireland, 1998 cited in Ireland, 2002); these capture forms of coercion and psychological violence that do not fit under headings such as "verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse" and which are rarely recorded in incident forms. Formal psychometric questionnaires might be completed by prisoners (e.g., Aggression Questionnaire [AQ]; Buss & Warren, 2000), though Auty et al. (2017) suggested these measures were of limited value unless violence subscales embedded within them were reported separately. Observational rating scales have rarely been used. Evershed et al. (2003) used an observational measure of frequency and seriousness, though, in a high-security hospital, and calculated counts of verbal and physical aggression based on case notes for high-security prisoners in treatment for violence have also been used (Tew et al., 2012). However, this method still relied on what staff recorded; unsurprisingly, "live" observational methods have not been reported in this field, although staff body-worn cameras may provide a future avenue for observational studies.

### ***Measurement Considerations in a Public Health Approach***

Although most of the forms of violence measured using these methods above fit a legal definition, they would also form part of measurement guided by a public health definition, albeit perhaps a small part. A public health approach creates greater complexities in both the definition and measurement of violence. But better recognising that prisons are complex and relatively closed systems promotes the measurement of violence not just as acts committed by prisoners and staff but also by the state, prison management, or the staff in particular units. So, for example, counting incidents where force was used may reveal not just a "difficult group of prisoners" but also a staff that would rather use force—even if on paper it is

legitimate to do so— than less aggressive techniques for interacting with frustrated prisoners. It may show the overuse of mechanical restraints or punishment cells, or a lack of procedural justice in basic processes. And it may promote an understanding of violence as the antithesis of wellbeing, leading to a wide range of new ways of measuring “not violence”, such as climate surveys. Auditing tools such as PRISM (Cooke, 2019) are consistent with a public health approach, and are, therefore, much more useful in identifying and improving violent environments than approaches based solely on legal definitions. The empirical measurement of baseline conditions and changes in these harms requires rethinking what to measure, and how to measure it: a challenging task. Making a related point, Liebling (2011b) suggested that because prisons deprive people of their freedom, and it is, therefore, difficult to imagine that they won’t cause harm, we have made a lot of assumptions about what the “pains of imprisonment” are (i.e., what is harmful), and we have therefore been slow to investigate the pains that prisoners actually experience; “What it is to feel treated inhumanely is difficult to conceptualize, and to compare internationally, but there are strong signs that the task is not out of reach, particularly if ‘grounded’ approaches are used in the development of empirical measures” (Liebling, 2011b, p. 546).

## **Conclusion**

We have considered several approaches to defining prison violence, but in practice, we have noted that violence is most often defined using existing legal or penal codes and is most often measured using the official records that result from staff recording prisoners’ infractions of those codes. In other words, there are significant holes in the comprehensive measurement of prison violence. If the purpose of defining and measuring prison violence is to create a healthier environment for those who work and live in prison, then public health approaches offer more promising definitions and more complete methods of measurement. A legal approach to prisoner (and staff) violence is important for myriad reasons, including the need to hold individuals accountable for violent actions. But it can narrow the focus of inquiry into solutions and interventions. It facilitates simplistic notions embodied in importation theories—that violence in prison is largely a result of concentrating together those who are prone to violence—and directs the focus mainly toward prisoners as the “problem”.

A public health lens can be used to shed light on the complex interactions between correctional staff, with (a) their own imported characteristics, orientation to their role, and wide powers of discretion, in interaction with (b) an equally complex collection of prisoners with diverse needs, in (c) physical environments that also vary widely in their safety and suitability, and (d) limited or guided by policies and leadership that may exacerbate or mitigate the potential for violence. In a public health view, although going to prison can be understood as harm in and of itself, correctional environments that add unnecessarily to—or do nothing to mitigate—these harms can themselves be defined as violent (Hamby, 2017). Punishment is a key principle of sentencing practices around the world; a public

health approach ultimately leads us to fundamental questions about what society means when it claims that people are sent to prison as a punishment rather than for punishment. Violence in prisons makes prisons places of fear and harm for prisoners and staff alike. Although providing constructive, engaging activities is itself an important preventive activity with regard to prison violence (Byrne & Hummer, 2007b), identifying and measuring systemic violence as well as individual acts of violence may be an important step in creating and enhancing prison regimes that habilitate more than they harm.

### Key Learning Points

- The type of definition adopted significantly affects the scope of what is considered violent.
- Reliable, replicable measurement of violence in prisons has been difficult to achieve but is a necessary step in seeking to understand variations in the prevalence of violence in prisons and determining the extent of the problem. This is a necessary foundation for intervention.
- Most studies of prison violence rely on officially recorded data, but useful information can be elicited from audits, surveys, and the use of psychometric tools and rating scales.
- Public health approaches offer promising definitions and more complete methods of measurement and can shed light on the complex interactions between correctional staff, people in prison, and the physical and administrative environments in which they live and work.

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### Notes

1. We recognise that a prisoner's violent behaviour can be dealt with within the structures for processing misconducts in prison, but at the more severe end may be handed over to law enforcement authorities and routine processing through the courts, a practice that is likely to differ across jurisdictions (Auty et al., 2017).
2. See Steiner, B., and Wooldredge, J. (2020) for examples of legal cases where staff have intentionally incited violence between prisoners or failed to protect prisoners who were obviously vulnerable to being victimised when made accessible to certain other prisoners.
3. See <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/type/investigation>

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### 3 **Toward a Gendered Ecological Approach for Understanding Prison Violence**

*Annette Perry and Randolph C. Grace*

Prison violence is a significant problem. Prisons are complex systems where individuals with diverse psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds, including many with antisocial tendencies and criminal histories of violence, live and interact according to both formal and informal rules of behaviour (Bosma et al., 2020; Caldwell, 1956; Paterline & Orr, 2016). While confined in close proximity and with limited freedoms, it is not surprising that violence can become an inherent part of prison life (Abbiati et al., 2019, Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). The recognition that prisons are complex systems underscores the importance of adopting an ecological approach towards understanding prison violence. That is, an approach that examines both individual and situational variables, and how they interact in the prison environment. In this chapter, we propose that it is also essential to consider gender and related issues as part of that ecology, and the gendered determinants of prison violence, using an ecological framework. Because there is limited research on transgender and gender-diverse prisoners and prison violence, our review is limited to studies which have reported samples of males and females, and we do not consider issues that transgender and gender-diverse prisoners face in prison further (for recent reviews, see Bromdal et al., 2019, Van Hout et al., 2020).

In New Zealand, committing violence in prison is an offence and a form of institutional misconduct under the Corrections Act 2004 (Department of Corrections, n.d.). Misconduct can indicate poor adaptation to prison, and many overseas studies have used misconduct as a measure of prisoner maladjustment (Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002) and, consequently, the risk posed to the social order of the prison (Dilulio, 1987; Flanagan, 1980). Higher rates of misconduct, especially violent misconduct, threaten the security of the prison, and the safety of correctional staff, and prisoners (Steiner et al., 2014). Thus, understanding why prison violence occurs is an important research goal, and necessary for developing effective interventions that promote the safety of both prisoners and correctional staff (Steiner, 2018). Few studies have explored prison violence in the New Zealand context, let alone the role of gender, despite a significant increase in the number of incarcerated women (Warren et al., 2004).

Much of the previous research on prison misconduct has focused on general misconduct, with some studies incorporating violence and others not. Many studies

have used gender-neutral risk assessment tools to measure individual risk factors in predominantly male prisoners, including: age, gender, ethnicity, education level, marital status, criminal history, sentence length, gang affiliation, and mental illness (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Driscoll, 1952; Flanagan, 1983; Huebner, 2003; Kuanliang & Sorenson, 2008; McGuire, 2018; Reidy et al., 2017; Toch & Adams, 1986). However, research suggests that the occurrence of prison violence is related to a complex interaction of individual and situational factors (Abbiati et al., 2019; Klepfisz et al., 2016), some of which are gendered.

Clemmer (1958) described the process of adjustment and assimilation to incarceration as “prisonisation”. Traditional models for this process have emphasised factors as explanations for prison violence, such as the deprivation model (which addresses causal factors within the prison itself such as prison rules, regime, and increased security levels) (Steiner et al., 2014), and the importation model (which addresses an inmate’s pre-prison socialisation experiences, dispositional factors, and criminal history) as causes for violent and general misconduct (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). The situational model bases inmate adjustment on situational variables in the prison environment (Arbach-Lucioni et al., 2012). Consideration is given to where, when, and with whom the misconduct occurred to capture the interacting variables of the situation and the person (Flynn, 1976; Steinke, 1991). The ecological model encompasses the interaction between the person, their physical environment (Berry, 1994; Flynn, 1976), and situational variables (Jones et al., 1981; Steinke, 1991). In summary, it encompasses all these factors to capture the interaction between the individual and the social, physical, and institutional aspects of the prison environment (Berry, 1994; Flynn, 1976; Jones et al., 1981; Steinke, 1991).

The reliance on predominantly male offender samples in research on prison violence is a limitation of prior studies, as comparative research suggests that gender-specific risks and needs should also be considered in correctional settings (Covington & Bloom, 2006). Feminist scholars have questioned the applicability to women of classification systems, dynamic risk/needs assessments, security procedures, and prison regimes that have been developed on male samples (Farr, 2000; MacDonald, 2013; Van Voorhis, 2012), and there is an ongoing debate about whether what works for male offenders also applies to female offenders (Polaschek, 2018). The role of gender is complex and nuanced, and there is evidence for both differences and similarities in predicting prison violence for males and females. For example, Harer & Langan (2001) found that while rates of violence in prison (including serious violence) were greater for men than women, a risk classification instrument had similar predictive validity regardless of gender. Group-based trajectory analysis has also identified similar heterogeneity in female and male cohorts, with stable-limited, early-onset, and delayed-onset groups in terms of involvement in prison violence over a three-year period (Reidy et al., 2017).

### **Reasons for an Ecological Framework to Prison Violence**

Previous research has highlighted that an ecological approach, which encompasses the interaction between the person, their physical environment (Berry, 1994; Flynn,

1976), and situational variables (Jones et al., 1981; Steinke, 1991), is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of prison violence. Prisoner populations comprise increasingly diverse groups of offenders, serving longer sentences, and for a wider range of offences (Paterline & Orr, 2016). There is also acknowledgement that prisons have their own culture and climate, which affects how prisoners perceive and act within the prison (Bosma et al., 2020). Prisons can be stressful environments with rules that severely restrict and regulate behaviour, often more so than in contexts outside the wire, and if not adhered to, can result in violent misconduct charges that can affect the outcome of a prisoner's sentence. Situational factors and prison conditions that have been found to affect rates of misconduct for both sexes include: personal safety concerns, less opportunities for work, unstructured routines, lack of participation in programmes, having been mistreated and/or wrongfully accused or punished by staff, perceiving inconsistency in rule enforcement, population density, temporal factors, and the prison's physical design (Bosma et al., 2020; Griffitt & Veitch, 1971; McCorkle, 1993; McGuire, 2018; Megargee, 1976; Morgan, 2009; Wright, 1991). For all these reasons, an ecological perspective provides the most suitable framework for considering the multiple and complex causes of prison violence across multiple contexts of behavioural influence (Estévez et al., 2008).

### **Reasons for a Gendered Approach to Prison Violence**

Comparative studies suggest that gender-specific risks and needs should also be considered within correctional settings. A focus on gender acknowledges that social and environmental factors, apart from any biological differences, contribute to differences in behaviour via the social roles prescribed for women and men and how these shape the contexts in which we live:

- Women in prison, often marginalised by race and class, typically engage in criminal pathways that are economically driven, based on survival and often substance abuse, and are less likely to have committed violent crimes compared to their male counterparts (Bloom et al., 2004). These pathways have common interconnecting factors including women prisoners often being undereducated and unskilled. For example, female prisoners have been found to have more educational and occupational deficiencies than male prisoners, with many being unemployed prior to incarceration. They are also typically offered less varied employment opportunities within prison compared to those offered in men's prisons, potentially impacting negatively on prison adaptation (Farr, 2000).
- Many incarcerated women have also experienced gender-specific life circumstances such as sexual and physical abuse. For example, rates of prior child, sexual, and domestic violence abuse are higher for female prisoners than for male prisoners (Farr, 2000), and prior abuse has been correlated with female prison offending (Wright et al., 2007). Further, experiences of prior abuse and trauma can affect the ability of female prisoners to develop and maintain healthy and supportive relationships (Covington, 2007). Salisbury and Van Voorhis

(2009) found that female probationers with dysfunctional partner relationships had greater risk for recidivism.

- Women prisoners often present with specific physical health issues. For example, female prisoners have been found to have special needs (obstetric and gynaecological) with regard to their physical health compared to men, which can hinder their adaptation to the prison environment and increase their likelihood of offending while in prison (Farr, 2000). Female prisoners also have a higher prevalence of comorbid substance abuse and mental health diagnoses than male prisoners. However, it is interesting to note that Camp et al., 2003 found that women were less likely to be involved in drug misconduct in prison than men.
- Research has also shown that men and women experience and respond differently to incarceration (Solinas-Saunders & Stacer, 2012). For example, female prisoners have been described as more sensitive and emotional than male prisoners, needing to engage with staff in meaningful communication and responding well when staff encourage this, which has also been found to affect their adaptation to prison (Farr, 2000).
- Women have also been reported to find prison more distressing than men due to pre-incarceration factors that worsen with time (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Reidy et al., 2017; Salisbury & Van Voorhis, 2009). Women are often the sole primary caregivers of their children before being incarcerated, in contrast to fathers in prison, who are not usually the primary caregivers of their children (Byrd & Davis, 2009). A common theme among female prisoners is a concern for their children and the worry, guilt, and sadness from missing them, which can negatively affect their adaptation to prison (Farr, 2000). This may be a contributing factor to findings that lengthier terms of incarceration increased the probability of females' prison misconduct in contrast to males (Gover et al., 2008). Ginn (2013) also found that female prisoners' rates of self-harm (16%) were significantly higher than men's (3%).
- Security classification has been linked to different experiences of men and women in prison in terms of interactions with prisoners and correctional staff, housing placements, and access to correctional resources (Farr, 2000). For example, male prisoners housed in more secure facilities have been found to commit more rule violations compared to female prisoners (Cihan et al., 2017; DeLisi et al., 2013). Conversely, a recent study of women prisoners in New Zealand found that misconducts were least in the minimum-maximum security prison compared with higher rates of misconduct in the smaller minimum-security prisons (Lancaster, 2020).
- Female prisoners have been found to be subject to more discipline for trivial behaviour than men yet are less likely than men to break the rules, except when it comes to verbal assault (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Croteau, 2000). Women may also have a greater need for social support in terms of adjustment to prison life. Jiang and Winfree (2006) found that women who had greater levels of social support in prison (e.g., calls or visits from children), and Celinska and Sung (2014) reported that the frequency of visits were both negatively related to prison misconducts for women but not for men.

- Institutional life in women's prisons can be as violent and conflict-ridden as in men's prisons, especially regarding fighting and lower-level physical assaults, but the displays of aggression and motivations for violence can be different. At the individual level, aggression has been shown to be developed and spread through social learning and modelling (Bandura et al., 1961). Once learned, the behaviour is maintained through positive reinforcement (Bandura, 1978). At the group level, violence can spread through social norms, in which it is the accepted and often expected form of retribution and perceived justice (Gilligan, 1997; Ransford & Slutkin, 2017). In contrast, not responding in an aggressive or violent manner can be seen as being weak and prone to victimisation (Anderson, 1980).
- From a psychological perspective, the causes of criminal behaviour are often linked to individual and familial dysfunction or psychopathology, relating to the individual characteristics of the offender, their immediate circumstances, and the crime (King, 2012). However, the causes of violence cannot be understood without also considering the social contexts in which they took place (King, 2012). Polaschek (2019), has stated that violent offending can be understood as a type of social behaviour which can also be conceptualised on a continuum of aggressive behaviours. It can be actual or potential, with different motivations (Wilds, 1973). For example, expressive or reactive violence is a spontaneous, reactive response by an individual or a group to stimuli that has been related to impulsivity and self-control (Morgan, 2009). It is unplanned and, as such, is difficult to anticipate by both prisoners and correctional staff (Morgan, 2009). In contrast, instrumental or proactive violence is calculated and used intentionally to gain benefits (Morgan, 2009). Expressive violence has been more linked to female prisoners, while instrumental violence has been more linked to male prisoners and it has been associated with acquiring power, rape, and gang activity (Croteau, 2000; Morgan, 2009).
- Motivations for violent attacks in prison also vary. O'Donnell (2016) reported that the most common reasons given by male perpetrators for assaults were: retaliation, settling conflict, debt enforcement, status enhancement, material gain, and relief from boredom. Whereas for women, it involved maintaining interpersonal relationships both in and outside the wire, with higher instances of sexual violence against female prisoners than male prisoners (Thomson et al., 2019).
- Several studies have found that whereas rates of prisoner-on-prisoner violence were comparable in women's and men's prisons, rates of serious assaults and prisoner-on-staff assaults were higher in male facilities (Harer & Langan, 2001; Kuanliang & Sorenson, 2008; Wolff et al., 2007).

Overall, these studies suggest that a gendered approach is needed to better understand the gender-specific risk factors for prison violence. Such an approach accounts for gender differences in type, frequency, and context of offending, thus enabling a better understanding to inform gender-appropriate assessment, treatment, and violence reduction and prevention efforts (Sorrentino et al., 2016).

## **Gender and Prison Violence: What Do We Know So Far?**

Women and men have many risk factors for prison violence in common. These include younger age, a history of past violent acts, gang affiliation, substance use, and mental health history (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Driscoll, 1952; Flanagan, 1983; Huebner, 2003; Kuanliang & Sorenson, 2008; McGuire, 2018; Reidy et al., 2017; Sorrentino et al., 2016; Toch & Adams, 1986).

### ***Young Age***

Age at admission has been shown to be a strong predictor for prison offending, with younger men and women at higher risk (Harer & Langan, 2001; Reidy et al., 2017; Zink, 1957). Prisoners of both sexes aged 21 years or less have been found to engage in more violent misconduct than those aged 22–35 or older during their first six months of incarceration (McGuire, 2018; Wolf et al., 1966). Three New Zealand studies found that young female prisoners were involved in offending more often than adult female prisoners, including assaults on other prisoners and on staff (Collie & Polaschek, 2003), and that they (female prisoners aged 14–19 years) reported being willing to engage in violent behaviour in prison (Goldingay, 2012). Lancaster (2020) also found a significant correlation between age groups and prison misconduct, with female prisoners aged 17–26 years having higher rates of misconduct compared with older female prisoners aged 35–75 years.

### ***Prior Violence***

A history of violent crimes and incarceration, particularly those with juvenile records, has been associated with higher incidents of prison violence for both men and women (Bosma et al., 2020; Cihan et al., 2017; Collie & Polaschek, 2003; Gendreau et al., 1997; Kubiak et al., 2017). Other predictors include gang involvement, substance abuse disorders, and mental health history (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Morris et al., 2012; Salisbury et al., 2009; Shelden, 1991; Sutton, 2017; Warren et al., 2004).

### ***Gang Affiliation***

Not only do gangs constitute over a third of the prison population but gang activity has been found to be a significant determinant, and one of the main reasons for prison misconduct and violence (Morgan, 2009; Tamatea, 2015). Prisons can provide a pathway to gang membership, offering protection and a sense of belonging in a threatening environment (Gluckman, 2018). However, with rival gang factions competing for status, gang-affiliated prisoners are more likely to be engaged in prison violence either as victims or as perpetrators. There have been estimated to be more than 50 different gangs and 3,300 gang affiliates in New Zealand prisons (Department of Corrections, 2020b). Approximately 34% of the prison population comprises current gang affiliates and 5% comprises ex-gang affiliates (Gluckman, 2018). The Mongrel Mob and Black Power are the two biggest adult gangs of

which Māori comprise approximately 90%, followed by 39% of Pacific people being gang affiliated, whereas 80% of the European prison population is recorded as not being gang affiliated (Gluckman, 2018). In his investigation of gangs in New Zealand prisons, Meek (1992) found that many of the fights and assaults at Paremoremo (Auckland Men's Prison) were believed to be gang-related and occurred for numerous reasons. Lancaster (2020) found that 18% of 2,038 female gang-affiliated prisoners from the two largest gang populations – the Mongrel Mob, followed by Black Power (there were 24 gangs in total) – accounted for 19% of incidents across the three female prisons.

### ***Substance Use***

Research has shown that substance abuse issues are also correlated with prison violence for both male and female prisoners. Although, Camp et al. (2003) found that females were less likely to be involved in drug misconduct than males despite a greater prevalence of reported problems with substance abuse for women (Wright et al., 2007).

### ***Mental Health History***

Mental illness has also been found to be significantly related to prison violence for both sexes, with women prisoners tending to have a higher demand for mental health services than male prisoners (Farr, 2000). They also have greater rates of comorbid substance use disorders, depression, anxiety, and self-harm in comparison to male prisoners (McClellan et al., 1997; Owen, 2005). These higher rates for women may or may not be reflective of them providing greater self-disclosure of their problems compared to male prisoners (Farr, 2000). Further, prior sexual and physical abuse and neurophysiological differences stemming from prior abuse for both sexes have been associated with displays of emotional dysregulation and a propensity for anger, aggression, and violence (Gluckman, 2018).

### **Testing a Gendered Ecological Approach: A New Zealand Study**

In this section, we briefly describe a recent study which tests whether individual and situational risk factors are similar for predicting violence in prison for men and women (Perry & Grace, in preparation). First, we provide some background information about incarceration in New Zealand. With about 170 of 100,000 persons in prison, NZ has a high incarceration rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the OECD average is 147 per 100,000 (Ministry of Justice, n.d.), and this rate has been increasing since the mid-1980s (Gluckman, 2018). New Zealand is also ranked fifth highest in imprisonment for violent offences (18.5% or 24 offenders per 100,000) compared to the international median (comprising 32 countries) of 6.6% (Boomen, 2018).

In June 2020, the New Zealand prison population was 9,469 – 629 females and 8,840 males across 18 adult prisons nationwide (Department of Corrections, 2020a). Of these, 36% (3,200 males and 258 females) were on remand, a percentage

that has almost doubled since 2013 (Department of Corrections, 2020a). Most offenders (53.6%) were in prison for interpersonal offences (sexual and violent offences). By contrast, the international median for prisoners with interpersonal offences was 33.2% (Boomen, 2018). Overall, 70% of the New Zealand prison population includes those remanded or sentenced for violence (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Māori were and still are significantly overrepresented at 52.3% of those incarcerated despite constituting 16.5% of New Zealand's population (Harris & Stanley, 2017; McIntosh, 2017). Of the remaining prisoners, 30.9% were New Zealand European, 11.7% were Pacific Island prisoners, 4.9% were multi-ethnic, and 0.2% were unknown ethnicity (Department of Corrections, 2020a; Stats NZ, 2019). In terms of age, the majority were 20–39 years old (61.6%), followed by 40–49 years (20.5%), 50–59 years (10.6%), 60 years and over (5.9%), and under 20 years old (1.4%) (Department of Corrections, 2020a).

New Zealand's prisoner population generally represents individuals who have come from impoverished neighbourhoods (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). They typically have developmental histories of poverty, discrimination, substance abuse, poor educational achievement (Bentley, 2015), unemployment, broken homes (Simpson et al., 2003), and family violence and/or neglect (Collier & Friedman, 2016). These common risk factors for mental illness are reflected in prisoners being three times more likely to have a mental disorder compared with the general population, with the prevalence of most disorders being higher among female prisoners (Cavney & Friedman, 2018; Indig et al., 2016).

Based on our review of the previous literature, a gendered ecological approach predicts that prison violence should be related to both individual and situational factors in broadly similar terms for men and women, but with specific differences related to gender. To test this prediction, we conducted a study using New Zealand data (Perry & Grace, in preparation). Information related to violent incidents between 2016 and 2020 was obtained for three women's prisons (Auckland Women's, Arohata, and Christchurch Women's) and three men's prisons that were geographically close to these (Auckland Prison, Rimutaka, and Christchurch Men's Prison). During this time, these prisons housed 3,954 women and 7,280 men. Overall, 14% of women prisoners were noted as a perpetrator for at least one violent incident during their incarceration, compared to 17% of men. We used mixed-effects modelling to predict violence separately for women and men using both individual variables (including age, static risk level, offence history, and gang membership) and unit-level variables (including prisoner turnover, the proportion of shared cells, and security level). Both individual and unit-level variables significantly predicted violence, accounting for 32.7% and 39.1% of the variance for women and men respectively. Although rates of violence were overall greater for men, log odds ratios were positively correlated for unit-level factors ( $r = .77$ ) and for individual risk factors ( $r = .96$ ) if the predictors related to prior sexual offending were excluded. Child sexual offences were associated with an increased risk of prison violence for women but a decreased risk for men.

Overall, Perry and Grace's results (in preparation) support the gendered ecological approach. Prison violence was overall greater for men but depended on both

individual and situational (e.g., unit level) factors for both sexes in a broadly similar way. For both men and women, those with higher static risk scores, younger age, gang affiliation, and prior violent offences were more likely to perpetrate violence, while units with a higher turnover and security levels, and a lower proportion of shared cells, were associated with more violence. However, the effect of a prior child sexual offence was different for men and women. To date, extant research, including ours, suggests that a nuanced understanding of the role of gender in prison violence is necessary for its risk prediction, prevention, and treatment.

A limitation of Perry and Grace's study is that it only used information from an administrative database which may be insensitive to some gender differences. For example, no information about mental or physical health needs was available, and based on previous research, these may be more acute for incarcerated women. The inclusion of such needs could aid the accuracy of risk assessment with the aim of contributing to the reduction of prison violence for both men and women (Sorrentino et al., 2016). As previously mentioned, other situational and environmental factors that have been found to affect rates of misconduct include: increased security measures, personal safety concerns, less opportunities for work or participation in programmes, having been mistreated and/or wrongfully accused or punished by staff, perceiving inconsistency in rule enforcement, population density, hot temperatures, and the physical design of prisons (Bidna, 1975; Bosma et al., 2020; Griffitt & Veitch, 1971; McCorkle, 1993; McGuire, 2018; Megargee, 1976; Morgan, 2009; Wright, 1991). Whether relationships between these factors and prison violence are moderated by gender is a question for future research.

In conclusion, the results of studies reviewed in this chapter, as well as Perry and Grace's study (in preparation) suggest that for those seeking to assess and mitigate the risk of prison violence, a gendered ecological approach should be adopted. That is, one that recognises that violence results from a complex interplay of individual, situational, and environmental factors. And, that more comparative research is needed to develop a more complete understanding of how relationships between prison violence and these factors may be gendered.

### **Key Learning Points**

- Previous studies have used gender-neutral risk assessment tools to measure individual risk factors in predominantly male prisoners, even though the occurrence of prison violence is related to a complex interaction of individual and situational factors, of which some are gendered.
- A focus on gender acknowledges that social and environmental factors, apart from any biological differences, contribute to differences in behaviour via the social roles prescribed for women and men, and how these shape the contexts in which we live.
- Our research shows that for both men and women, those with higher static risk scores, younger age, gang affiliation, and prior violent offences were more likely to perpetrate violence, while units with a higher turnover and security levels, and a lower proportion of shared cells, were associated with more violence.

However, the effect of a prior child sexual offence was different for men and women.

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## 4 Elucidating the Ecology of Prisons

### A Look through the PRISM

*David J. Cooke*

We used to go to airports to catch a flight, but now we shop as well. This is no accident. Owners of airports derive substantial revenues from shopping; they design the airport environment to promote impulsive buying. Think of the last time you were in an airport; you were encouraged to move from the sparse, barren and uncongenial check-in area into the more enticing waiting area—thereby increasing the all-important *dwelt time* in the shopping mall. Typically, you had to take a sinuous track past isles of luxury goods—liquors, perfume, watches—the lighting was soft, the music was slow, the temperature was comfortable, the scent was seductive, and the salespersons were the simulacrum of glamour. These malls are designed to promote impulsive buying of expensive goods. And they work (Bohl, 2014).

There can be little doubt that contexts affect human behaviour, yet when it comes to prison violence, we tend to focus on the characteristics of the individual prisoner (e.g., their history of violence, personality disorder, substance misuse, violent ideation) rather than the characteristics of the individual prison. This focus on individual characteristics is an example of the fundamental attribution bias (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977); that is, the tendency, when explaining the behaviour of others, to focus on their personal attributes and downplay external factors; curiously, the opposite of the approach we take when explaining our own behaviour.

For many years psychologists ignored the power of contexts; they treated the influence of environments on behaviour as noise—or measurement error—which needed to be stripped out of models of human behaviour (Mischel, 2004). But there is information in that noise, information that can be captured to reduce uncertainty and thereby reduce risk (ISO 31000; 2018). When we consider prison *ecology*, we are not focused merely on the physical *environment*, but rather we are focused on the complex web of interactions that all members of the prison community have with each other, and with their environment. Prison ecology seeks to understand the processes that underpin these interactions, and the consequences of these processes. Violence being one possible consequence. The ecology is not simply about what happens within a specific prison, but rather it embraces the wider context within which the prison sits; the correctional system more broadly, as well as that political, societal and cultural thinking which girds the functions of corrections. If we want to understand violence in prison, we ignore prison ecology at our peril.

Fortunately, aspects of prison ecology are captured by several criminological theories about violence in prisons. For example, the deprivation model posits that

violence is a response to the pains of confinement (e.g., Barak-Glantz, 1983; Sykes, 1958); the management models implicate failures in staffing and security (Dilulio; 1987; McCorkle, Miethe & Drass, 1995). Strain models emphasise the impact of the deprivation of the usual comforts of life (privacy and autonomy), the subjection to noxious stimuli (crowding, victimisation, noise), and the denial of positively valued goals (access to goods and services; Morris, Carriaga, Diamond, Piquero & Piquero, 2012). Procedural-justice models suggest that institutional violence is a response to arbitrary, unfair and bureaucratic responses to legitimate complaints (Bierie, 2013; Bierie & Mann, 2017). While these models are informative, they do not provide a comprehensive characterisation of prison ecology; we cannot understand what we cannot describe. Critically, these models do not permit the systematic and comprehensive risk assessment of the ecology—an assessment that can lead to change.

### Evaluating and Understanding Violence Risk

The last three decades have seen the rise and rise of risk assessment in all areas of life. In corrections, the primary focus of risk assessment is violence prevention. Violence can be prevented; this is not a matter of conviction but rather a matter of evidence (World Health Organisation, 2010). Drawing on the principles of epidemiology, it is possible to discern two broad strategies designed to prevent threats to public health, including violence (Rose, 1992; World Health Organisation, 2010). The first strategy, the “high-risk” strategy, is the one most commonly adopted in corrections. A prisoner who is assessed to be risky by some means—informal or formal—is constrained, treated, monitored or supervised in order to restrict their ability to engage in violence. This approach makes sense, given that in New Zealand, for example, two-thirds of prisoners do not have any involvement with violence (R. Grace, personal communication, 11 October 2021). Effective identification of the at-risk could lead to effective intervention. The second strategy—the “population” strategy—intervenes across all members of the prison population irrespective of their inherent risk: interventions might focus on changing practices, policies, institutional climate and conditions. By tackling the risk of the many, the risk posed by the few is diminished. Both strategies have their place: they complement each other (Rose, 1992). The population approach to risk is particularly apposite when dealing with a condition or problem that is the result of a multitude of risk factors, not a single strong risk factor. Violent behaviour is such a problem (Cooke & Johnstone, 2010; Monahan et al., 2001). Rose (1992) coined the term *prevention paradox* for his observation that if a large number of individuals are subject to a weak risk factor, this will result in more cases than if a small number of individuals are subject to a strong risk factor. There are no truly strong, or indeed moderately strong individual risk factors for violence (Cooke & Michie, 2014). Thus, as Rose (1992) noted in such circumstances, “the high-risk preventative strategy is dealing only with the margins of the problem” (p. 60). To illustrate this point with reference to Ara Poutama (the Correctional Service of New Zealand), suppose it was possible to identify and sequester the top 5% of most violent prisoners (circa

700 prisoners)—a practically challenging and expensive proposition—then almost two-thirds (63.5%) of violent incidents would still occur (R. Grace, personal communication, 11 October 2021). When exposed to institutional provocations, the large number of lower-risk prisoners can generate as much—or more—violence as the small proportion of truly high-risk individuals.

From a practical perspective, population interventions in corrections have a number of advantages. First, problematic prisoners are the least likely to engage in interventions—treatment or supervision—designed to obviate their risk of violence. However, they are not necessarily impervious to the impact of changes in prison ecology. Second, focusing resources on the institution as a whole rather than on a sub-group of particularly disruptive prisoners can have significant cost benefits; current resources are being used to provide more impactful interventions (Wortley, 2002). Third, changes in prison ecology have effects that go beyond their impact on violence. Improving the quality of institutional life may have a positive impact on other indicators of institutional dysfunction—self-harm, suicide, drug misuse, absconding, or disengagement from activities or staff sickness absences (Cooke, 2019).

### **Risk and Uncertainty**

It is widely recognised that risk assessment and management, whether in relation to violence or indeed other hazards, is about uncertainty reduction. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO, 31000; 2018) provides overarching standards for risk management in any context, not merely violence risk management. It defines risk as the “effect of uncertainty on objectives” (section 3:1) and focuses on the impact that incomplete knowledge of events or circumstances has on an outcome. The greater the uncertainty, the greater the difficulty in managing any putative risk. The risk manager’s task is to reduce uncertainty (Cooke & Michie, 2011). How can this be achieved?

Over the last three decades, violence risk assessment has evolved significantly; no longer is it dependent on the idiosyncratic and often unstructured evaluation of an assessor, but rather, the task is sustained by what is termed as structure professional judgement (SPJ) protocols (e.g., Eaves, Webster, Haque & Eaves-Thaiken, 2019; Otto & Douglas, 2020). Professionals now have access to SPJ protocols that reduce the uncertainty associated with forecasts for a wide range of possible violent acts—sexual violence, the abuse of spouses, children or elders, stalking or acts driven by extremism (Otto & Douglas, 2020). These approaches are designed to support both professional evaluation and professional action; they are fundamentally practical. Research and professional practice have identified risk factors for the particular types of future violence of concern. The evaluator determines whether this risk factor is present in the subject of the risk assessment. This determination is founded on a comprehensive analysis of what is known about the subject and their circumstance based on interviews, document review, discussions with informants and formal psychometric assessment. In the jargon, a multi-modal, multi-informant assessment is carried out. When risk factors are identified, the assessor considers

whether they are relevant to the risk of violence, relevant because the risk factor is causally linked to a propensity for future violence (e.g., psychopathic personality disorder, substance misuse, violent ideation) or relevant because the risk factor will interfere with future risk management plans (e.g., a history of violating legal orders). These considerations allow the generation of a formulation—an individually tailored mini-theory of why the subject might engage in violence in the future. Such formulations allow different risk scenarios to be developed and evaluated and a risk management plan developed to counter the perceived risks. Like many things in life—pandemics, earthquakes, stock-market crashes—prison violence can be difficult or even impossible to predict. Nonetheless, it is recognised that we can mitigate the impact of unpredictable events through, for example, vaccination programmes, building controls, or the diversification of assets. The same is true of violent behaviour.

The SPJ approaches are systematic, evidence-based, transparent, and practical. The approach provides a common language that allows practitioners from many disciplines to understand and manage risky individuals; they ensure that professional knowledge and skill are at the heart of the risk management process.

While there is little doubt that prison ecology influences the rate of prison violence (Cooke, 1989, 1990; Wortley, 2002), a key question is *how*? If we are to understand the impact of prison ecology, we need to have a theoretical framework to explain violent acts. Alongside the evolution of SPJ protocols has been the evolution of SPJ decision theory. SPJ decision theory has its roots in other theories that have been used to explain criminal behaviour, e.g., Action Theory (Aguilar & Buckareff, 2010), Situational Action Theory (Wikstrom, 2014) and Bounded Rational Choice Theory (Felson, 2009). (See Gartner, Douglas, Hart, & Kropp, 2021 for a fuller discussion.)

Fundamental to SPJ decision theory is the assumption that violence is a decision; it may be a bad decision or a decision made badly (Hart & Logan, 2011). A bad decision is one that results in a non-optimal or maladaptive outcome; a decision made badly is one made in a disorganised or incoherent manner. The decision is not necessarily founded in actuality and is not necessarily coherent or reasonable, but nonetheless, it is a decision.

Within SPJ decision theory, the decision to be violent is rationale, not in the sense of being founded in clear logic but rather in the sense that the perpetrator has the capacity to reason regardless of the quality of that reasoning (Hart, Douglas, & Guy, 2016). The decision to be violent is a cognitive process, but it may be an unconscious process being rapid and habitual, a decision made carelessly and impulsively. Within the SPJ decision theory framework, there are four phases: first, the individual arrives in a setting where they consciously consider a violent decision; second, they consider the benefits of violence; third, they consider the cost of violence; fourth and finally, they consider the feasibility of violence (Hart & Logan, 2011). To be clear, these decisions may not necessarily be good decisions or decisions made well, but these decisions are made under the influence of many individual and situational risk factors. Within SPJ decision theory, risk factors may influence the decision to be violent in several ways (Cooke, 2010; Gartner et al.,

2021). *Motivators* (also known as drivers) act to increase the perceived utility of violence; for example, a prisoner may decide to act violently to increase his status amongst his peers. *Disinhibitors* act to decrease the perceived costs of violence; for example, a prisoner who suffers from personality pathology may act violently because of a lack of affect and empathy. They are incapable of experiencing any emotional cost. *Destabilisers* act to disrupt the individual's thinking and thereby impair their decision making. For example, personality pathology, chronic drug use or the effects of acute stressors may disrupt the prisoner's capacity to consider various response options. SPJ decision theory explicitly recognises the influence of context on decision making; the theory provides the link between environmental influences and the individual who acts violently. Unfortunately, it remains the case that the qualities of contexts that promote decisions to be violent have been significantly under-researched as compared to individual risk factors.

### **Understanding Institutional Risk Factors**

At the beginning of my career in correctional settings, I had the privilege of working in the Barlinnie Special Unit with prisoners deemed "Scotland's most violent men" (Boyle, 1977; Cooke, 1989, 1997; in press, a). These men were by definition 'high risk'; they were unmanageable in mainstream prisons; the majority had committed murder—at least once—they had grown up in a culture that venerated violence, and from their early years, they engaged in criminal behaviour that evolved into diverse and prolific criminal careers. Many suffered from known risk factors for violence—personality pathology, substance misuse, violent ideation—and in some cases, major mental illness. They were inherently risky, but only two assaults occurred in the long history of the Unit. The most parsimonious explanation was not that the men changed—at least in the short term—but rather the Unit's ecology differed from the ecology of Scotland's high-secure prisons. There was no magic bullet but rather a mosaic of changes that impacted the Unit ecology. Safety was underpinned by relational rather than structural security; this was achieved by better staff selection and training; the community ethos allowed a shift from authoritarian to authoritative (firm but fair) control; prisoners were given access to a rich variety of activities and access to visitors (Cooke, 1989; Cooke, in press, a).

My early experiences in the Barlinnie Special Unit, as well as my experience of being a member of the command team during four major riots and hostage-takings, made clear that violence risk evaluation is inadequate if institutional ecology is not considered (Cooke, 1989, 1997, in press, b). My colleague Lorraine Johnstone and I recognised the need for an SPJ protocol focused on institutional ecology rather than individual prisoners or forensic patients (Cooke & Johnstone, 2010, 2012; Johnstone & Cooke, 2008). We perceived the need for an evidence-based protocol that would, first, assist staff to reflect on how the ecology of their institution might promote or defuse the violence of their inmates and, second, how that ecology could be altered systematically to reduce the likelihood of violence occurring. We called the protocol PRISM—Promoting Risk Interventions by Situational Management. A prism lets us see things in new ways: an optical prism splits white

light into its constituent parts and allows these colours to be identified and analysed. PRISM evaluates a correctional organisation as a whole and identifies the constituent elements that influence violence in the institution. The complexity of the correctional ecology is deconstructed to allow change processes to be implemented in a practical manner.

It was important that PRISM represented evidence-based practice; thus, we undertook four steps in the development of the SPJ protocol and process that would allow not only the identification of risk factors for institutional violence but also that would guide the identification and implementation of interventions designed to obviate the risk of violence. Reducing risk by reducing uncertainty. We started by carrying out a systematic review of published literature on violence in prisons and secure hospitals to determine which ecological factors had been implicated as contributing to prison violence. The results were stark. Despite reviewing thousands of papers, our review identified a paucity of systematic research (Gadon, Johnstone, & Cooke, 2006). We collected evidence more directly from inmates and staff using semi-structured interviews to capture their experiences, knowledge and understanding. Collectively, the staff had over 300 years' experience working in institutions and prisoners had over 100 years of experience living in institutions. The interviews were analysed using NVivo to support a grounded theory approach to the data. The interviews with inmates and staff not only revealed *which* ecological factors were important in relation to violence but perhaps more importantly, they revealed *why* these factors were salient. In line with SPJ decision theory, some risk factors could be construed as motivators, for example, factors that generate a sense of injustice or sense of being disrespected; some risk factors were disinhibitors, for example, the deprivation of valued goods to the extent that there is nothing to lose by being violent; or destabilisers, for example, risk factors that engender a sense of uncertainty or feelings of frustration.

Having accumulated an evidence base, we used a conceptual, analytic approach (e.g., Machado & Silva, 2007) to refine and distil the information gathered. Prison ecology can be parsed into many components; our considerations led to the identification of 21 distinct risk factors, which we brigaded into five distinct conceptual domains, namely, *History of Institutional Violence*, *Physical and Security Factors*, *Organisational Factors*, *Staff Features*, and *Case Management*.

The History of Institutional Violence domain maps out the nature, frequency, and pattern of violence in the institution over the previous two years. Characterising the quantity and qualities of prior violence provides a baseline against which the institution can be compared to other institutions or with itself across time. More importantly, having a clear understanding of the qualities of violence supports the scenario planning process used to envision possible future violence—and strategies for preventing such violence.

The Physical and Security domain captures information about two facets of the prison ecology. First, the quality of the prison architecture and environment (e.g., structural appropriateness, cleanliness, space, temperature, noise, and smell) and the nature of security. Is the physical environment fit for purpose, does it comply with human rights, and health and safety legislation? What approach is adopted to

achieving security; is it oppressive, or does it match the level of actual risk? Ill-matched security—too much or too little—can promote violence; too much can generate violence due to the need to save face, and too little by generating uncertainty or tension (Cooke, 1991).

The Organisational Factors domain examines the strengths and weaknesses of the institution being considered but also the wider organisation in which the institution is embedded (e.g., the prison system or health system). Issues to be considered would be whether there is an identifiable person responsible for the policies, procedures and practices designed to manage institutional violence; does the organisation have zero tolerance for violent behaviour and a systematic approach to achieving that objective, is organisation change and conflict managed systematically and effectively?

The Staff Features domain, unsurprisingly, is key. The focus of this domain is whether staff are fit for the purpose of managing individuals with the potential to be violent. Are skilled staff recruited and retained, is the staff complement sufficient in size for the demands of the regime, do staff have the requisite mix of skills and experience, have they received relevant training for managing potentially violent individuals, are they supported by senior management in such tasks?

The fifth domain, the Case Management domain, is focused on the services that are available to prisoners. Does the organisation implement a systematic approach to determining the individual and aggregate needs of the prisoners, are appropriate programmes of sufficient quality available to remediate the criminogenic needs of prisoners, and more broadly, do prisoners have access to positive experiences such as education, meaningful work, recreation and contact with family?

The criterion validity of the PRISM items has been examined. Jennifer Skeem has led an innovative study of PRISM at the Napa State Hospital (NSH) in California (Sadri, Skeem, Farrell, McDermott, & Cooke, 2020). NSH is a closed psychiatric setting for patients with serious mental illness; it contains over 1,200 beds. NSH had the highest rate of patient-to-patient and patient-to-staff violence of all five State Hospitals in California (Sadri et al., 2020). This study set out to examine which of the 21 PRISM risk factors were most closely associated with violence rates in closed psychiatric settings. Twenty-one of the 26 units in the NSH were examined in detail using a systematic, multi-source, multi-informant approach that included semi-structured interviews with patients and staff (260 in total), in vivo observations within the units, examination of patient chart data as well as consideration of hospital policy and procedures and records of violent incidents over the previous 12 months. Standardised measures were used to capture information about patient–staff relationships, institutional climate, work environment and client satisfaction. Observations were made of the physical features (e.g., lighting, cleanliness, and control of bad smells), security features (e.g., blind spots, and crowding) and the quality of treatment groups.

In line with the PRISM process, the systematically derived multi-source, multi-informant data were considered, and consensus ratings on the PRISM risk factors achieved high levels of inter-rater reliability (Sadri et al., 2020). The result demonstrated that institutional factors matter when it comes to violence. While key

risk factors unsurprisingly varied from unit to unit, overall, they were found to be moderately to strongly predictive of violence rates on units even after controlling for patients' risk levels. Robust factors included authoritarian staff–patient relationships, inadequate staff training and competencies in violence prevention, poor social climate/cohesion, hierarchical organisational structure, low staff morale, limited interventions for violence reduction and shortcomings in the physical environment.

Unsurprisingly, the quality of staff-relationship style was most strongly associated with violence: authoritative relationships that can be characterised as being firm, fair and caring were *protective* against violence and other forms of antisocial behaviour, while authoritarian relationships that can be characterised as lacking warmth, fairness and interest in the patients' perspectives were associated with elevated rates of violence. Those units that had access to good-quality groups or individualised treatment focused on criminogenic factors had lower violence rates. This study supports the criterion validity of the PRISM items.

The fourth and final step in the development of PRISM was the completion of field studies, including one following a major prison riot in Barbados (Cooke & Wozniak, 2010) and a multiple case study analysis of five Scottish prisons (Johnstone & Cooke, 2010).

### **Applying PRISM in Real-World Settings**

When confronted by a violence-prone institution, the challenge may appear intractable—where do you start? Having a clear structure and a process to work through provides traction. PRISM was designed to create an action-orientated approach to confronting the change of institutional violence (Cooke, in press b; Cooke & Johnstone, 2010; Johnstone & Cooke, 2008). The PRISM process begins with the recruitment of a cross-discipline team from the prison; there is no prescribed membership but diversity in knowledge and experience is key. The team might include a middle manager, a mental health nurse, a prison officer, a trade union representative, a security officer, and a personnel professional—an ideal number is somewhere between six and eight. This group comes together and is trained in how to achieve a PRISM evaluation. They then undertake the data-gathering phase of the process. The middle manager may provide policies and procedures concerning the management of violence; the mental health nurse might provide information about rates of psychological disturbance, drug misuse, and self-harm; the prison officer might undertake interviews or focus groups with prisoners; the trade union representative may provide information about the particular concern of members of staff; the security officer could provide intelligence reports about the nature, location, and consequences of violence, while the personnel professional may describe the extent and pattern of sickness absences amongst staff. The key is to generate relevant information, and, critically, a multi-modal, multi-informant approach is adopted. As a group, the PRISM team evaluates all this information and considers each of the risk factors and decides, first, whether there is evidence that it applies or not, and second, whether it might be relevant.<sup>1</sup> Having identified the relevant risk

factors for their institution and having acquired in-depth knowledge of the qualities of violence that typically affect their institution, the team generates a formulation—an integration of the complex information into hypotheses about the mechanisms which underpin violence in the prison. For example, in a prison subject to high rates of prisoner turnover—transiency—violence be elevated. Why? —there are many possibilities. In a swiftly changing population, normal social structures are not developed; challenges in the prisoner hierarchy are more frequent; natural wariness of new and potentially dangerous prisoners is exaggerated; normal prison trading relationships in drugs, money, tobacco and gambling are riskier; and prison officers react in a more disciplinary manner. Change is threatening; rapid change is particularly threatening (Cooke & Shewan, 1999; Porporino, 1986). Transiency does not inevitably lead to violence. Pelissier (1991) reported that the rapid doubling of the prison population did not lead to an increase in violence because of the care taken in managing the change and in ensuring the regime and programmes were not adversely affected.

The formulation is fundamental. From the formulation flows the scenarios that characterise the range of violent outcomes that may occur in future. These scenarios serve as the foundation on which changes in the prison ecology can be built.

### *Prism in Practice*

The PRISM process has been implemented in a wide range of forensic institutions—prisons, secure units, and high-secure forensic psychiatric settings—in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Singapore, USA, and Barbados. Much of the PRISM work remains unpublished primarily because of the sensitive nature of many of the evaluations; the case studies serve as action documents rather than academic outputs. This process is sufficiently flexible to apply in diverse settings to diverse problems. PRISM has been used for a variety of purposes, from critical incident review, through on-going “temperature taking” to the strategic planning of new institutions.

An early application of PRISM was a critical incident review of the riot, and its aftermath, at HMP Glendairy in Barbados (Cooke & Wozniak, 2010). Glendairy was a relic of the British Empire built in 1855, and by 2005 it was dilapidated. A fight broke out amongst a small group of prisoners and soon escalated into a full-scale riot that lasted for three days. The prison was lost. Around a thousand prisoners—adults, young offenders, males and females, remanded and convicted (some on death row)—had to be rehoused. The Barbados government acted swiftly; all those with metal fabrication skills on the island were recruited, and temporary secure accommodation was created—essentially large cages—in a former naval base.

My colleague Ed Wozniak and I implemented the PRISM process. We recruited a staff group to drive the process. We collected data. We surveyed around 1000 prisoners, surveyed staff and held interviews and focus groups. The purpose was to cast light on the root causes of the riot, but more importantly, we were forward-focused. Our primary aim was to ensure that the toxic elements of the penal

ecology that had evolved in Glendairy did not migrate to the new prison under construction. The PRISM team made recommendations, including the implementation of a more consultative management style, a programme for enhancing staff skill, morale and leadership, the implementation of practices designed to improve staff-prisoner relationships and the introduction of systematic risk-needs assessment of each prisoner. Resources were found to implement many of the policies, procedures, and practices in the new prison (Cooke, 2020; Cooke & Wozniak, 2010).

A less dramatic but more common use of the PRISM process is to fine-tune an institution's functioning. Following the Barbados implementation of PRISM, we carried out a multiple case study design across five Scottish prisons (Johnstone & Cooke, 2010). Several interventions and changes were implemented, including improvements in the violence-recording process, a reappraisal of the complaints procedure, the development of a strategy to communicate about security and control, comprehensible policies regarding violence risk and the implementation of individualised risk assessment processes (Johnstone & Cooke, 2010). Interestingly, the PRISM process galvanised staff across the five prisons, and they spontaneously shared their learning. The model made sense to them.

In Sweden, Statens Institutioner Styrelse (SiS) implements compulsory secure care for either young people with severe psychosocial difficulties or adults with difficulties arising from severe substance abuse. A study of four of their residential units revealed that the rate and nature of violent incidents were not well recorded, that individual risk assessments were absent and that there was little adherence to policies and procedures designed to manage violence. Resources were mobilised to tackle these problems, and PRISM evaluations of other SiS units were carried out (Nötesjö & Asare, 2016).

Lessons can be learned from non-prison settings. For example, De Villiers (2016) evaluated a 13-bedded unit for people suffering from learning disabilities; a unit that was characterised by high levels of physical aggression and staff injury. Her PRISM evaluation revealed that the organisational ethos accepted that staff could be abused and assaulted on a regular basis; unsurprisingly, staff felt undervalued and alienated from the organisation; their morale was low and professional relationships were fractured; the physical environment was unsafe. Problems extended beyond the unit, and the dysfunction of the wider organisation had an impact exemplified by the attempts of senior managers to suppress and then alter the evaluation. Careful negotiation led to critical challenges being addressed; processes designed to resolve on-site staff conflicts were implemented, staff engaged in clinical supervision, management decision making was streamlined, and the physical fabric of the unit was upgraded. These changes resulted in a substantial reduction in violence.

The proactive evaluation of a medium-secure psychiatric unit took place in the context of rising levels of violence within mental health services of New Zealand; the ethnic mix of the unit (Māori, Pacific and NZ European cultures) required cultural awareness (Lehany, 2016). The PRISM process identified the need to refurbish the unit, ensure a greater emphasis on specific staff skills, introduce evidence-based rehabilitation programmes and improve sharing of learning across similar mental

health units. In England and Wales, for example, PRISM is now a key element in the Youth Custody estate, being used annually to review practices designed to promote safety in young offender institutions and secure care settings. These examples hopefully demonstrate the flexibility of the PRISM process.

### **Looking to the Future**

The Nga Tumanakotanga project provides a rich opportunity to enhance the PRISM process by exploring the role that prisoner culture may play in promoting prison violence. Additional risk factors may be field tested. The ecological approach emphasises the interactions amongst individuals, interactions that can be supportive or antagonistic to violence in prison. The ways in which groups of prisoners relate to each other, perhaps forming gangs or groups based on some extremist ideology, can provide the circumstances that promote violence. Understanding the role of prisoner culture can lead to innovative interventions designed to tackle violence in prison (Hanlon, 2021; Workman, 2021). Groupings of prisoners can influence violence through a multitude of processes. In the circumstance of uncertainty belonging to an in-group provides a sense of comradeship and promotes and consolidates a sense of identity. Group membership may confer a sense of security and protection by deterring members of the out-group from engaging in violence through the threat of retaliatory force. However, membership in a gang may confer duties as well as privileges. Beales (2021), describing the influence of gangs in New Zealand corrections, observed “people being instructed to do things that actually they didn’t wake up that morning having any intention to do” (p. 30). Being a member of an in-group comes with costs, e.g., obedience to a group leader and the need to comply with group rules of conduct.

Violence may be promoted in prison when group membership promotes *us and them* thinking. The prisoner group may support values, beliefs and attitudes that endorse the sense that violence is acceptable, desirable or required with regard to out-group members. These beliefs may include, but are not limited to, the belief that others have no value, are not human, that meting out violence is a form of justice, etc. Examples of out-group members are wide-ranging and may include sex offenders, supporters of a rival football team, unbelievers—“Kuffars” and members of different ethnic groups, e.g., Caucasian, Latinos, Jewish, members of different criminal gangs or people from different geographical regions.

The benefits of belonging to the in-group may not be merely expressive or affective but may also be instrumental. The in-group may exercise control over resources, profits and rewards within the prison. Membership of the group confers access to the benefits of limited resources within the institution (Hanlon, 2021). Violence may be applied instrumentally to ensure that resources are maintained by the in-group.

Just as buying behaviour is influenced by the ecology of airports, violent behaviour is influenced by the ecology of prisons. If we desire to prevent violence, we need to describe, understand and intervene to modify such ecology. PRISM provides an evidenced-based process towards that end. It is important to acknowledge

that the distressed, the disordered, and the dysfunctional who are detained in our prisons are not violent merely because of who they are but because of where they are—and how they are treated.

### Key Learning Points

- Contexts affect human behaviour; the ecology of prisons affects the behaviour of their inhabitants—including violent behaviour;
- Prison ecology is not merely the physical environment but includes the social environment; the ecology embraces the wider environment within which the prison sits; including the political, social, and cultural environments;
- Structured Professional Judgement Decision theory proposes that violent actors make a decision to be violent; this may be a bad decision, or a decision made badly. Prison ecology can promote the decision to be violent;
- The PRISM process provides a method for systematically reviewing prison ecologies in order to understand—and critically—in order to intervene to discourage decisions to be violent.

### Note

- 1 In SPJ decision theory, *relevance* denotes risk factors that drive a particular individual, or in this case, a particular institution. A risk factor may be relevant because it directly influences decisions to be violent or because it disrupts risk management interventions.

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# 5 Preventing Prison Violence

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So far in this book, we have considered the importance of attending to the “problem” of prison violence, presented an ecological framework to show how violence can be understood in relation to both social structure and personal agency, and described how “risk” can be identified using administrative data. The ecological approach directs attention to the wide range of factors that can put people at risk, as well as helps to explain how factors at one level of the ecology will inevitably influence factors at another. And it follows from this that it will be necessary to intervene across multiple levels at the same time if violence prevention efforts are to be sustained over time and achieve population-level impact. The ultimate value of all this work, however, will inevitably rest on its capacity to inform the development and implementation of policies and practices that reduce the prevalence (i.e., the number of people impacted), the incidence (i.e., the rate at which violence occurs), and the severity (i.e., the harms that result) of violence in the prison setting. In this chapter, we connect an ecological framework to a public health model of violence prevention (Public Health Association of Australia [PHAA], 2018) and argue that this will assist in developing and implementing comprehensive, systematic, and effective intervention strategies.

## **Applying a Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention**

The World Health Organisation’s Violence Prevention Alliance (2010) has identified a relatively small set of policy, legal, and intervention goals that should be considered in any public health strategy to prevent violence in prisons. Their approach is consistent with an ecological perspective in so far as it explicitly recognises that violence occurs because of multiple interacting factors relating to the individual, their relationships, community, and society more broadly (Brownson, Gurney, & Land, 1999). It also takes a life course perspective by acknowledging that circumstances in early life will influence developmental pathways and will sometimes lead to violent behaviour. For example, those who engage in violence will have often experienced significant disadvantage and exposure to potentially traumatic events throughout their lives, including childhood maltreatment, domestic and family violence, and have parents or caregivers who struggle with mental health, substance use, and involvement with the justice system (Thornberry & Krohn, 2019). The WHO approach is thus best understood as a set of prevention initiatives

(see Brownson et al., 1999) that targets “the root causes and risk factors underlying the likelihood of an individual becoming involved in violence and recognizes the need for improved services to mitigate the harmful effects of violence when it does occur” (p. 9).

In practice, applying a public health approach to prison violence prevention involves four steps: *defining the problem* through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics, and consequences of violence; *establishing why violence occurs* by determining the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that can be modified through interventions; *describing what works* to prevent violence by designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions; and *implementing effective and promising interventions* in a wide range of settings (WHO Violence Prevention Alliance, 2010). As we describe in the other chapters of this book, it is immediately apparent that much of the knowledge that is required to achieve each of these steps in relation to prison violence is already available.

### ***Defining the Problem***

First, we need to understand the *scope* and *scale* of prison violence, which involves describing its prevalence and incidence. Risk and protective factors can then be identified in relation to variation according to person, place, and time. Then, we need to consider what outcomes we are aiming to achieve by preventing prison violence; these may be shorter term (e.g., improving safety and the social climate of prisons) or longer term (e.g., improving the wellbeing of people in prison and the institution itself) outcomes.

In terms of understanding the scope and scale of the problem, information about the extent and the common types of prison violence is routinely collected through incident reporting processes. There are examples of large datasets that have been used to provide insight into who is involved and where and when incidents of violence occur. For example, Brabyn and Grace (2021) have used prison incident data collected by Ara Poutama Aotearoa (the Department for Corrections) in New Zealand (the COBRA database) to describe the most frequently recorded and most serious categories of violent incidents (Table 5.1).

These data can be used to explore the incidence of violence across time, across and within sites, and according to the characteristics of those who perpetrate violence. While this type of descriptive analysis can provide critical information about those sites that are most in need of prevention efforts—and, indeed, may well offer the best view of prison violence currently available—it does not obviate the need to consider how the quality of data inputs might affect outputs. In our experience of using administrative data from multiple sectors, issues relating to the quality of data inputs, business rule decisions made centrally for purposes other than research or surveillance, and incorrect data specification for extractions can all lead to a reduction in the usefulness of such data.

So, how might we judge whether administrative data relating to prison violence is “good enough” to be used to inform decisions about when, where, and how to

*Table 5.1* Most Common Incident Reports of Violence in Prison

<i>Categories of violence from most to least “frequent”</i>	<i>Identified as “serious” violence</i>
Prisoner verbally threatens staff	Physical assault on prisoner—
Fighting	serious fire or arson
Physical assault on prisoner—non-serious	Physical assault on staff—serious
Prisoner physical assault on staff—no injury	apparent homicide
Physical assault on prisoner—no injury	Physical assault on prisoner—
Physical assault on staff—non-serious threatening	sexual apparent suicide
Self-harm	Physical assault on staff—sexual
Prisoner abuses or physically threatens	hostage
Prisoner self-harm—no threat to life	Bomb threat
Prisoner abuses prisoner	Physical assault on other—sexual

*(Brabyn & Grace, 2021)*

intervene or who to intervene with? Perhaps the most immediate consideration here is whether an agreed definition exists about what triggers the recording of an incident across different sites—especially if there are systematic differences in what is recorded between sites. For example, if sites with frequent violence have a lower propensity to record incidents than sites with lower levels of violence (i.e., where prison violence is “normalised”), then the uncritical use of administrative data may lead to incorrect conclusions about which site is most violent and thus merits intervention.

One way to mitigate this risk is to return data-to-source. This involves presenting an analysis of the data to all levels of the organisation—from executive and policy staff to the frontline staff who record the violent incidents. This can help to establish whether the data reflect what would be expected, and this is a good starting point for identifying anomalies while also helping the frontline staff to understand how the data they record can be used. Beyond this, it is also important to consider organisational investment into minimum data collection, definitions and practices, staff training and support, and the meaning and purpose of routine reporting. We are strong supporters of the wider use of administrative data to inform policy, with the caveat that the value of this inevitably depends on the right questions being asked and the validity of the data collected to answer those questions. Administrative data is nonetheless often the only data source available for surveillance of “the problem”—and this is the backbone of the public health approach to understanding the scope and scale of any problem over time.

### ***Understanding Why Violence Occurs***

To understand why prison violence occurs, the public health approach relies on both high-quality data on the epidemiology of prison violence *and* theoretical understandings of its causes. As discussed above, the value of any administrative data is limited by the nature and quality of reporting, as well as the extent to

which reporting and recording practices vary across different settings. For example, some types of violence (e.g., when physical harm results) may be more likely to be recorded than others, and violence perpetrated *by* staff may be under-reported in comparison with violence perpetrated *against* staff. Incident reports will often also tell us rather little about the function of the violence in any given scenario, even though this is critical to any analysis and interpretation of the data that identifies modifiable causes. In other words, without information on the functions of violence, it will be difficult to determine which prevention strategies will be most likely to succeed (when, where, and for whom). A common problem is to (wrongly) assume that topographically similar acts of violence will have the same function and thus require the same response. For example, a fight between two people in prison might be a result of a simple disagreement, a dispute over resources, a gambling or drug debt, to establish gang affiliation, or for a myriad of other reasons. Administrative data typically fails to document these different functions, which can only be understood through a more detailed analysis of what actually happened.

The challenges that arise in collecting high-quality administrative data suggest that we need to consider, in the short term, investing the time and resources in augmenting routinely collected data with more detailed information about each violent incident. This may involve, for example, developing ways of coding detailed incident reports or the collection of more in-depth information in a smaller sample of settings or sites. In the longer term, there is a need to implement strategies that improve the consistency and quality of current data inputs, as well as refine which data is routinely collected. This inevitably means that operational staff will need to work much more closely with researchers to determine which data need to be collected, when, and in what form. Investment in high-quality and fit-for-purpose data collection is critical to the success of efforts to apply a public health approach to prevention.

Prevention strategies are underpinned by an understanding of those risk or protective factors that cause prison violence and, of course, whether these are dynamic and thus potentially modifiable through intervention. While observing an association between a risk factor and prison violence provides insight into co-occurring characteristics, it puts us no nearer to understanding how that association might be altered. To do this, we have to make some assessment of which risk factors are causal—and this involves defining causation (which is different from the requirements for constructing a causal model). So, what do we really mean by the concept of a *cause*? Parascandola and Weed (2001) propose that the most useful definition comes from a probabilistic perspective of causation combined with the concept of counterfactuals (see also Rubin, 1974). This is where the risk factor *A* increases the probability of outcome *Y* and, when put together with counterfactuals, is explicitly related to a comparative condition. For example, the statement “if the staff-prisoner ratio had been higher, then this incident of prison violence would have been less likely to have occurred” implies a comparison condition in which a better staff–prisoner ratio would decrease the probability of prison violence. This scenario must be observed under *ceteris paribus*—all other things being equal. However, applying this explanation of causality brings us no

closer to distinguishing between correlates and causes of prison violence when we consider a field of evidence. Hill's (1965) "viewpoints" offers a useful perspective from which to think about what is more or less likely to be a cause. These viewpoints, which refer to risk factors but can also refer to a set of co-occurring factors or a single factor, include:

1. *Strength* of the association. If a risk factor (or set of risk factors) has a relative risk of increased prison violence of, say, 20-fold, it is much less likely that this increased risk is the result of confounding, information, or selection bias. A related perspective on "strength" might also consider the proportion of cases that have the risk factor/s. In other words—asking what proportion of people participating in prison violence have each risk factor. If the prevalence is very low, we then must ask if this is a factor that requires intervention as—even if it is "causal"—any intervention will prevent very few incidents of prison violence.
2. *Consistency*. Does the risk factor increase the probability of prison violence when measured in different ways across different settings, places, and populations? Convergence of evidence across different studies and designs will increase our confidence in the causal nature of a particular risk factor. The idea here is similar to triangulation, defined as integrating results from several different approaches to studying causation where each approach has different sources of bias (Lawlor, Tilling, & Davey-Smith, 2016).
3. *Temporality*. Did the risk factor occur before the outcome? This may be more challenging to ascertain when we consider that some risk factors (e.g., "unjust" treatment from prison staff) can be both a cause and result of violent incidents.
4. *Coherence*. Our interpretation of what causes prison violence should not contradict generally accepted facts (e.g., that the incidence of prison violence increases in the presence of poor prison conditions).
5. *Experiment*. In the face of uncertainty around what constitutes a cause, a robust test of causation would be to assess under quasi- or fully experimental conditions when all else is held equal, whether when we intervene on a particular factor or set of factors, does the incidence of prison violence decrease?

In addition to these ideas, Susser (1991) proposes a pragmatic assessment of causation—is the change in the outcome caused by the risk factor *consequential*? Hill (1965) further emphasises that even if we can study the effects of interventions to consider what is a cause, there is no formal test of statistical "significance" to help us decide if something is causal. In fact, leading researchers in epidemiology and statistics are clear that p-values cannot indicate whether a substantively important effect has been detected. In fact, the reduction of study findings into "significant" and "nonsignificant" has been labelled a "pernicious statistical practice" (Greenland et al., 2016, p. 348; see also Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016)—while p-values can tell us something about the random error, we must also consider confounding, selection, and information bias as sources of systematic error.

Although we have only considered a subset of the theories of causation in epidemiology, we might reasonably conclude that there are no clear-cut rules to declare one risk factor as causal and another as not. Deciding whether any factor (or set of factors) is causal requires a thoughtful assessment of the evidence for and against causation in relation to contemporary theoretical explanations of the problem. In the face of such uncertainty, we are generally in favour of testing the causal nature of intervention targets by either taking advantage of natural experiments or robustly evaluating intervention efforts.

Fortunately, we already know quite a lot about commonly occurring risk factors for violence, even when their status as causal factors is less clear. Steiner and Wooldredge (2020) have, for example, argued that three broad groups of predictors of prison violence had been identified:

pre-prison *attributes of individuals* (demographics, criminal histories, needs, social, and economic backgrounds), factors reflecting individual level *experiences during confinement* (e.g., victimisation, gang involvement, visitation, work, programs), and the *attributes of confinement* itself which operate at the macro level (e.g., administrative philosophies, workforce attributes, architecture, facility size, crowding, security levels).

(p.33; emphasis added)

A comprehensive set of risk factors that have received empirical support has also been reported in a review by McGuire (2018). These are summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Common Risk Factors for Prison Violence

<i>Category</i>	<i>Example</i>
Individual variables	Younger age, pre-existing record of prison violence, gang membership, ethnicity, gender.
Prison conditions	Feeling threatened and unsafe, having been mistreated by staff, having been wrongfully accused or punished, perceiving treatment as unjust, being subject to additional restrictions, having fewer work assignments, structured routines, or levels of programme participation, perceiving that rules are under-enforced, or that officers have less legitimacy.
Prison design and conditions	Assaults are more common in cell areas than in work areas, in prisons with a “telephone pole” design, and in areas with lower levels of guardianship. Staff-to-prisoner ratio. Poor prison conditions.
Administrative, procedural, and managerial factors	Time out of cells, freedom of movement, the availability of different resources and facilities, the extent of choice over daily activities, the experience and skill levels of frontline staff, higher security levels, how well organised the prison administration is, the extent to which residents experience prison processes as fair, inconsistency between staff.

*Adapted from McGuire, 2018.*

It is, of course, important to be able to distinguish between those risk factors which can be considered both causal *and* dynamic as opposed to those that only help us target potential cohorts for prevention strategies (i.e., static risk factors, such as ethnicity). For example, while age (younger) and gender (male) might be strong risk factors for prison violence, these are not modifiable. On the other hand, being mistreated by staff may be both a causal and potentially modifiable target through intervention. There are several other factors that might be considered modifiable (e.g., freedom of movement and time out of cell), but intervening to change these factors would require a level of organisational and system investment that may be unrealistic.

Along with identifying causal, dynamic risk factors for prison violence, it is instructive to also consider those that are potentially protective. Although there is no agreement on how protective factors might best be conceptualised, two different types have been identified by Lösel and Farrington (2012). First, a *direct* protective factor is a characteristic of an individual or environment that is associated with a decreased likelihood of specific problem behaviours. Second, a *buffering* protective factor is one that moderates the influence of risk factors. More work is needed to establish the role that both direct and buffering protective factors might play in prison violence. In our experience, however, protective factors derived from administrative data will often only reflect the inverse or absence of a risk factor (e.g., low education [a risk factor] vs higher education [a protective factor]). It is not clear how helpful this is in advancing our understanding of protective factors.

In summary, then, the logic behind understanding violence in this way is the identification of different risk and protective factors that are both causal *and* dynamic that can then provide meaningful targets for intervention. By this we mean that we can expect that any reduction in either the presence or intensity of these risk factors (or strengthening of protective factors that are also causal and dynamic) will help to reduce violence. And so, for example, it might be expected that improving the quality and consistency of the interactions that prison staff have with those in prison (i.e., addressing the risk factor “feeling unfairly treated”) will improve the perception of legitimacy and fairness, which, in turn, will result in fewer violent incidents triggered by perceived provocations of this type. However, moving from the identification and description of individual risk factors to developing a robust *explanation* of violence that can then guide prevention efforts will inevitably involve understanding how different risk factors interact with each other.

It is also important that data are used to test hypotheses derived from theoretical explanations of prison violence. Howard et al. (2020), for example, relate their findings about prison violence to routine activities theory, although alternative explanations that draw on the “importation” and “deprivation” models—and the idea that violence occurs in response to a range of “situational” factors—have been more commonly proposed. In brief, the importation model suggests that many people will come to prison with a propensity to act violently, whereas the deprivation theory sees violence as a response to the “pains” of imprisonment. Bottoms’ (1999) model of good order in prisons also places particular emphasis on the idea of legitimisation—perceptions of fairness and how prison routines, normative involvement

in projects that promote a degree of prisoner commitment to the goals of the institution, the nature and balance of incentives and disincentives, physical constraints and surveillance, and staff deployment approaches and skills can all play a role in violence prevention efforts (see Homel & Thompson, 2005). Finally, the situational model of prison control (Bottoms, Hay, & Sparks, 1995; Wortley, 2004) emphasises how the psychological processes that actively induce individuals to act violently relate to the experience of the prison environment. Wortley (2004), for example, suggests that a person will consider the *perceived risks* and *anticipated rewards* and punishments of violence, including an appraisal of the likely consequences. This introduces the idea of *opportunity reduction* by changing situational precipitators and regulators of violent behaviour. Each of these theories makes a set of assumptions about the causes of prison violence and identifies suggestions (hypotheses) about what might be an effective intervention in relation to addressing known risk factors (Table 5.3.).

### ***Describing What Works to Prevent Violence by Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Interventions***

Acknowledging that explanations of prison violence are complex and multi-faceted, it seems unlikely that any single preventive intervention will lead to effective and sustained reductions in violence. When designing interventions, the public health approach principle of *progressive universalism* can help us to think about different types of prevention. Progressive universalism is where some services are available to everyone (universal prevention), and more intensive services are available to those who need them the most (secondary and tertiary prevention).

*Universal (or primary) prevention* initiatives target whole populations or places and aim to prevent a given problem from developing or occurring in the first place. Universal initiatives are also a platform from which to screen the whole population and inform secondary prevention efforts. Examples of universal initiatives in prison violence prevention might be increasing more staff or reducing prisoner-to-staff ratios or structured work programmes. *Secondary prevention* targets at-risk individuals, groups, or places and aims to prevent or slow the transition from risk to manifest problem; finally, *tertiary prevention* targets those individuals or places identified as having already developed a given problem and aims to ameliorate associated harms and prevent any repetition of the problem.

A key tenet of the public health approach is that intervention is required *at every level of prevention* if it is to succeed. From this perspective, violence prevention should comprise a set of actions that impact everyone to reduce the factors that lead to violence; interventions targeted to those at risk to prevent violence from occurring and interventions when violence has already occurred. While implementing preventative interventions at every level is ideal, we also need evidence to show that each intervention can be reasonably expected to be successful in its own right. A recent systematic review (Day, Newton, Cooke, & Tamatea, 2022) of current evidence for preventing prison violence programmes revealed that robust empirical evidence to support the delivery of any single intervention or programme is

*Table 5.3 Plausible Theories of Prison Violence, Risk Factors, and Logical Interventions*

<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Assumptions</i>	<i>Example risk factors</i>	<i>Logical interventions (example)</i>
Importation model	People arrive in prison with a personal disposition to act violently or lack the skills to regulate their behaviour.	Younger age, history of violence, gang membership, male, impulsivity.	Programmes to assist people in regulating their behaviour in prison (conflict resolution, anger management).
Deprivation model	The prison environment is so impoverished that people act violently to access scarce resources.	Feeling unsafe, limited access to family and other supports.	To incentivise non-violent behaviour through privileges and rewards.
Legitimation model	People act violently in prison when they feel that they are not being treated fairly or with humanity or respect.	Being spoken to disrespectfully.	Strengthen the social climate of institutions, including the way in which staff interact with people in prison. Ensure transparency in service delivery, especially in relation to conflict management and resolution.
Situational model	People will act violently in prison when opportunities present, and they perceive it to be in their interests.	Poor surveillance.	Ensure that violence is detected and punished, as well as introduce incentives for non-violent behaviour.

somewhat limited. They concluded that considerable diversity exists across the available studies, with some interventions designed to elicit change at the level of the individual (e.g., through the psychological treatment of those who have acted violently or who are identified as presenting a significant risk) by focussing on changing the environment or the situations in which violence occurs (e.g., staffing, surveillance, and physical design) or, more widely, the social context of prison life (e.g., family visits). This diversity—and the absence of empirical data that examines the impact of more integrated, multi-modal prevention strategies—means that it is not currently possible to specify what evidence-based practice in prison violence prevention might look like. And, as Jaspers et al. (2022) have also noted, the results from evaluations of single interventions to prevent violence and/or threats of violence in prison have generally proven to be either inconclusive or produced

only small effects. In our view, this is an area of research that requires much more attention if the public health model is to be effectively implemented.

In the absence of robust evaluation evidence to support the selection of specific interventions to reduce prison violence, there is an opportunity to leverage and build on existing routine data collections in prisons and related systems to underpin our approach to the implementation and evaluation of multi-faceted interventions. There are examples of innovative and seemingly successful interventions that have resulted in low-violence prisons. For example, one maximum-security prison in New South Wales, Australia, experiences minimal violence. This might be attributable to high levels of surveillance that ensure that any act of violence will be observed, to an enhanced and more meaningful regime, or to the capacity to move people out to other prisons should violence be identified (Peebles, 2021). While in practice, each of these factors may be successful, there has been no formal evaluation. However, if we were able to address challenges to data collection and augment existing joined-up prison and adjacent agency data (e.g., police, courts, and health) with data on who did and did not receive the intervention (at an individual or site level), we may be in a better position to investigate the effectiveness of different approaches. Of course, the data demands to achieve this are high—we would also need to ensure that enough information on potential confounders at the individual and/or site level is collected to be able to draw any conclusions about effectiveness.

### ***Implementing Effective and Promising Interventions in a Wide Range of Settings***

Consistent with a public health approach, Cooke (2019) has suggested that any violence prevention strategy should involve a broad range of responses that address how individual actors/perpetrators interact with the physical, social, technological, and cultural aspects of their environment. In an important sense, prison violence is understood here as a product of functional social ecologies—spaces where people, the presence and flow of resources, and the built environment inter-relate. This also suggests, as we have noted above, that single-factor perspectives of violence (such as those that focus exclusively on individual risk)—while elegant in their apparent simplicity—may also result in largely ineffective solutions to what is inevitably a complex social problem.

Given the challenges in implementing a strategy spanning all levels of the public health approach to violence prevention, we would argue that the success of any prevention attempts will ultimately rest on the ability to engage all stakeholders. To put this another way, for any prevention strategy to have any realistic prospect of success, staff *and* people in prison will need to have a shared commitment to change. In this respect, it might be noted that while for most people violence prevention is a laudable goal, there may be some who nonetheless are invested in the status quo or perhaps even personally benefit from violence. This might include, for example, those who use violence to secure scarce resources, protect themselves against bullying, affiliate with peers, or perhaps “punish” those who are seen as deserving. It may even be that some members of staff also view violence as a legitimate or appropriate means to maintain good order and discipline. Early research

in this area, for example, noted an (unspoken) cooperation between residents and staff, whereby staff overlooked certain illicit behaviour in return for imposing control in other areas (Sykes & Messinger, 1960). The point we would like to make here, then, is that, for at least some people, the perceived benefits of violence may well outweigh the costs and that we cannot simply assume that everyone will see the need for violence prevention initiatives, feel remorseful about acting violently or consider it as particularly problematic.

It is also clear that any intervention will need to be supported by policy. This might relate to *communication/marketing* (using print, electronic, telephonic, or broadcast media to promote prevention), *guidelines* (documents that recommend or mandate practice), *fiscal* (to reduce or increase the financial cost), *regulation* (establishing rules or principles of behaviour or practice), *legislation* (making or changing laws), *environmental/social planning* (designing and/or controlling the physical or social environment), and *service provision* (delivering a service). One example of the scope for preventing violence in this way is provided by Day, Tamatea, and Geia (2021) in their discussion of the development of practice guidelines to improve the cultural safety of prisons. They drew on Stanley, Baron, and Robertson's (2020) argument that a practice framework serves a number of different functions, such as explaining the organisation's general approach and purpose and setting out a clear commitment to ethical decision making. A practice framework can also reinforce an agreed set of practice methods and approaches while facilitating access to relevant research, practice, and discipline knowledge to support service delivery. And finally, a good practice framework will invite reflexivity about practice, offering a basis for both professional supervision and quality assurance.

Day et al. (2021) go on to describe a culturally safe practice response when two people in prison have been involved in a fight in a prison in Aotearoa, New Zealand. They propose that any response to this scenario should certainly involve safety and separation but would also recognise that an incident might represent more than a mere physical altercation. For example, issues such as a person's *mana* (to have *mana* is to have great authority, presence, or prestige)—especially where this has been violated, need to be considered as part of the overall picture when responding to violent behaviour in these contexts. For instance, a fight that erupts in a prison yard between two men who have been identified as affiliated with rival gangs might be best conceptualised as gang-motivated insofar as territoriality or flow of contraband may be involved. However, it may also be the case that the particular incident can be traced to tensions beyond the prison itself, such as the partner of one *mauhere* ending the relationship and entering a new relationship with a member of the rival gang represented by the other person. Thus, an effective practice response would involve distinguishing between maintaining dominance (a gang issue) and saving face (a *mana* issue).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explored the implications of adopting a public health approach to prison violence prevention. Building on the WHO's violence

prevention approach, we have outlined considerations in (1) defining the problem, including the scope and scale of prison violence and the outcomes we want to achieve by reducing it; (2) ways to understand why prison violence occurs; (3) designing, implementing, and evaluating efforts to reduce prison violence; and (4) implementing multi-faceted preventative interventions. We have also identified numerous challenges to implementing a public health approach to prison violence, including the need to invest in routinely collected high-quality data that can be joined up with adjacent agencies, connecting data to theory, and the lack of an existing evidence base on effective preventative interventions. We have, albeit cautiously, nonetheless suggested that the public health model provides a framework from which to develop and implement a comprehensive violence prevention strategy. However, it is clear that all of this requires significant engagement with stakeholders—from people in prison to Ministers—and sustained investment in both reducing violence within prisons and the longer-term goals of successful rehabilitation and reintegration.

McDonald (2000) also reminds us that the public health approach that has been applied across all health problems (from eradicating a communicable disease to reducing the morbidity associated with other diseases) contrasts with the way in which the criminal justice system works. The criminal justice system's focus is on retribution, deterrents (general and specific), incapacitation, and rehabilitation. For understandable reasons, this mindset permeates the prison setting and often results in the adoption of responses to prison violence that are similarly retributive and based on incapacitation (e.g., the use of protection and segregation following violence). The public health approach introduces a different focus, and this may well prove challenging for correctional agencies, especially in relation to the imperative to invest in primary and secondary prevention as well as programmes that respond to violence after it has occurred.

The adoption of a public health prevention strategy resonates strongly in countries like Aotearoa, New Zealand, where public policy focuses attention on early intervention initiatives that promote social development and the impacts of a range of negative social indicators that drive contact with the criminal justice system. This reflects a national policy discourse that places community wellbeing and responses to inequality at the centre of government service delivery (see Stanley & Monod de Froideville, 2020) in a context which sees the continuing over-representation of Māori and other cultural minority groups in prisons. And so, for us, the adoption of the approach to prevention described in this chapter can help to reframe the problem of prison violence in terms of the vulnerabilities that arise from multiple structural, institutional, and socio-cultural harms. However, we would also caution that what works in one setting may well look quite different from what will work in another and that a careful assessment of the context in which violence occurs should be undertaken before deciding what universal, secondary, and tertiary prevention interventions might be most successful. Our conclusion then is that, while ambitious, the public health approach may be a platform from which to inform broad policy changes and lead to the identification of new interventions to prevent prison violence. These should be supported by rigorous evaluation that

feeds into a try-test-learn system that contributes to improving outcomes for prison populations.

### Key Learning Points

- The public health approach involves four key steps: defining the problem, establishing why violence occurs, describing what works, and implementing effective and promising interventions.
- The quality and integrity of data about violence is critical to the success of the prevention efforts and should be checked by returning “data-to-source”.
- Careful assessment of which risk factors are causal is needed before developing interventions that can be implemented across each level of the ecology.
- Progressive universalism is important—where some services are available to everyone (universal prevention), and more intensive services are available to those who need them the most (secondary and tertiary prevention).
- Prevention efforts always need to be culturally informed and supported by policy.

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## **Part II**

# **Violence in Context**



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# 6 New Zealand Prison Violence

## History, Prevalence, and Organisational Responses

*Armon Tamatea and Nick Wilson*

One afternoon on 29 December 2020, approximately 20 prisoners located in a prison yard at the high-security “top jail” facility within Waikeria Prison lit fires and began to riot. While a number surrendered, other prisoners joined in, climbing onto the roof, smashing windows, and setting fires within the building itself. All remaining prisoners in the building were relocated to other areas of the prison or to other sites overnight. By the following morning, 17 prisoners remained on the roof and continued to threaten staff safety, damage the facility, gain access to restricted areas, and start fires until their surrender on 3 January 2021 (Department of Corrections, 2021). A few months prior to this incident, an OPCAT<sup>1</sup> report found the prison in “very poor condition” and that the prison’s design was criticised for making the supervision of prisoners difficult. Investigators found issues with hygiene, as well as significant influence from gangs, and noted that levels of violence were high in the high-security facility (Boshier, 2020).

This event captured public attention and was the leading news story in New Zealand for over a week. It also sparked political discussion as to whether the situation constituted a riot or a *protest* (Membery, 2022). In any case, the disruptions at Waikeria served as a public and visible reminder that institutional violence has been part of the criminal justice legacy of New Zealand. Similarly, efforts to manage and prevent violence in carceral settings have also been part of this narrative.

New Zealand, as a small nation, has a high rate of incarceration. There were approximately 164 people in prison per 100,000 New Zealanders in 2021. By contrast, more than half (53%) of all countries and territories have rates below 150 per 100,000, with the average world prison population being 140 per 100,000 in 2021 (Fair & Walmsley, 2021). Conversely, Aotearoa, New Zealand,<sup>2</sup> also has the advantage of implementing (or, if need be, dis-establishing) initiatives rapidly. This ability to mobilise resources in tandem with sensitivity to research and evaluation has positioned New Zealand’s correctional system as a model of effective prisoner management, and it provides an example that those from other countries can learn from. However, violence has been an intertwined and long-standing aspect of the corrections context in this country and has resulted in piecemeal and crisis-driven responses that have failed to address systemic drivers of prison violence (Newbold, 2008).

This chapter provides a historical view of prison violence and institutional responses in a New Zealand context. Taking an ecological perspective, we outline what was learned from each incident, what was (and wasn't) implemented, and why violence in prison settings has persisted as a wicked problem.

### **The New Zealand Prison Context**

The first background issue for the reader to bear in mind in considering the Aotearoa prison landscape is to understand that the country comprises two islands named (with great inventiveness) the North and South islands (Te Ika a Maui and Te Wai Pounamu). The islands are long and relatively narrow, meaning it is roughly 2,000 kilometres from the tip of the North Island down to the bottom of the South, with the majority of the population resident in the North (3,925,800; 77%; Stats NZ, 2023). To cope with this geographical spread, Ara Poutama<sup>3</sup> has 18 prison facilities located from Northland down to the bottom of the South Island in Invercargill, with a cluster of three prisons in Auckland, our largest city. All but one of the prisons are state-operated, and three of the prison facilities are designed for women, with the largest located in South Auckland. Of note, the majority of these prison facilities are old buildings, but seven have been built in the last 10 years, and many of the older sites have new units built to replace facilities that are no longer fit for purpose. The authors have noticed a trend over the last 10 years for Ara Poutama to increasingly look to providing services related to reintegration and health needs rather than relying on other government departments, both due to a scarcity of services and in recognition of the speciality nature of the imprisoned population.

The changing nature of the New Zealand prison population and trends within are both exciting in terms of the reduced numbers imprisoned but also challenging when there is consideration of the increased risk and multiple needs and high risk the remaining prisoners present with. In recent years, the prison population had receded dramatically from a peak of over 10,600 (remand and sentenced prisoners) in 2018 to just over 7,200 in 2022 (Dept of Corrections, 2022)—countering muster predictions that indicated steady growth and the need for new facilities. During this period, the government invested in *Hōkai Rangī*,<sup>4</sup> the Department of Corrections' strategic five-year direction. In addition, changes in sentencing, increasing community sentences, as well as raising the age from 17 to 18 at which youth were seen by the Youth Court rather than adult courts also impacted imprisonment rates. The trend in New Zealand has been one of an increased proportion of those on remand in prison with all the attendant issues that this volatile unsettled population brings to prison management. The decline in imprisonment has been for the sentenced, not for those on remand, particularly accused remand. Diving deeper into the current prison muster also finds that the decline in the sentences has meant changes in the proportion of prisoners on long sentences, with those on indeterminate sentences (typically for murder and Preventive Detention) now making up 18% of the population ( $n = 850$ ). While the number of Māori men in the overall muster has reduced over the last four years, the percentage in the muster has increased from around 50.5% to 53%; other ethnicity groups either stayed stable or reduced in the

same time period. The prison muster also has more serving sentences for violence rather than dishonesty, driving, and drug offences.

Once imprisoned, the majority of prisoners serve their sentence in minimum to low-medium-security settings (84%), with only 2.2% held in maximum security. Paremoremo (Auckland men's) Prison holds almost all maximum-security prisoners as well as a number of those classified as High. It is noted that this prison had 49% indicated with a staff assault risk flag (mean across prisons 28%) and 52% with an active gang membership flag (mean across prisons 39%). What is of particular concern is the number of High and Maximum security classified prisoners who are "stuck" in these higher-security settings, reducing their ability to engage in available rehabilitation and treatment options while reinforcing their violent behaviour and the risk of them being the victim of violence or perpetrating violence against other prisoners and staff.

So, what is the impact of these changes and reductions to the Aotearoa prison muster on the prison environment? This means we have more men with sentences for violence on longer sentences grouped together into fewer operating prison spaces as units are closed or repurposed as the muster falls. These men—and, to a reduced degree, women—placed into the care of Ara Poutama as prisoners typically have more wellness and trauma needs and personality-related interpersonal problems. In terms of treatment, they present multiple needs (both risk- and other non-risk-related needs) with significant general and specific responsivity barriers to reliable engagement in therapeutic and reintegration needs.

### **History of Violence in New Zealand Prisons**

As can be seen, violence in prisons is not a new phenomenon in New Zealand—nor is a conservative Departmental response. Accounts of prisoner unrest and aggression on a significant scale were noted in Mt Eden Prison as far back as the 1930s, where police reinforcements were deployed to control prisoners in a united refusal to return to the yard (Newbold, 1989). One of the most notorious prison-wide disruptions occurred, again at Mt Eden Prison, on 20 July 1965. Two masked prisoners clubbed a warder who surprised them while escaping. Several more cells were opened before the prisoners set fire to the central dome. In the fray, additional prisoners were freed to avoid asphyxiation. While firemen struggled to put out fires, rioting prisoners showered them with bricks, crates, books, and Molotov cocktails. Eventually, the firemen were withdrawn from the buildings to prevent serious injuries. A cordon of armed police, custodial staff, and troops set up a perimeter around the prison. The riot ended the following morning when the prisoners surrendered. After having rendered the then-83-year-old prison to a blackened shell, all of the 293 prisoners were detained in custody (McLintock, 1966).

The frequency of prison riots increased in the intense international political climate of the 1960s and 1970s (Newbold, 2007). Riots occurred in Paremoremo, Mt Eden, Mt Crawford, and Paparua over the years 1969–1975 (Taylor, 2019).

The attributed causes were typical deprivation factors and included overcrowding and poor treatment of prisoners. According to Newbold (1989), solidarity with a powerful social code amongst the maximum-security prisoners was reinforced by experiences after 1965, as was a repressive style of administration. From the outset, then, there was prisoner resistance, violence, and rising tension resulting in official inquiries and a new managerial regime. Relaxation of control brought a weakening of overt resistance, and the mid-1970s were the most tranquil period the prison had known. However, a changing social climate outside the prison changed the relationships among prisoners within it; in particular, prisoner solidarity became fragmented by the growing prominence of gang affiliations. A new phase of resistance, violence, and repression began in the late 1970s. With the prison population disproportionately tilted toward Māori and Pasifika (Hook, 2009; Webb, 2009), as well as the broader racial tensions in New Zealand society during that era, it was argued that there was a racialised dimension to these events (Taylor, 2019).

By the 1980s, prisoner violence was seen to have become more serious and more frequently observed, with much of it regarded as “explosive, individualised ... gang related” (Newbold, 2007, p. 80), resulting in global changes to the prison’s organisation and routines (Meek, 1986). In April 1986, Sir Clinton Roper was commissioned with the task of investigating the extent and types of violence and violent crime in New Zealand. The report canvassed social services (e.g., education, police, and prisons), domestic (family violence), as well as sports and cultural (e.g., gangs and televised violence) domains. Tellingly, the committee signalled the need for corrections to avoid simplistic solutions to interpersonal violence, commenting that violence “can not be eliminated simply by placing people on treatment programmes. Any act of violence is a complex human response that occurs in a context that is specific for each individual offender and victim” (Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence, 1987, p. 115). Medical, mental health, and cultural services were recommended as essential services in prisons to reduce violence in these sites.

In 1987, Sir Clinton Roper again headed a committee to review the entire organisation, practices, and policies of the prison system. The ensuing report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into the Prison Systems (1989) advocated a more liberal position that if “society demands both the punishment and reformation of offenders then we must accept that resources must be allocated to each of these aims” (p. 4). Although a recommendation by the Committee to transform New Zealand prisons into semi-custodial “habilitation centers” was rejected by the government as unworkable (Newbold & Eskridge, 1994), the restructuring of the New Zealand corrections system was informed by *He Ara Hou*<sup>5</sup>—a national strategy that promoted greater professionalism within the system, recognised the multicultural needs of prisoners, and elevated the role of rehabilitation programmes (Newbold & Eskridge, 1994). Accordingly, special treatment units<sup>6</sup> emerged over the 1990s and 2000s to target prisoners with specific offence profiles (e.g., men who have sexually offended against children).

In 2009, the Department of Corrections conducted a review of the nature, location, and timing of prison violent incidents in New Zealand and found that incidents were increasing and occurred on a daily basis (Policy, Strategy &

Research, 2009). This study found that gang members were overrepresented in incidents of prison violence; these gangs were typically nationwide organised groups such as the Mongrel Mob and Black Power. In addition to many being gang members, the perpetrators of prison violence were significantly younger (40% under 25 years of age) and were of Māori descent. The majority of violent incidents occurred in remand or maximum-security units. The attacks on staff usually involved manual assaults (e.g., punching) and were believed to be opportunistic with little planning but were more likely to occur after prisoners were unlocked in the morning, with a quarter of incidents happening as prisoners were moved around the prison. However, as informative as the research was on the nature and location of violent incidents, no information on precursors to the incidents was provided, and staff were only recommended to receive additional training on conflict resolution. While the report had hoped to use mapping of incidents to predict where these were more likely to occur, no clear predictive picture was possible.

One consequence of an increasingly more violent prison environment has been an acceptance or normalisation of violence—unless it is directed against staff or it results in serious injury or death and the resulting negative media publicity (see examples below). The authors found that, in practice, in higher and maximum-security settings, where the base rate of violence was high, the prison staff ignored violence that would be reported in lower-security units. One prisoner summed this up to an author that “here [Maximum] they leave us alone unless we try to escape, or they are assaulted” (Wilson & Tamatea, 2010). Often violence is minimised as “sparring” when, in reality, it is a *fight*. Violence is managed in these higher-security settings through the use of prisoner isolation and high physical security, limited unlock, the use of specially trained squads of prison officers “all kitted up”, and by tracking gang numbers to ensure a “balance” across different groups. This means, in terms of effectiveness, that containment is the strategy of choice rather than intervention. It is noted that prison officers receive a far greater level of training in control and restraint procedures and the use of weapons than in de-escalation. That being said, in prison contexts, violence perpetrators are not always prisoners and sometimes intended solutions produce new problems.

In the following sections, we briefly review a number of significant events in the history of violence in New Zealand prisons and discuss what we have learned about the contributing factors, the response, and what this can tell us about understanding institutional violence.

***“The only thing separating these prison officers from inmates is the style of their uniforms”—Mangaroa, 1993***

Situated on the east coast of the North Island, Mangaroa Prison (also known as Hawke’s Bay Regional Prison) was opened in 1989. By the mid-1990s, the site housed just over 200 prisoners and employed approximately 140 staff (Logan, 1993). The site was largely composed of medium-security units, a youth unit, a minimum-security unit, and a remand unit. Mangaroa was one of the then-new

sites that was built in the wake of the Penal Policy Review Committee's regionalisation proposals, which promoted stronger links to the community through Iwi,<sup>7</sup> hapu,<sup>8</sup> and whānau<sup>9</sup> ties through work and recreational programmes—which would have been better suited to a minimum security.

Uncharacteristically, New Zealand was included in a report on human rights violations and concerns by Amnesty International (1994) on the basis of several complaints from prisoners regarding ill-treatment while in custody. A Ministerial Inquiry was launched to identify specific causes (but interestingly, not the specific incidents themselves) with a focus on management practices, organisation, and staffing. The report from a Ministerial Committee of Inquiry (Logan, 1993) noted the nature of the allegations and included:

- Assaults on prisoners—these ranged from a “cuff to the head after a personal remark to a series of attacks lasting several days” (p. 32).
- Degradation—staff misuse of confidential information to ridicule prisoners.
- Neglect of prisoners known to be suicidal.

Disturbingly, some custodial officers, who were parochially known as “designated hitters”, were allegedly directed by prison authorities to beat prisoners. Furthermore, staff corruption was noted and included drug dealing, contraband, and inappropriate relationships between some staff and prisoners.

On one level, violence was seen to be an interaction between so-called riotous prisoners as well as the staff who had developed an acceptance of the use of violence to maintain order in the institution. However, the ability and competence of staff to manage violence in non-combative ways was regarded as variable across the site and was seen as reflecting inadequate recruitment, retention, and promotion procedures, which meant factors like aptitudes and personality were not sufficiently assessed. Furthermore, the report indicated that exposure to guile, intimidation, or bribery by prisoners resulted in corruption among some staff. Furthermore, a collective attitude among staff that conflated discipline with aggression supported and promoted the use of force as an acceptable and expected means of controlling prisoners. The assaults were conducted by nominated staff with executive support and occurred in cells away from other prisoners (e.g., punishment-pound cells/isolation), which would have reduced the likelihood of escalation or even intervention. Although these issues were not isolated to Mangaroa, the then-recent introduction of reforms (i.e., *He Ara Hou*) opened opportunities for staff and prisoners to relate better, but insufficient guidelines resulted in leadership and competence drift. Lastly, a high presence of drugs in the nearby community meant lots of opportunities for money to be made by staff and dealers.

The Logan Report (1993) recommended the establishment of an independent prison complaints authority, a review of prison staff recruitment, and improved training for staff. The following year, Amnesty International (1995) reported that 12 prison officers were dismissed by the Department of Justice after an official investigation into allegations of cruelty at the prison. Six of these prison officers were reinstated to serve at other prisons, and all of them were reportedly paid

lump sums—rumoured to be part of an undisclosed agreement between the prison officers and the Department to avert personal grievance actions by officers against their dismissal. However, the Department was reported to have referred the findings of the internal inquiry into ill-treatment in Mangaroa Prison to the police for possible further investigation. In a 1994 report, the Detective Inspector involved in the investigation expressed disgust at the actions of the prison officers, not only in the seriousness of the assaults but also at the collusion designed to undermine the course of justice, adding that “in terms of morals and criminality, the only thing separating these prison officers from inmates is the style of their uniforms” (Beaten prison officer wishes he had sued, 2000). In 2000, the Crown issued an apology, regretting the actions which gave rise to the claims. Significant changes were subsequently implemented to prevent similar situations, such as what occurred at Mangaroa, from happening again (New Zealand Government, 2000).

***“There’s no place for soft cocks in this unit”—Paparua, 1999***

Also known as Christchurch Men’s Prison, Paparua was established in the Canterbury region in 1915, catering to approximately 15 prisoners in its first year and by the late 1990s, was housing over 700. In 1999, the Department of Corrections commissioned a 280-bed remand block (Paparua Remand Centre; PRC) at the prison. However, a disagreement over staffing levels at the PRC ensued between Paparua officers and the Department. The PRC’s design was based on a unit at the Silverwater Correctional Centre in Sydney, Australia. During their visit to Silverwater, a delegation of Corrections and the Public Service Association<sup>10</sup> were impressed with Silverwater’s specialised emergency response unit and considered that replicating the unit would effectively solve the staffing-level issue at the PRC (Symon, 2012). Consequently, the Canterbury Emergency Response Unit (CERU) was formed, a full-time response team established to deal with any upheavals that might arise at Paparua. Selected from the ranks of prison guards, the 15 men and 1 woman were authorised to conduct strip searches of prisoners and seize property and drugs from inmates and civilians without having to record their actions (Gardiner, 2002). The then-president of the Howard League for Penal Reform, Peter Williams QC, commented that if prisoners were brutalised that they were likely to commit more heinous offences, yet there was a deliberate policy in the 1990s to remove privileges and get tough (Gardiner, 2002).

The CERU allegedly agitated and harassed prisoners, waking them in the night and aggravating them, dragging out of cells anyone who spoke to them in a way that was deemed disrespectful, and locking them in punishment cells. The CERU moved from jail to jail, including men’s and women’s institutions, using prisoners as part of their training operations to “test compliance” and impose their will. Outside jails, they were reported to have searched visitors and their cars for drugs, weapons, and alcohol—some of which disappeared. Any reaction would lead to CERU members storming cells and seizing the prisoner (Gardiner, 2002).

In November 1999, a prisoner at Paparua died of an apparent heart attack as a result of being overpowered by five guards and restrained. Following escalating

disruptive behaviour in his cell, members of the CERU, dressed in full riot gear, had entered the prisoner's cell to relocate him to a more secure area of the prison, at which point a brawl took place, and the prisoner died (Martin, 2000). The staff members involved were cleared of any responsibility in the prisoner's death; however, a Christchurch coroner's inquest concluded that the prisoner probably would not have died if the violent struggle had not occurred (Keen, 2002).

Ailsa Duffy QC was appointed by the State Services Commission to conduct a review of alleged mishandling by the Department of Corrections into matters concerning the CERU. Her report included:

- Unlawful actions.
- Unlawful strip searching and use of handcuffs.
- Denial of medical treatment subsequent to an injury incurred while being restrained.
- Injury.

Perhaps most conspicuous in this case is the low monitoring of the behaviour and activities of the CERU (Duffy, 2004). A Corrections Department investigation in 2001 revealed that, among other things, unit members had tampered with timesheets, inappropriately obtained and used funds, and had failed to sufficiently record and secure confiscated contraband (Newbold, 2007). Further, a toxic and macho culture had emerged within the squad.<sup>11</sup> The CERU were also found to conduct loud training sessions deliberately in earshot of the prisoners and stormed through units after lockup, ostensibly to unsettle and intimidate them. The haphazard formation and self-evolution of the CERU from a temporary support unit for the PRC to a specialised crime prevention and emergency response unit was characterised by poor governance, the absence of a clear line of management, and a subsequently poor line of accountability. Symon (2012) noted that the lack of a proper leadership structure meant there was ambiguity around who was in charge of key operations at the prison and allowed the CERU to run itself virtually with its own rules.

After only a year in service, the unit, notoriously labelled the "goon squad", was disbanded in June 2000 (Symon, 2012). The activities of the CERU prompted a damning report written for the State Services Commissioner (Duffy, 2004), which found that the unit's activities regularly and knowingly departed from official procedures. In addition to breaches of the Department's code of conduct and the law, the findings of the report concerned a lack of clarity about whether the unit was intended to be temporary or permanent, a lack of a clear line of management or accountability (including financial accountability), and that the Department's responses to allegations of inappropriate behaviour in the CERU were inadequate. Furthermore, although the ostensible purpose of the CERU was to resolve officers' demands for additional support in the PRC, the unit's establishment was considered inappropriate for this purpose, and its formation was not documented. A number of prisoner's complaints regarding treatment by the CERU were upheld by the Ombudsmen's Office. Nonetheless, all staff involved with the unit continued to

work for the Department of Corrections (Martin, 2001). Senior department managers and eight other members of the squad were called to give evidence. At the hearing, a squad deputy leader reacted to one of the members not coping after the aforementioned death of a prisoner, where they were advised to “harden up” because “there's no place for soft cocks in this unit”. Police, the Defence Force and Customs claimed to have no awareness of the allegations until the court case and launched internal inquiries of their own.

***“Blood everywhere, all over the walls and floor”—Paremoremo, 2008***

In the late 2000s, New Zealand’s only dedicated maximum-security units were situated at Paremoremo Prisons’ East Division in Albany, north of Auckland. These units were opened in 1969 and were based on the design of Marion Penitentiary in the US with similar single-cell (i.e., front of cells has bars rather than a solid door), high-security, and a telegraph pole pattern (Newbold, 1989). The three blocks each housed up to 48 maximum-security prisoners across two levels. The plan for safer prisoner management at East Division recommended a review of staffing levels, suitability of staff, contracting other prisons to rapidly house prisoners who were reclassified as being maximum-security in an effort to counter “siltage”, infrastructural changes, and identification of specific staff training needs (Burns, 2008).

In July 2008, a custodial officer was hospitalised with serious injuries after being stabbed repeatedly in the face and chest with an aluminium shank by two prisoners after one was reportedly upset over being denied a phone call. According to an eyewitness, “there was total commotion, blood everywhere, all over the walls and floor. You wouldn’t have believed what a mess it was”, adding that the officer was saved only by the quick intervention of two other staff (Cook, 2008). The following month, prisoners were locked in their cells after four prisoners were stabbed. Although no fatalities occurred, two of the injured prisoners were taken to hospital. (Prison in lockdown after stabbings, 2008). As can be seen, these incidents formed part of a pattern of serious violence at Paremoremo during this period, as noted by the following:

- January 2008: Convicted killer Dean Shepherd stabbed triple murderer and fellow prisoner William Bell through the eye.
- July 2008: A prison officer was stabbed in the eye and head by a prisoner.
- September 2008: Two prison officers were badly beaten by a group of prisoners—One was attacked by five prisoners, who dragged him into the laundry and beat him before they assaulted another officer who came to help.
- December 2008: Graeme Burton (at the time, serving 26 years non-parole for murder while on parole for a previous murder conviction) was found guilty of attempted murder after seriously injuring gang member Dwayne Marsh in Paremoremo.
- January 2009: Convicted murderer and prison escapee Gary McKinley stabbed a fellow prisoner up to six times in the neck after he had scared a feral cat the pair had befriended.

- March 2009. Tue Fa'avae, 23, was found dead in a shower block. An autopsy revealed that he had been beaten to death.

As a maximum-security institution, prisoners with histories of institutional violence are the norm and allocated there as a result of the internal security risk system. Further, many prisoners in these units would have had long histories of antisocial behaviour and react to situations of frustration or anger using violence with little warning (Cook, 2008). Furthermore, gang members were highly represented in these blocks and their aggressive activity had long been considered a major determinant of violence (Wilson & Tamatea, 2013).

The PRISM (see Chapter 4—this volume) was introduced to New Zealand for the first time as a methodology to understand the situational context in which violence occurred in this institution. The following were observations made by the present authors (see also Wilson & Tamatea, 2013). At the social level, violence was considered to be a norm in maximum security. Some staff expressed that the hazardous and disruptive nature of maximum-security prisoners was a likely deterrent for most prospective employees. Further, no specific training was noted to be in place over and above the standard suite of correctional training that is offered to all staff (e.g., control and restraint). However, staff were generally seen by prisoners as approachable and appropriate, with minimal reports of antagonistic behaviour. Indeed, some prisoners stated that the wellbeing of staff had an effect on prisoners (“when staff are affected, we are affected”). The presence of gang members and young prisoners, particularly in high concentrations, was considered by staff and prisoners across all units as highly likely to set conditions for violent behaviour among prisoners (typically, gang membership is closely monitored on each cell landing by staff ... and indeed by the prisoners!).

A general consensus amongst respondents (staff and prisoners) indicated that the physical environments across all blocks were adequately resourced with regard to basic human needs (e.g., noise, temperature, natural light, fresh air, and social interaction). This also reflected the general acceptance on the part of prisoners that the prevailing conditions were tolerated (if not expected) given that they were located in a maximum-security prison. It was not uncommon for collective punishment to be imposed on all prisoners in a given block largely due to the actions of a few disruptive individuals who tended to be younger and serving much shorter sentences than the majority. Educational advancement, library use, cultural interventions, church attendance, gym activity, and employment were seen as already-scarce resources that appeared to diminish due to poor prisoner behaviour (e.g., destroying property and equipment, and violence when supervision is low) and institutional impositions (e.g., withdrawal of resources/access as a punishment).

Some procedural changes intended to solve security and wellbeing issues inadvertently created new problems. For instance, it was noted that contact visits were prohibited for prisoners in these units, which reduced the availability of drugs in the prison but also prevented family connection. An imposed compulsory yard time was also seen as an infringement on some prisoners' perceived freedoms insofar as it limited their opportunity to take “time out” from other prisoners.

Lastly, the system itself introduced broader issues. For instance, the then-current practice was to not provide rehabilitative opportunities in the form of treatment programmes for prisoners in high-medium or maximum-security institutions. Instead, intensive treatment facilities are available for those able to achieve a lower security classification. It should also be acknowledged that these buildings had been designed and built decades earlier but not with treatment options for prisoners in mind. Furthermore, the Department had firmly committed to a risk-centric view of offender management, so “risk” became the frame for prioritising and managing violence.

Following an investigation and Court appearances for the assailants of the assaults on staff members, the prison workers’ union<sup>12</sup> had called for increased protection for custodial staff as they claimed that prisoners have become better armed than those charged with looking after them. Then-Chief Executive of Corrections, Barry Matthews, ordered the independent Prison Inspectorate to review Paremoremo’s high-security wing. The Department also began reviewing its policies for the management of maximum-security prisoners. Prison management also introduced its own project, called Safer In the East, which involved the management working with staff to assist with maintaining basic security practices and a clearer focus on the active management of prisoners. Routine changes, such as time out of cells for exercise, meant that smaller numbers of prisoners were transitioned at a time. Environmental changes, such as sheets of clear plastic, have been fitted to open-fronted cells to prevent hot water, urine, and burning paper from being thrown at staff.

***“Rioting Inmates Smiled and Waved at Cameras”—Spring Hill, 2013***

The Spring Hill Corrections Facility (SHCF) is located near Meremere in Waikato<sup>13</sup> and is one of the country’s biggest prisons. It was one of four prisons that opened in the mid-2000s. Unlike previous prisons that have been built with containment and security as a focus, SHCF was designed with rehabilitation and recidivism reduction outcomes in mind. As such, the site has a distinctive and highly secure perimeter wall that encloses a large open space containing a range of separate buildings for accommodation, rehabilitative units, and services.

One day in June 2013, 27 prisoners took control of a high-security unit<sup>14</sup> at about 11 am where they set fire to two cell blocks and inflicted structural damage to the buildings with improvised weapons. Ambulance staff who were reportedly called to treat a wounded prisoner encountered chaotic scenes and were forced to retreat. The prisoners began throwing mattresses and rubbish onto pyres in a courtyard and forced Corrections staff away. Custodial officers were brought in from as far away as Northland to join the armed police and dog squads in trying to control the situation. In a phone call to a national TV news station, one prisoner gloated about causing “chaos” and “carnage”. Other prisoners appeared to celebrate as they waved at cameras with wooden stakes before they were eventually brought under control just after 8 pm. Three Corrections officers and two prisoners were injured (Weekes & Carroll, 2013).

An internal report of the Inquiry (Beales et al., 2014) into the riot at SHFC identified a number of contributing factors, in particular:

- The availability of home brew was considered by the review team to be the most significant precipitating factor contributing to the initiation of the riot. In the previous months, staff in the adjacent unit had discovered a number of home brews. While staff were aware of these finds and had a plan to escalate the frequency of searches for home brew and even shut down the unit upon future discoveries, this had yet to be carried out on the day of the riot.
- Fighting between two prisoners which necessitated staff intervention on two occasions. It was alleged that one of the staff pushed a prisoner away after they were struck by them. However, the prisoners believed the officer had assaulted the prisoner.
- Organisational factors included a general lack of capability within the management team that was also considered to be “divided and dysfunctional in some respects” (p. 28), with poor leadership for prison staff.
- As mentioned, SHCF was originally designed with a focus on rehabilitation rather than a prison with a focus on security and control. However, the changes made in the late 2000s to increase the capacity for a higher number of prisoners involved the introduction of double-bunking of a number of cells impacted the operating philosophy of the prison. The Inquiry panel considered that opportunities to increase physical security or by local management to appropriately adjust to these changes were not taken by senior management at the time. In other words, a “significant operational risk was created by having a high density of unmotivated, high security prisoners in a site that was not designed to hold them” (p. 29).
- The riot occurred in a unit that held a number of “unmotivated, difficult and disruptive prisoners” (p. 29) who were predominately gang affiliated. Gang membership was regarded as a risk factor in and of itself, whereby such individuals were considered—more likely than non-gang members—to “involve themselves in incidents of prison violence and disorder, and once a serious incident commences, gang members are more likely to feel obliged to join in, rather than distance themselves from the fray” (p. 29). The site was not considered to be physically designed to contain a high proportion of high-security gang members; accordingly, the mix of prisoners was seen as a contributor to the outbreak—and escalation—of a full-scale riot.

The Inquiry report recommended specific measures taken to prevent future such incidents at this site and included (from Beales et al., 2014): (1) reducing the ability of prisoners to make home brew (including alcohol-free hand sanitisers and limiting the amount of fruit that prisoners can access), (2) reducing the numbers of high-security prisoners held at SHCF, (3) reviewing the management of high-security prisoners, (4) implementing design and security enhancements to the prison facilities, especially those related to staff safety (including fire safety), (5) reviewing the practice of the two-hour unlock regime (i.e., two hours meet the

minimum entitlements but also resulted in unruly behaviour among prisoners who were locked in their cells for periods of more than 24 hours), and (6) reviewing and enhancing the capability, resources, and equipment available to teams trained in advanced control and restraint procedures. Lastly, reaffirm the need for timely reporting of incidents by staff.

The media response by Ara Poutama management was to blame the riot on the prisoners and that the immediate trigger was their access to “home brew” and prisoner-to-prisoner fighting. The 2013 riot at SHCF was the most serious facility riot in 15 years for Ara Poutama. The facility was left with severe fire damage and a repair bill estimated at \$10 million. Further, 23 prisoners were charged with 40 offences, and three staff and two prisoners sustained injuries. There was no acknowledgement of the boredom experienced by prisoners in the unit who had little access to programmes nor to problems family had in visiting, or to long-standing management problems at the prison. Of interest is that SHCF was built to a design to facilitate an open campus prison model where prisoners could access activities and the greater campus with few restrictions, yet when opened, it defaulted to a restricted environment where prisoners could only move around if escorted. In addition, staff were reportedly trapped in the unit, so structural changes to the guardroom design were made to allow for evacuation.

***“It Was Basically a Jungle”—Mt Eden, 2015***

Very little research exists on the nature or performance of remand prisons in New Zealand or elsewhere. By definition, remand refers to the detainment of individuals prior to trial (i.e., neither convicted nor sentenced). By 2015, remand prisoners in New Zealand represented 23% of the total prison population, which was a marked increase from 13% in 2000 (Department of Corrections, 2000, 2016). For these individuals, especially those who spend considerable time on remand, harsh conditions relative to mainstream (e.g., increased lockdown) indicate significant disadvantage under a legal system that presumes innocence (Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into the Prisons System, 1989). General Departmental policy has required remandees to be kept as separate as possible from sentenced prisoners and in high-security accommodation. However, the size of this group makes this difficult to achieve. The recommendations of the Ministerial Inquiry into prison systems (1989) recommended (1) separate remand facilities and (2) privatisation of facilities to address the issues of prison conditions for a body of men who are likely not to have required imprisonment.

Mt Eden is the country’s biggest remand prison, servicing the Auckland region. By 2015, the average length of stay for a prisoner was 28 days, with a throughput of 30,000 prisoners a year. The original Mt Eden prison was designed in 1922 (Newbold, 2007) and remained in operation until the 2000s. Auckland Central Remand Prison, New Zealand’s first private prison (located on the same site as the original Mt Eden), was opened in 2000 and operated by Australian Corrections Management (ACM). Following two on-site suicides and a highly critical report from Amnesty International regarding refugees on remand, ACM’s contract was

not renewed, and the site was taken over by Corrections until 2010, when Serco obtained the contract to run the rebranded Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF) (Blackstock, 2014). As a remand prison, MECF is routinely subject to a higher rate of prisoner movements compared with other institutions. Remand institutions are characterised by a high-volume throughput that exerts unique operational challenges for staff and management as well as impacts individual prisoner adjustment. The “churn” of prisoners who enter and exit MECF at a high rate and volume creates challenges for appropriate allocation in units, meaning that aggressive/competitive prisoners may be housed with similar, or gang numbers may increase in an area where gang density was not previously problematic.

Following the death of a prisoner earlier in 2015 who fell<sup>15</sup> from a balcony, another had come forward claiming that he was being transferred to another prison after being beaten. The revelations came after footage of apparently arranged fights between prisoners was captured on contraband cell phones and subsequently posted on social media, where the so-called fight clubs garnered wide public attention (Department of Corrections, 2014, 2015; Fitzharris, n.d.). The Department of Corrections statistics showed in the year ending March 2015, 115 prisoners were assaulted at Mt Eden. Seven of those suffered serious enough physical or sexual attacks to require hospitalisation. Sixty-three prisoners assaulted at Mt Eden were on remand, with five seriously hurt (Shadwell, 2015).

According to the Chief Inspector’s report, organised fighting occurred frequently in full view of closed-circuit surveillance cameras, with 12 incidents recorded in June and July 2015. Further, it was believed that this form of “contender fighting” or “fight club”<sup>16</sup> occurred at least once a week,<sup>17</sup> during this period, as evidenced by CCTV footage, prison incident reports, prisoner disclosures, and even YouTube footage. Descriptions of some incidents involved fighting over a significant duration with multiple “rounds” of fighting between participants and many consecutive fights. Senior gang members were speculated to have been the primary organisers, and the fights were commonly described by prisoners as “mean, fierce, brutal and hard-out with no mercy for the contestants” (Department of Corrections, 2014, p. 8). Further, coercion to participate was considered to be a part of this picture. The report also indicated that staff and management had failed to adequately act on internal reports of fights occurring. It was noted that surveillance cameras did not operate in cells and that staff presence could sometimes be low (partly a function of low staffing)—or in some cases, failed to take an active role in supervising prisoners—while all cells were unlocked, which concealed activities in these spaces.

Despite these risk factors, there were notable protective measures in MECF that include (1) an explicit “zero tolerance” norm that was conspicuous across the site, (2) the presence and use of monitoring systems, (3) staff vigilance and clarity on violence response processes, (4) adequate staff training, and (5) the reality that many units/locations were violence-free.

Since July 2015, MECF and Serco have been subject to much public scrutiny and political debate following intense media exposure of prisoner aggression, contraband mobile phones, and the death of a former prisoner raised concerns about

perceptions of prison violence, staff and prisoner safety, and operational limitations (Collins, 2016; Moir, 2015; Shadwell, 2015; Walters, 2015; Watkins, 2015). The Inspector made 21 recommendations that mainly concerned reviewing, identifying, monitoring, and changing a range of practices and procedures to align with good security and compliance codes (Fitzharris, n.d.). In a parallel review into circumstances surrounding organised prisoner-on-prisoner fighting and access to cell phone contraband in New Zealand prisons other than Mt Eden, Fitzharris (2016) found that there was no evidence of “fight club”-type activity (including cell phone recordings) at eight other prisons.

### **Drawing It All Together**

There is no doubt that violence has been an ongoing problem in New Zealand prisons. Government Inquiries and internal reviews have played an important role in advancing our knowledge of what information is required. For instance, consistent with the Roper reports in the late 1980s, subsequent Inquiries such as Mangaroa (Logan, 1993), the CERU (Duffy, 2004), and SHCF (Beales et al., 2014) have, by degrees, increasingly recognised that no single factor alone can account for what happened during a given incident that the combination and alignment of a range of factors creates an underlying situation that enables violence to escalate. Furthermore, broader systemic factors are important in understanding institutional violence. In this sense, it is important that the focus of future inquiries does not exclude critical factors and perspectives that can add value to understanding the social conditions and “culture” that are not always discoverable via official sources.

One way that this admittedly cursory history can inform methods of inquiry is to guide research that identifies and examines the conditions under which violence occurs, the relationship between these factors as they pertain to certain places and contexts, and how these ecologies facilitate—and prohibit—violence within these spaces.

### **Key Learning points**

- The ongoing issue of violence in New Zealand institutions, despite policy, practice, and even design changes, reflects a wicked problem that defies simple and unitary approaches to resolution.
- Although it is evident that a wider range of factors have been recognised over time as playing critical roles in the incidence of violence, an ecological approach that formulates these varying factors in a whole-of-context way has not been adopted in this country and because situational prevention informed by such an approach has yet to be properly implemented.

### **Notes**

- 1 The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international agreement aimed at preventing torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The

- objective of OPCAT is to prevent the mistreatment of people in detention. OPCAT was adopted in 2002 with New Zealand ratifying the OPCAT in 2007.
- 2 Aotearoa and New Zealand are the Māori (Indigenous) and English names of this country, respectively. They will be used interchangeably or together throughout this chapter as the context suits.
  - 3 Official Māori name of the New Zealand Department of Corrections.
  - 4 This name was provided by Te Poari Hautū Rautaki Māori, Corrections Māori Leadership Board. It is taken from the karakia (incantation) *Kete o Te Wānanga*, which draws on Māori cosmology and describes the ascent by the Deity, Tāne, into the highest heavens.
  - 5 Māori: “A new way”.
  - 6 Purpose-built rehabilitative prison environments. Exemplars include the units: Kia Marama (Rolleston Prison) and Te Piriti (Paremoremo Prison) for men with child sexual offence histories and Te Whare Manaakitanga (Rimutaka Prison) for men with non-sexual violent behaviour.
  - 7 Major Māori kinship grouping with strong connections to a given geographical region.
  - 8 Smaller kinship group. A number of hapu make up an Iwi in Māori society.
  - 9 Generally, “family”. The basic political unit in Māori society.
  - 10 The Public Service Association is the largest democratic union in New Zealand representing the interests of members working in central and local government, the health sector, Crown agencies, state-owned enterprises, and community and government-funded agencies.
  - 11 In apparent eagerness to prove he was not soft, one of the team put his penis on the bar of Canterbury’s Kirwee Tavern and allowed another member to bash it with a beer bottle (Gardiner, 2002).
  - 12 Corrections Association of New Zealand (CANZ), an industry-specific and specialised union for Corrections staff working inside prisons.
  - 13 Local Hapu (subtribe), Ngāti Naho, are the acknowledged *kaitiaki*, or site guardians of the prison.
  - 14 Of interest, this was the same block where a prison officer had been killed in the course of a prisoner assault in 2010.
  - 15 Some accounts suggest that he was purposely dropped (Mt Eden prisoner was “damaged goods”, 2015).
  - 16 This was not the first time the Department investigated the so-called fight clubs at Mt Eden. Earlier accounts were investigated in 2009 (Professional Standards Unit Office of the Chief Executive, 2009).
  - 17 Of the 12 prisoners who were prepared to comment on this activity, estimates ranged from weekly to almost every day in the units in which they were housed (Fitzharris, n.d.).

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# 7 What Do People in Prison<sup>1</sup> Think about Violence?

*Michael Daffern*

Four incidents of violence marked my first year as a prison psychologist. There were undoubtedly many more that I was either unaware of or cannot recall, but these four incidents were instructive and unforgettable, occurring over 30 years ago. Within weeks of commencing work in a high-security reception and remand prison, I began co-facilitating an orientation programme for men who were recently received into prison. I knew little of the routines of prison; my role, as I saw it, was to be available for those men who were distressed and to work to enhance their sense of wellbeing. My co-facilitator was an older man. He had lived in prison for much of his adult life, and he was familiar with the formal and unwritten routines and rules of the prison. He regularly advised those young men entering prison for the first time that if they were “stood over” then they should be ready to respond violently, that this was necessary to protect themselves against imminent harm but also to prevent further threats. He said that if they were not prepared to respond violently, then other men would be watching, they would be regarded as either “predators or prey”, and if they were unwilling to fight, then other men would be ready to take advantage. The intimidation and threats would persist. This experience revealed that beliefs about violence in prison were different from those that are common in the community and that some acts of violence in prison can be viewed as necessary and functional, preventing harm and respite from threat, and generating status. This messaging also highlighted the tension and threats of harm that are ever present in prison and the role that violence may play in reducing this tension. Soon after, I worked in a different prison where one day, two powerful men fought in the central open area of the prison. They fought until they were depleted. Watching over them were staff and other people in prison. Tension between rival groups had been high. The fight was evenly pitched and fair, no weapons were involved, and the others watched on at a distance. Whatever the cause of the underlying tension, it dissipated afterwards, the “problem” seemingly resolved, at least temporarily, using an acceptable, “masculine” way of resolving conflict. Charges were brought against the two men by prison authorities, but these were accepted and seemingly insignificant when compared to whatever tension had contributed to the fight. What was remarkable here was that the fight was clearly conducted according to rules that were known and ostensibly accepted by both men. Sometime afterwards, a young man was brutally raped, allegedly by several other men; there did not seem to be consequences, nobody was charged, and

silence prevailed. Few men in the prison could have regarded this act as anything but awful, and what was recounted at the time continues to unsettle me. Yet, as far as I was aware, nobody informed on the perpetrators. Lastly, towards the end of my first year of work, a man was murdered, a consequence of conflict over drug dealing within the prison, although the precise nature of the disagreement that led to the murder and the circumstances in which it occurred were never clear to me.

My personal experience resonates with claims that violence is common in many prisons (Heard, 2019). According to Wolf et al. (2007), “rates of physical assault for male inmates are more than 18 times higher than the equivalent rates for males in the general population. For female inmates, the rates are more than 27 times higher” (p. 19). The impacts of violence are profound, not only for those people who are in prison but also for staff (Kunst, 2011) and their families. Violence undermines the physical and psychological integrity of the lives of people in prison as well as staff (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Violence diverts resources away from rehabilitation, unsettles routines, and depletes staff resources. When staff are victimised, then this may adversely impact their willingness to help, thereby eroding the potential for personal connections between staff and people in prison that may generate the social capital that is necessary for reform. Violence may also tarnish the prison “climate”, generating fear and distress, exacerbating pre-existing mental health problems, “propel[ing] people with mental health vulnerability into violence, substance abuse, self-harm and even suicide.” (p. 10). Violence contributes to mistrust and tension, and a reduced sense of personal safety may also lead some people to seek sanctuary in protective custody or to gravitate towards antisocial groups, including gangs, to achieve a sense of personal safety and refuge from victimisation (Liebling & Arnold, 2012).

Antisocial thoughts are a key risk factor for criminal behaviour, and thoughts about violence have the potential to increase a person’s propensity for violence (Gilbert et al., 2013). Consistent with contemporary approaches to understanding aggressive behaviour (e.g., General Aggression Model, GAM, Anderson & Bushman, 2002), it is generally accepted that violence is multiply determined, the consequence of a complex interaction between personal and environmental factors, or, as Tamatea (this volume) has articulated, between different layers of the social and environmental ecology. The GAM suggests that a person’s propensity to act violently is the result of inherent dispositions (e.g., genetic and other biological factors and early familial experiences), the development and maintenance of *aggression-related knowledge structures* (i.e., cognitive structures and processes such as beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and scripts) and the person’s exposure to environmental factors, including interpersonal, organisational, and community factors, that trigger these propensities (e.g., perceived provocation).

As a social learning approach, the GAM draws heavily on research that has revealed the importance of so-called *knowledge structures* that influence the way in which individuals perceive and interpret their social environment and make decisions about how to act. Three important *knowledge structures* are highlighted: (1) *Perceptual schemata*, the meaning that is attributed to social phenomena and which is used to understand other peoples’ actions (for example, how people in prison understand the

behaviour of other people in prison and the actions of staff – an example here might be somebody who steals from somebody’s cell, a “Peter-thief”, which then becomes a legitimate target for violence), (2) *Person schemata*, beliefs about a particular person or group of people (e.g., people working in prison and other groups of people in prison, such as those who have a history of sexual offending against children), and (3) *Behavioural scripts*, the stereotyped violence-related event sequences that are mentally rehearsed and which prepare people for action, guiding future behaviour (e.g., thoughts about what to do if one is feeling threatened). Many people who enter prison, particularly those with a history of violence, have pre-existing beliefs about the normality of violence (Dunne et al., 2018), tendencies to see other people’s actions as threatening and a propensity for rehearsing violent behavioural scripts. For example, in a study of 131 people in prison in Melbourne, Australia, Hosie et al. (2022) reported that most ( $n = 94$ ) reported a history of violent script<sup>2</sup> rehearsal, with 61.7% reporting rehearsal of scripts concerning hitting or punching other people, 31.9% reporting thoughts of kicking other people, and 29.8% reporting thoughts of stabbing other people. Interestingly, these thoughts were typically aroused by feelings of hopelessness and fear, and they often occurred after the person felt belittled, disrespected, or betrayed. These violence-related knowledge structures can be consolidated and expanded in prisons because violence is normalised in some prisons (or even encouraged, as in the case of my co-facilitator above), and violent cognitions can be triggered by unsafe prison environments (e.g., disrespectful treatment by another people or feelings of fear or hopelessness may trigger script rehearsal as indicated by Hosie et al., 2022). There are also incentives in prison to act violently (e.g., to achieve status, access to scant resources, release tension, or prevent threats).

Moreover, it is assumed that people are, for the most part, capable of both intensifying and minimising the effects of their initial aggressive impulses and that the mechanisms by which this most often occurs are cognitive in nature. In this regard, beliefs about the appropriateness of violence act as a filter through which people consider whether violent behaviour is appropriate. For example, if a person is confronted in prison by somebody stealing from their cell, then they may be angered and may consider violence (the aggressive behavioural script). Whether they act violently will be determined by the likely costs and benefits of whatever action is scripted and whether they believe violence is appropriate; these “normative beliefs” are influenced by prison norms, rules, and routines. Delineation of these GAM-specified cognitive mechanisms has improved understanding regarding how, why, and when aggression is enacted, and the development of a conceptual framework to understand aggression has enabled a more sophisticated and coherent understanding of aggressive behaviour. It is, of course, a general model, not specific to violence in prison. I now consider how normative beliefs about violence in prison, which ultimately act as a filter to determine whether violence will occur, are influenced by the “prisoner code”.

### **Beliefs About Violence from the Perspective of People in Prison**

Around the world, there are almost 11 million people in prison (Walmsley, 2018), yet their experiences and perspectives on violence have rarely been studied. Since

prisoner populations around the world typically comprise a substantial number of people with histories of violent offending (e.g., in the United States of America, about half of all people in prison have been convicted of a violent crime (Byrne et al., 2015)), it stands to reason that people in prison, as a group, are likely to think favourably about violence, at least under some circumstances. This is consistent with the *importation* perspective (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). According to this perspective, those people who are violent in prison enter prison with personal qualities (e.g., propensities, vulnerabilities, values, and beliefs) that lead them to engage in violence (see also Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020, p. 20).

However, violence does not occur in a vacuum, and contemporary theories of violence, including the GAM, emphasise how personal and environmental factors interact to produce violent behaviour. Expanding on this point, Pogrebin and Dodge (2001) draw attention to the experiences of violence from the perspective of women in prison. In this study, some women reported how violence was necessary when they felt intimidated and that not acting violently in response to intimidation may encourage further threats:

women who were threatened by other inmates and did not use aggressive tactics to defend themselves were seen as weak ... For these respondents, their reputation as weak defined who they were in the eyes of other prisoners. Their passivity to more aggressive women often led to constantly being taken advantage of.

One participant stated,

It was hard cause I was scared, but she came at me one day and I fought back. She beat the crap out of me, but I took it. The guards broke it up and we both [were] sent to isolation for seventy-two hours. After that it got better, she still made smart-ass remarks, but she never really bothered me. I guess Shelly [her friend] was right, well I know she was, no matter how bad it is you need to stand up for yourself, cause if you don't everyone will be coming after you and you won't have a chance.

(p. 535)

The quote illuminates the normality and functionality of violence, but it also shows that the short-term aversive consequences (i.e., isolation) may be relatively insignificant when compared with the reduction in tension and freedom from fear that can occur when one acts violently to defend oneself. A similar experience was noted by Evans and Wallace (2008), “For many men in prison, the only way to ensure that one does not become a victim is to take on the role of perpetrator. A readiness to use violence confirms one’s manhood.” One man said, “People start to treat you right once you become deadly” (p. 487).

These reflections point to some of the “community” rules (what Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) would refer to as the level of the microsystem—the rules generated amongst people in prison to govern behaviour) that shape the way people in prison think about

violence, how prison environments can feel tense and unsafe, and how violence may be necessary to prevent victimisation, consistent with the messaging provided by my co-facilitator. These reflections also point to the possibility that people in prison may consider some acts of violence to be normal and necessary. Accessing these “rules” about violence is difficult. Violence within prison is often surrounded by silence, like several of the acts reported in the introduction to this chapter, including sexual assault and homicide. Violating the so-called “prisoner code” by speaking about another prisoner’s behaviour (or their own victimisation) may result in reprisals and retaliation (“snitches get stitches”); see, for example, Gear (2007) who noted that 20% of people in prison who had not reported their most recent experiences of violent victimisation said that they did not make a report because they feared retaliation.

Clemmer (1940) refers to the shared beliefs about behaviour within prisons as the “*inmate code*” and defines it as “the taking on in greater or lesser degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary” (p.299). These beliefs include distancing oneself from staff, “not interfering in the personal business of other inmates, no snitching or creating problems for other inmates with staff, and any behaviors that would convey weakness or vulnerability in the eyes of other inmates and staff” (p. 18, Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). Adherence to these rules is important and corresponds with status and therefore access to privileges and goods; those people who staunchly adhere to “the code” have higher status than those who do not, and those who breach the code by, for example, stealing or “snitching” may become legitimate victims of violence.

Since it is difficult for “outsiders” to penetrate and document the “prisoner code”, some scholars have looked towards the language that is used by people in prison to indicate the prison community’s beliefs about violence. Some famous insights were produced by James Hardy Vaux’s 1989 *Dictionary of Criminal Slang*. Vaux was transported to Australia as a convict, where he compiled a dictionary of prison slang terms. Words such as “fence” (a receiver of stolen goods), “knuckle” (to pickpocket), and “ruffles” (handcuffs) were examples of common convict terms. Contemporary terms like “rock spider” (a person who sexually offends against children), “Peter thief” (a person in prison who steals from other people); “screw” (custodial staff), and “dog” (an informant) not only describe some people in prison but reflect a derogatory attitude to some people and imply that violence towards them may be acceptable. Gettinger (1978, as cited in Gendreau et al., 1985) noted that violence directed towards informers (referred to as “dogs” or “snitches”) may be regarded as legitimate, and there would be pressure for the informer to thereafter remain housed in protective custody, eroding this prisoner’s status and access to resources. Further examples and elaboration are provided by Pogrebin and Dodge (2001):

You don’t really want the guards involved in protecting you because you’ll become known as a snitch or an ass-kisser. If someone wants to get you, they will find a way to do it and the guards can’t do anything about it even if they know.

(p. 535)

The normative beliefs around “snitching”, the need to not interfere in other prisoners’ business or to “get close” to people working in prison may explain the lack of response amongst people in prison to the account of sexual abuse and violence mentioned earlier in the introduction to this chapter. Other men in prison may have felt sympathy for the young man who was sexually assaulted that I described at the start of this chapter, but they may have believed that it was improper to intervene, and improper to inform on the suspected perpetrators, revealing problems at the level of the mesosystem in the way that people in prison relate to staff and do not “snitch”, which ultimately enables violence.

A consequence of the adoption of the “inmate code” is that some people within a prison can become “legitimate” targets, and aggression directed at these people can be reinforced by increased status, which then protects the perpetrator against victimisation. Scapegoating certain people in prison and designating them as “legitimate” victims also diverts attention away from those people who adhere to the code and who don’t have the qualities of the legitimate targets of violence (those who steal, “snitch” or who have a history of certain offences). Fear of victimisation can lead people with a history of sexual offending to be defensive and deceitful, reducing their willingness to participate in treatment as this would result in identification as a person with a history of sexual offending, and reluctance to disclose details of their sexual offending in case breaches in confidentiality occurred; meaning that unsafe prisons can also undermine rehabilitation efforts; “In prison, whether in protective custody or general population, they struggle for survival, usually anonymously. Attempting to work with such individuals in a prison is fraught with difficulties precisely because they hide their identities (p. 964, Monahan et al., 2005).” Another group of people in prison who seem to be “legitimate targets” for violence are people who are LGBTIQ. Sexual victimisation rates of 4% for males in prison and 22% for females (Wolff & Shi, 2011) have been reported, with increased rates noted for people who are LGBTIQ (Tarzwell, 2006).

Finally, violence towards people working in prison may also be guided by rules; perceptions of fairness, the legitimacy of prison rules, and the way in which these rules are enforced may contribute to violence towards staff. This would also suggest that acts of violence towards staff who are perceived to be unfair are legitimate. Steiner and Wooldredge (2020) found that prisons in which officers generally exercised their authority more lawfully and fairly or generally relied more on their skills and expertise for gaining inmates’ cooperation had lower rates of violent and/or nonviolent rule violations (p. 27).

### **Violence and a Lack of Safety in Prison Creates Violence**

Consistent with a socio-ecological perspective, this chapter now moves from a discussion of the beliefs that people in prison have about violence to a consideration of the way that the prison environment can shape and prime these beliefs about violence. As noted above, there are several key GAM-specified knowledge structures that are relevant to violent behaviour in prison. Although little research has examined people’s beliefs about violence in prison, research into the implicit theories about violence held by people with a history of violent offending (Polaschek

et al., 2009) and schemas associated with violence (Dunne et al., 2018) in incarcerated men allow us to understand how people in prison may think about violence (see also Toch, 1992). Starting with schemas, several studies have drawn upon Young and colleagues' (2003) conceptualisation of schemas and identified early maladaptive schemas that are common in those people with a history of violent offending. The schemas with the strongest association with violence included "Insufficient Self-Control" (Dunne et al., 2018), and "Mistrust" and "Entitlement" (Tremblay & Dozois, 2009). Similarly, Polaschek and colleagues (2009) examined the offence transcripts from men who participated in an intensive violence treatment programme in New Zealand. They identified the following implicit theories (schemas): (a) the normalisation of violence, (b) the need to act violently to achieve or maintain status and autonomy in a violent world ("beat or be beaten"), (c) the sense of moral superiority and entitlement to attack, harm or discipline others ("I am the law"), and (d) the inability to appropriately regulate one's own behaviour and maintain self-control without assistance ("I get out of control"). There is evident overlap here in these two lines of research that suggest that feeling unsafe and believing that one cannot or does not need to control oneself are common ways of thinking about the world in those people who act violently. Although these studies (Dunne et al., 2018 and Polaschek et al., 2009) were conducted with men in prison, they did not specifically focus on beliefs associated with violence in prison. The context of the extent to which these beliefs give voice to the beliefs that encourage and legitimise violence in prison is unclear, presenting an important opportunity for future research. The use of derogatory terms like "dogs" or "snitches" may indicate that some people in prison think they are entitled to act violently and that acts of violence towards these people are normal.

The prison environment, particularly when it is perceived as unsafe, can prime violent thoughts. Many people in prison do not experience safety. As a result, a sense of wellbeing is difficult to attain, and violent thoughts may be activated. Liebling and Arnold (2012) reported that 28% of males in prison feared for their physical safety, whilst 31% felt at risk of being injured, bullied, or threatened. McCorkle, Miethe and Drass (1995) reported that most people in prison (78%) utilised at least one type of behaviour which increased their feeling of safety, either through passive precautionary strategies such as avoidance or through aggressive precautionary strategies such as carrying a weapon. Here, it is also worth returning to Hosie et al. (2022), who reported that aggressive scripts were typically aroused by feelings of hopelessness and fear or following belittling and disrespectful treatment.

Ultimately, it seems reasonable to conclude that exposure to violence, as well as a sense of injustice and a lack of trust, can undermine feelings of safety, which in turn can prime violent thoughts. Furthermore, feeling unsafe creates a general negative affect that can increase the propensity for violence. Jakupcak (2003) showed that violence can diminish feelings of vulnerability by externalising emotional distress instead of attending to one's own emotional state, consistent with the suggestion that the targeting of "legitimate" victims within a prison can not only generate status but also diminish tension generated by feeling unsafe.

## Conclusion

Violence in prison is a complex problem that is impacted by various personal and contextual factors. It is evident that many people who come into prison believe that violence is normal and functional. The “inmate code” may consolidate and strengthen these beliefs. This unwritten set of rules governs the behaviour of people in prison, it determines prison hierarchies, creates order, and it can help generate status and protection from victimisation for those who adhere to the code. The code also enables violence, and this undermines safety in prison.

Prison satisfies several goals in justice systems: reform and rehabilitation, deterrence, incapacitation, and punishment. If people in prison are contained in an environment that encourages violence, then this does not facilitate pro-social change. As such, violence in prison hampers the capacity of a prison to reform and rehabilitate. In violent prisons, resources are redirected to managing untoward incidents and staff willingness to assist in reformative activities may be eroded. The adverse psychological consequences of exposure to prison may also result in distress that renders people unable to make a commitment to change or to have optimism and hope for the future, which are important for change processes (Day et al., in press).

Given the complex and multiply determined nature of violence in prison, it stands to reason that prevention efforts are likely to be complicated, and they will need to be multi-layered, targeting all levels of the ecology. Encouragingly, there are many policies and procedures that are already in place to prevent and manage violence in prisons. I have argued in this chapter that beliefs about violence are important and that interpersonal, community, and organisational factors might impact these beliefs; as such, when a new intervention is being proposed, whatever the level that is being targeted, one question that should be asked is whether the intervention helps to erode beliefs that support violence and whether the intervention creates safety and respect and reduces feelings of hopelessness. Interventions that lessen the value of violence amongst people in prison and help people interact more positively and productively with staff, such that the mesosystem works to limit and prevent violence, are sorely needed. Changes at the level of the exosystem that might have an impact on prison violence may include improving attitudes towards people in prison such that feelings of isolation, rejection, and hopelessness are limited. These negative attitudes may generate a negative affect that, in turn, is directed towards “legitimate” targets and those people who are, according to the “inmate code”, lower in the prison hierarchy.

Prisons must become safer settings because unsafe prisons trigger violent thinking, and this can maintain the propensity for violence not only during incarceration but also following release. Increased access to educational, vocational, and industrial programmes (McCorkle et al., 1995) creates opportunities for self-improvement, reduces boredom, increases hope for the future, and creates safety; violence occurs less commonly in these occupational settings. The provision of therapeutic and skill development programmes within prisons may also help alleviate stress and violence, as they allow people to gain a sense of personal control, as well as develop skills involving planning, problem-solving, and organisation. In

productive and safe settings, there is a reduced likelihood of people feeling hopeless and fearful and, therefore, less activation of aggressive thinking. Despite the trade-offs that exist between safety and the provision of personal autonomy, programmes may also provide a therapeutic environment and therefore increase well-being (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999; McCorkle et al., 1995).

Finally, treatment programmes for people with a history of violent behaviour have some capacity to reduce violent behaviour (Papalia et al., 2019), although their impact on antisocial cognitions is limited (Papalia et al., 2020). Although these interventions clearly benefit some people, they are expensive to operate, they rely on voluntary participation, and it is likely that there are many more people in prison who are violent than there are places available in these programmes. It is, therefore, important that broader actions are taken to erode the inmate code as it pertains to the legitimacy of violence. Initiatives that build opposition to violent behaviour, reward collaborative and non-violent conflict resolution, and facilitate status without recourse to violence are important.

### **Key Learning Points**

- What people in prison think about violence is the subject of surprisingly little research, meaning the voice of prisoners concerning the origins and impacts of violence are relatively unknown.
- Research with men in prison about their reasons for violent behaviour more generally suggests that violence in prison is normal and that many men feel entitled to use violence, particularly when they regard victims as untrustworthy or unworthy.
- Unsafe prisons undermine recovery and likely prime violent scripts and consolidate beliefs that support violence.

### **Notes**

- 1 “People in prison” is used in this chapter instead of terms like “prisoner”, “inmate”, “convict” or “felon” to emphasise a more humanising and healing approach. It reflects the tone of Hōkai Rangi (Ara Poutama Aotearoa, 2019), a statement that seeks to correct the overrepresentation of Māori in Ara Poutama Aotearoa, the New Zealand prison system. “People in prison” is used in Hōkai Rangi to encourage a more dignified and respectful approach, consistent with Ara Poutama Aotearoa’s commitment to avoid further harm and unnecessary stress in those people who are incarcerated.
- 2 Aggressive scripts are stereotyped aggression-related event sequences that incorporate procedural knowledge and factual information about aggressive behaviour and that define situations, prepare people for action, and guide future aggressive behaviour.

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# 8 Correctional Staff

## Roles and Experiences

*Devon L.L. Polaschek*

Life in prison for correctional officers consists of monotonous routines ... punctuated by sporadic episodes of extreme violence, carrying with it the risk of serious injury or death. This is not an easy way to make a modest living.

(Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017, p. 172)

Staff roles in prisons are among the most dangerous employment roles, especially on the front line<sup>1</sup> (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). Although not all prisons may exactly fit Musick and Gunsaulus-Musick's (2017) descriptions of "the American Prison", there is no doubt that prisons can be dangerous and challenging places, not only for prisoners but also for those whose employment brings them into direct, daily contact with prisoners. Correctional institutions typically have little or no influence over who is sent to them to serve custodial sentences, or when, or even how many they are expected to accommodate. Prisons themselves are often designed physically in ways that make safety a challenge. But notwithstanding these difficulties, the way a prison is managed, from the highest level to the front line can affect prison officers' and prisoners' perceptions of and experiences of violence.

Prison officers are given the largest share of responsibility for protecting prisoners and each other from violence. Staff have a role in its prevention or management at the incident or acute level, whether by use of force or by de-escalation strategies. But how staff conduct themselves and work together in diverse prison environments also affects the overall ecology of violence, including how safe or unsafe their work environment is. This chapter reviews theory and research on staff experiences of violence as victims, their involvement as perpetrators, and, then, factors relating to the prison regime and day-to-day work behaviour that may affect prison violence. While recognising that some violence is inevitable within prisons as they currently function, I conclude with a brief section recognising the influence of outside factors (political, organisational) on the difficulties staff have alongside prisoners in creating a safer, less violent environment.

## Prison Officers as Victims of Violence

Prisons are regarded as one of the most dangerous workplaces in terms of the risk of assault (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). Consequently, prison officers commonly view the risk of being victimised as simply part of the role or as “commonplace” (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013; p. 105). Recorded rates of staff victimisation vary, depending on, for example, the method of measurement, the reference period (ever vs. a fixed period), and staff roles. Boudoukha et al. (2013) reported from a survey of 240 French correctional staff (mean length of service was 13 years) that 97% had been verbally or physically assaulted and a similar proportion had witnessed violent assaults. In the US, prison officers ( $n = 1,802$ ) surveyed across a variety of institutions in Ohio and Kentucky reported an average of 1.2 threats and 0.34 assaults in the previous month (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017), and other US research suggests that 30% of staff have experienced at least one physical assault (see Higgins et al., 2022). Lahm (2009) found across three Southern US states that in the previous 12 months, 40% of prisoners had assaulted staff. But some systems are markedly safer for staff. Perhaps as a function of their smaller facilities and more liberal approach to corrections, in Swiss prisons over a 6-month period, very few staff reported experiencing or witnessing violence, and most of what was reported were psychological (insults, verbal intimidation; Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020).

There is much less research on the sexual assault of prison staff by prisoners. In a 1983 dataset of staff-recorded incidents, just 1.4% had a sexual element (Light, 1991). However, to some extent, the prevalence may depend on whether the event is viewed as sexual or not. For example, genital exhibitionism is commonly experienced by both male and female staff and may be understood by them either as sexual or as a form of intimidation (Cathcart & Jones, 2021). A recent study suggests that two forms of prisoner-to-staff abuse—exhibitionistic exposure of genitalia or masturbation and the throwing of faeces, urine, saliva, blood, or some unidentified liquid at staff—are probably much more frequent than is currently recognised because of unsystematic recording; and both affect staff perceptions of, and actual, safety (Cathcart & Jones, 2021). Neither would conventionally be regarded as assaults.

So violence victimisation of prison officers can be direct or vicarious, covers a variety of acts, and is typically a repetitive experience rather than a single major event and can be harmful to staff. For instance, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms are commonly found in prison officer populations. In the French correctional system, staff self-reported PTSD scores were like those of clinical patients (Boudoukha et al., 2013). But in this study, staff ratings of the seriousness of their assault experiences were not related to PTSD. Spinaris et al. (2012) surveyed 3,599 correctional professionals across the US, including 43% of security/custody staff. They found 27% had PTSD symptoms in the last 30 days (34% of security staff but also 23% of all other staff). PTSD was associated with more exposure to workplace violence, injury, and death events, more physical assaults overall, and more types of events (e.g., witnessing a suicide attempt, death threat to you, and witnessed sexual assault). Death threats, witnessing physical harm,

and threats of physical harm were the most common and were almost ubiquitous among those with PTSD. PTSD rates were higher in men and in custody staff than in women or staff in other roles and were higher for those with a greater accumulation of events (Spinaris et al., 2012).

Various other consequences have also been noted, including increased work stress, increased sleep disorders, increased sense of vulnerability, reduced sense of security and safety, maladaptive use of alcohol and drugs, other negative impacts on home life, and greater rates of burnout (Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020; Sorensen et al., 2011). Cognitive changes have also been reported, such as increased hypervigilance and changes in threat perception (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013; Seidman & Williams, 1999).

Some of these consequences, in turn, affect how prison officers view prisoners and behave towards them. Qualitative studies suggest that prison officers become harder, less empathic, and more “enforcer” oriented as a form of adaptation to the role (Arnold, 2016; Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013). They may develop compassion fatigue and dehumanise prisoners as a class of people (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013), retreating into an “us vs. them” orientation, with concomitant changes in personality such as reduced agreeableness and conscientiousness (Einat & Suliman, 2021).

## **Factors Linked to Staff Victimization**

### ***Prisoner, Environmental, and Staff Predictors***

Broadly, research on predicting staff’s direct exposure to prisoners’ violent behaviour has examined victim, perpetrator, and situational or environmental factors. Staff are more at risk when they are younger, newer to the job, less well-trained, and male (see McNeeley, 2021; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017) for reviews. Prisoner factors include youth, short sentences, and gang affiliation (Sorensen et al., 2011).

Turning to environmental predictors, Steiner and Wooldredge (2017) found that staff are threatened more on day shifts and when they are in direct contact with prisoners (cf. working in a control tower in a US prison). Staff are more likely to be assaulted when they have more contact with prisoners, but paradoxically they also feel safer if they have more contact. Higher security environments and residential units have been identified as the riskiest (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017).

With increasing overcrowding and reduced resources, the staffing situation and employee morale may also be important predictors of prisoner assaults on staff. Steiner and Wooldredge (2020) found that staff who were more likely to have been threatened or assaulted in the previous month were also more likely to report a lack of training, insufficient staffing, and lack of time to do their job roles and lack of support from co-workers, and more role and work stress. They also reported being in units where they thought rules were underenforced and there were more indicators of disorder so prisoners were more likely to verbally abuse staff when staff processed them for violating rules (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). That assaults on staff might be an indicator of wider disorder is supported by the finding that

assaults are higher when prisoner–prisoner victimisation is also higher (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017).

### ***Situational Precipitants***

Staff perceptions of safety at work and their experiences of victimisation are not necessarily in synchrony; in some studies, staff report that they may feel quite safe even when they are occasionally victimised (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2020). One reason for this apparent contradiction may be that staff may be able to sometimes anticipate specifically when they will be most at risk, which may make risk seem more controllable.

Several routine activities that prison officers undertake place them at increased risk of violence. Breaking up fights between prisoners, moving angry prisoners into cells, and giving prisoners bad news are all considered risky (Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020). Prisoner movements are among the most frequent activities associated with staff being assaulted, but assaults following an officer’s command or instruction are also common (Light, 1991; Sorensen et al., 2011). Precipitants for these incidents include the prisoner refusing to leave or enter an area, requests for identification, and appearance and personal hygiene issues (e.g., not being dressed in required clothing for particular activities). Changes in regulations or routines required by management often irritated prisoners, as did being moved to a new cell or unit, resulting in aggressive behaviour (e.g., a change to medication delivery; Ricciardelli & Perry, 2016). Prisoners might also be protesting, feeling unfairly treated or disrespected or punishing the staff member for taking too long to provide something the prisoner regards as an entitlement (Light, 1991; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017; Trammell et al., 2018). Assaults precipitated by these factors may be directed at the “offending” staff member and the actions around them. Another significant proportion is attributed by staff to the emotional or mental volatility of the prisoner concerned (McNeeley, 2021). The most frequent sites were in segregation or in prisoners’ cells (McNeeley, 2021).

Much of this research is from official records of events, as recorded by staff or from staff interviews. From this perspective, in a significant proportion of staff assaults—a quarter in Light’s (1991) study—staff reported no obvious immediate precipitant. On some occasions, the prisoner may have been waiting for some time for an opportunity to “get back” at that staff member. Alternatively, Light suggested these events may be linked to general autonomy concerns for prisoners or may occur in circumstances where prison officers and prisoners do not have meaningful relationships, and the prison officer represents the regime itself (Light, 1991). Prisoners may victimise a particular prison officer simply because they are conveniently available for expressing anger about, for instance, unwelcome news, or a staff member may be assaulted to facilitate a prisoner’s desire for transfer to a more secure facility (Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017).

### **Prison Officers as Perpetrators of Violence**

Along with the risk of victimisation of prison staff, staff can also be the instigators of violence. Both prisoners and other staff can be victimised by prison staff, but

investigations into prison staff as perpetrators mainly have occurred as part of formal investigations of specific events (e.g., a prison riot); there has been little actual research (Novisky et al., 2021).

Prison officers are expected to use force where necessary to restore or maintain prison order, and they are trained and equipped with various weapons (e.g., chemical irritants, batons, hoods, restraints, and even guns; Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017). But prison staff may also be seen to go beyond this mandate in two circumstances. First, they may physically assault prisoners because they believe it is their right to do so or the prisoner deserves it. Second, they may sexually assault prisoners—whether violently or by use of coercion because their presence is seen as an opportunity for the staff member to degrade the prisoner or gain sexual satisfaction. In a third circumstance, the prison has mandated extreme procedures for pre-empting violence during routine handling of prisoners deemed to be dangerous. In this context, prison officers may be operating lawfully but in such an extreme way as to be defined as state-sanctioned violence (see King [2005] below).

### ***Illegitimate Use of Violence by Prison Staff***

Prisoners or ex-prisoners commonly report that they have been assaulted by staff (Novisky et al., 2021), but such reports may not be given credence for a raft of reasons and have largely been overlooked by researchers. We found just one study reporting rates of staff assault on prisoners using prisoner self-report victimisation surveys. Wolff, Blitz, Shi, et al. (2007) reported 6-month prevalence rates of 13.9–23.6% of male prisoners and 2.3–8.3% of women prisoners.

As already noted, in some systems, prison staff may hold the belief that their employment gives them the right to use violence on prisoners, and prison supervisors may implicitly support this view by ignoring their actions (Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017). After knowing for what particular prisoners are imprisoned, staff may feel entitled or justify their actions as a public good, as they contemplate assaulting or killing prisoners or supporting these prisoners to kill themselves (Higgins et al., 2022). There are accounts of prison staff abusing prisoners for their own entertainment or satisfaction, including illegal and lengthy periods in restraints, beatings, stabbings, and killings. In some cases, it may be a single staff member who is engaged in illegal violence, but more often, it may be a group of staff or the culture in a particular prison (Johnson et al., 2016). Staff may also engineer, indirectly, serious assaults on prisoners, such as arranging gladiatorial fights between prisoners, for their own viewing (Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017; Novisky & Peralta, 2020). Musick and Gunsaulus-Musick also reported cases where prison officers intentionally mixed prisoners, knowing that the result would be violence, and then covered up the result with inaccurate incident reporting. Alternatively, staff might simply choose to fail to act (i.e., turn a “blind eye”) when prisoners are harming each other. One informant in the Higgins et al. study said: “Inmates get in a fight and crack each other’s head open, and to be honest I can speak for everybody here—they can do it all day and I don’t care if they die ... but as soon as the touch a staff member, the response is very different”

(Higgins et al., 2022, p. 15). A final strategy is the withholding of medical treatment to prisoners, which can lead to extreme suffering and even death (Novisky et al., 2021).

As with police, prison officers have a strong code of silence when it comes to investigating egregious behaviour; in part, because they depend on each other for backup in dangerous situations. In some well-known US legal cases when correctional staff were eventually charged for violence against prisoners, they were acquitted because colleagues refused to provide evidence against them (Johnson et al., 2016), and in other cases, they had the support of their local communities for their behaviour (Musick & Gunsaulus-Musick, 2017). Practices that increase the risk of excessive or illegal violence by staff in prison have been identified as including corruption, associated prisoner favouritism, routinely demeaning and degrading prisoners, and a lack of routine communication between prisoners and staff (Johnson et al., 2016).

Like any form of staff corruption, unsanctioned force, and violence can also have much longer-term effects on prisoners, including criminogenic effects (Novisky et al., 2021). Research on both law enforcement and institutional custodial staff shows that perceptions that those who represent the criminal justice system are behaving illegitimately are associated with a variety of poorer criminal outcomes for those prisoners (see Novisky et al., 2021; for a review).

### **Sexual Assault of Prisoners**

Although sexual assault—sometimes cloaked as “inappropriate staff-prisoner relations”—is not commonly reported, it may be more common than prisoner–prisoner sexual assaults. The 2007 US National Inmate Survey of 130 state prisons for adults and 20 facilities run by the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that 4.4% of prisoners reported sexual assault, and more than half of cases were perpetrated by staff (Beck & Harrison, 2007). In another study, the rate of any type of sexual victimisation was 4.4% for those victimised by other prisoners and 7.8% by staff (Wolff, Blitz, & Shi, 2007). In the most recent survey, more than half (58%) of incarcerated sexual assault victims reported that staff, not prisoners, were perpetrators (Rantala, 2018). Male prisoners are much more likely to be physically victimised by prison staff, but women prisoners are more likely than men to be sexually assaulted by prison staff (Buchanan, 2007; as cited in Wooldredge, 2020). Little research has been conducted on how to best prevent staff sexual assaults on prisoners, even though prisoners often know who the serious sexual abusers are on staff (Novisky et al., 2021). Staff may avoid raising the issue with other staff who are conducting these assaults due to a fear of being assaulted themselves.

### **Staff Factors Related to Increasing and Decreasing the Risk of Prison Violence**

Staff occupy a central role in their own safety, the safety of their colleagues and the safety of prisoners. Their ability to read situations, skills at de-escalation,

preparedness in high-risk situations, and attitudes and beliefs about prisoners are all important in this regard.

### *Acute Prevention of Prison Violence*

Based on their prior knowledge of the precipitants of prisoner assaults on staff, prison officers are aware of circumstances in which they are more likely to be assaulted, including those between prisoners that will require them to intervene. Events quite often start with threats or arguments between staff and officers (McNeeley, 2021), giving officers time to use their discretion in how best to respond. In the early stages of an event that unfolds slowly, staff have considerable discretion. They may be able to use verbal and non-verbal communication skills to talk a prisoner out of a corner or otherwise de-escalate the situation. Alternatively, they have options to use force or otherwise disable the prisoner to prevent an episode from escalating.

Staff are often taught both control and restraint (C & R) and de-escalation skills. Early in their careers, C & R may foster a helpful level of cohesion between staff but also may inadvertently lead them to view prisoners as “dangerous others”, best kept at a distance socially, and inherently untrustworthy, manipulative, deceptive and violent (Arnold, 2008). It is unclear how staff learn to make decisions about which approach to use in each circumstance. In fact, I found no empirical research while writing this chapter on how prison officers decide when to use different strategies to manage potential incidents, nor whether training improves outcomes for staff and prisoners. For example, in a “slow-burning” scenario, are prison officers more likely to use de-escalation strategies first when dealing with a lone prisoner and a show of force when there are others around who may join in?

Similar concerns have been noted in a recent review regarding research on police de-escalation training (Engel et al., 2020). There also seems to be a dearth of research on the effects of C & R training on staff behaviour, but there are several recent studies that suggest that de-escalation training may be associated with dealing more effectively with prisoners in a state of acute mental distress (McNeeley & Donley, 2021).

Use of force often requires mandatory reporting, creating more accurate records for research purposes. Mandatory reporting is important given that the legitimate right to use of force is granted to a few employees and only under a very limited range of circumstances. But perceptions of how these reports are reviewed by authorities may also affect staff safety. In some regimes where every use of force resulted in a third-party review and where institutional investigations could result if a handcuffed prisoner had marks on his wrist, prison officers felt less safe because they second-guessed their actions in altercations, and some colleagues would choose not to respond to emergency codes that required them to back up a colleague who had set off a duress alarm because of wanting to avoid such complaints (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013).

### *Maintaining Security and Good Order*

In this book, we argue that the role of staff in preventing violence in the ecology of prison is best thought of by framing violence as a “symptom” of problems with the

routine functioning of the prison. “Empirical exploration shows that staff can create either safety, support, and assurance among prisoners or fear, frustration, anxiety, and distress, leading to higher rates of violence, disorder, and suicide” (Liebling & Kant, 2018, p. 25). Ultimately, prison officers influence the likelihood of prisoner violence as part of a complex interacting system, and their own part in that system as both individuals and, more generally, as a workforce can influence prisoner violence in a number of ways, with the results in turn influencing their perceptions of prisoners and of risk (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016).

How staff think about their roles and the prisoners they manage are linked closely to their perceptions of the risk of violence. The risk of violence towards staff can be distinguished from the subjective perceptions that staff have of their safety, and both are important (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). Minimising risk and increasing perceived safety is part of a prison officer’s responsibility for “good order”. Good order is, in many ways, the inverse of violence and has many benefits besides safety. How do staff contribute to the establishment or maintenance of good order in prison so that staff and prisoners feel secure and prison life flows relatively smoothly?

For some staff, the maintenance of good order is understood mainly to result from strong physical security. An overly security-focused orientation characterises prisoners as unpredictable, and bad, with the officer’s role emphasising patrols, muster counts, locking and unlocking, and searching (Gredecki & Horrocks, 2017). Staff with this physical security focus are suspicious of prisoners, conceptualise their role in quite simple terms—us vs. them and mainly controlling and managing—and do not subscribe to an understanding that security may also be related to “softer” aspects of prisoner staff dynamics and that responding with greater restrictions to perceptions of threat may escalate violence risk rather than increasing safety.

Physical security is an important part of what keeps prisoners and staff safe, but it appears to be only a part. One important way that prison officers influence prisoner behaviour, for instance, is linked to how they use their power and how that behaviour is perceived by prisoners (e.g., prisoner perceptions of their authority and fairness). For example, when staff rely on coercion (e.g., verbal warnings, threatening physical punishment, and trying to intimidate prisoners), it undermines their credibility as an authority figure, can enhance prisoners’ cynicism and anger towards the prison, and as it loses effectiveness, escalation is inevitable (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016). When the use of power is associated with taking a dehumanising “us vs. them” approach, it can also backfire on the staff member’s mental health because it requires them to be hypervigilant to potential threats (Higgins et al., 2022).

Although the public often assumes that prison officers maintain control using force (Symkovich, 2019), the reality—except perhaps in supermax institutions—is different, even though the possibility of staff using force is ever present in the background (“power at bay”; p. 97; Symkovich [2019]). Force may be necessary and useful in the short term, but in the longer term, a more ordered regime based on face-to-face interactions is generally regarded as more effective in maintaining social order.

Prison officers are aware that prisoners can and do spend hours observing them and looking for weaknesses that could make them vulnerable to victimisation. Male staff seek to convey themselves as confident and physically capable with a “tough guy” image to feel safer and less vulnerable to victimisation (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013). Being able to convey that they could be an “enforcer”, at least for some staff, made them feel safer even if their preferred strategy for dealing with prisoner aggression was still words first (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013), because ultimately, usually one could be overpowered by the prisoners anyway. More effective and experienced staff rely more on “peacekeeping” (Arnold, 2016, p. 268), where they can ensure the prison runs smoothly and is not disrupted by over-enforcement, especially of minor infractions. By contrast, one study found that being a male staff member and having a military background was correlated with the adoption of a hard orientation: a hard-line approach to the “job” and to interactions with prisoners. Compared to non-veterans, military veterans were more likely to endorse the use of force to gain a prisoner’s compliance with an order (Hemmens & Stohr, 2000). On the other hand, Ricciardelli and Gazso (2013) reported that staff were aware that how they treated prisoners could strongly affect their safety, citing cases where staff who treated prisoners with respect were warned to leave the floor prior to a riot, in which other staff were later badly hurt.

Liebling and Kant (2018) have summarised the different positions occupied by staff into two cultural stances: *professional-supportive* and *traditional-resistant*. They characterise the first orientation as characterising the best of prison staff, who take pride in their work, accomplishing social order with careful use of discretion to enforce the rules and a positive outlook on prisoners’ futures, while recognising their realities as well. They use their authority and “their most prized skill-straight talk” (Liebling & Kant, 2018, p. 4) over force and aim to resolve conflicts. Similarly, staff can reduce threat not only by talking respectfully to prisoners as a starting strategy but also by recognising prisoners’ need to maintain face with each other and other dynamics between prisoners (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013). Although professional-supportive prison officers were not the majority in the prisons that Liebling has studied, when they are present in good numbers, the experience of prison is less damaging for the prisoners they oversee (Liebling & Kant, 2018). In contrast, traditional-resistant prison staff are past-oriented and prize a paramilitary approach to control over care and rehabilitation. These staff work in brutal, neglectful or punitive prison climates, and care little about prisoners’ welfare. They are also change-resistant, instead favouring “the way things have always been done around here” (Liebling & Kant, 2018, p. 5). Staff are cynical and hostile towards all outsiders and keep prisoners on austere, limited regimes where their own work preferences are prioritised over, for instance, allowing prisoners to phone family members. They are also typically sexist and racist. Traditional-resistant staff have an us vs. them approach to prisoners and, though preoccupied with safety, may fail to maintain it because they avoid interacting with prisoners. Although they consequently needed staff to back them up in the face of violence, they also did not trust those staff would be there.

## **Organisational Factors**

This chapter concludes with a brief mention of wider organisational factors. Although correctional officers—even individual officers operating against a generally negative staff culture—can make the difference for prisoners between deciding to kill themselves or others and leaving prison with a better “shot” at desistance, their ability to do so is substantially influenced by the organisational culture. Frontline staff sit between the cultural dictates of management, legislation and political forces, and the prisoners themselves. There are striking disparities between the cultures of small prison units in parts of Europe, therapeutic prison units such as those in parts of the UK, and the worst of the “prison industrial complex” in parts of the US. Different types of facilities and even different units have different cultural rules that affect both how staff and prisoners go about their lives. In some prison systems, prisoners have been described as “nightmares” and treated with barbarism by staff, who understand their role to be harming and dehumanising prisoners on behalf of a community committed to penal retribution policies (Higgins et al., 2022). Elsewhere, correctional officers may function as a kind of minimally trained therapist (Bond & Gemmell, 2014). The reality for many staff may be a balancing act between “security” and a “human services” approach—with similar confusion and complexity reflected in how their own management and the wider society understand their roles. This kind of complexity in the daily life of a prison officer is a significant source of stress (Bond & Gemmell, 2014; Gredecki & Horrocks, 2017). The likelihood of violence is further increased by overcrowding and understaffing, cuts to educational programmes, lack of treatment resources, and reductions in food quality, which are routine problems in many prisons, particularly in North America (Ricciardelli et al., 2018). The combination of these circumstances increases stress and violence between prisoners and makes it hard for prison officers to complete their routine tasks safely (Ricciardelli et al., 2018). This section presents two very contrasting views of how prison officers engage in the work of maintaining order in prison in two different organisational cultures. The first and most striking example comes from a study of supermax prisons in the US. Arguably, the idea of supermax comes from a conceptualisation of human behaviour that emphasises punishment and control as providing the preferred solution to violent prisoner behaviour, even though giving prisoners “less and less to lose” would appear to escalate the problems or create more severe problems. Descriptions of supermax suggest that the National Institute of Corrections continued to embrace an increasingly extreme view of how to achieve prison order that focused on deprivation, control, the use of force, and punishment rather than more humane circumstances (Briggs et al., 2003). Consequently, “the incapacitative effect of supermax involves essentially the same philosophy as might be deployed by a gardener who solves the problem of unwanted weeds by turning his garden into a concrete courtyard” (King, 2005, p. 122). The approach can become so extreme that it may seem relatively incomprehensible to more liberal systems.

Of course, most prisons in the US are not supermax. However, US prison regimes still tend to rely primarily on static security to achieve safety in prisons through a

combination of physical security measures and the degree to which prison officers follow routine procedures for the management of prisoners (e.g., movement control; Abdel-Salam & Sunde, 2018). Depending on the facility and unit, prison staff will have varying amounts of contact with prisoners, but typically their role duties do not extend to therapeutic interactions. By contrast, in Norway, prison officer roles encompass both security and rehabilitation. Dynamic security is relationship based; staff work to develop rapport with prisoners, are active in conveying their engagement in supporting positive change, broker specific social services based on prisoner need and develop reintegration plans with prisoners and serve as role models. From a security perspective, while dynamic security renders prison officers more vulnerable to prisoner-based corruption, it also can enable them to preempt prisoner violence well before that becomes the prisoners' preferred option (Abdel-Salam & Sunde, 2018). Dynamic security approaches improve safety because they provide superior intelligence-gathering opportunities and are used in several jurisdictions internationally, although there is limited research on how it is implemented in practice. Combining dynamic security with other features, such as well-trained staff and a positive ethos, can decrease threats of, and actual violence, with many other positive effects as well (Liebling et al., 2019; see also Crewe & Liebling, 2015). However, they do also increase the complexity and conflict within prison officers' roles.

Prison officers have a unique job. They look after people, confined against their will, often in stressful, dehumanising, sometimes repugnant conditions. But during their workday, they are also confined within the institution, sandwiched between prisoners, other staff, and the institution's management. In some circumstances, staff are brutal and abusive, simply furthering their own or societal aims to continue in prison the harm that prisoners are seen to deserve by virtue of being sentenced. Elsewhere, within the limitations imposed on them by the physical structure, resources, prisoners' needs and management, they have the discretion to contribute to increased safety and reduced violence for everyone in their workplace. One way they achieve this is by working together to uphold an established pattern of routines, customs, and procedures that are seen as legitimate by both prisoners and staff. Within the walls, these interactions become the stable structure of prison life that make it possible for both staff and prisoners to be and feel safer and less stressed (Boin & Rattray, 2004). In other words, although many people in prison are there because of a history of violence, staff know that they have a central role in whether prisons are violent places or places that minimise harm to people doing their time.

### **Key Learning Points**

- Staff have a central role in the prevention or escalation of prison violence, can be victimised by prisoners or fellow staff, and may perpetrate violence towards prisoners and other staff.
- Prison officers' views of their role affect their own and prisoners' safety and wellbeing.

- Perhaps paradoxically, efforts to prevent prisoner violence by keeping prisoners in conditions restricting physical access to others become dehumanising and result in increased prisoner violence when contact becomes necessary.
- More humanising regimes where staff get to know prisoners and attempt to relate positively, respectfully, and in a firm but fair manner are better at preventing violence and in promoting long-term social order.
- Staff also experience these social environments as safer, even though assaults do still occur.
- Prison officers are most likely to be assaulted while moving prisoners from one physical space to another.
- Prisoners, especially women, are as likely or more likely to be sexually assaulted by prison staff as by other prisoners.
- Staff often have discretion about whether to attempt to de-escalate prisoner behaviour or use force, but little is known about how they decide which to use when.
- Organisational policies and practices and physical environments and resources affect staff approaches to prisoners and violence, but more indirectly than the day-to-day behaviour of individuals and groups of staff with prisoners.

## Note

- 1 In this chapter, “staff” is not defined. For the most part I refer to prison officers, but some research includes other roles as well, such as programme staff, and in some prisons, particularly during times of short staffing, all staff can be co-opted to the “front line”, meaning that the findings here are probably pertinent to all staff who have contact with prisoners within the walls.

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## **Part III**

# **Critical Issues**



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## 9 Critical Issue 1

### Colonialism, Settler Colonialism, and Supporting Indigenous as Violent

*Robert Henry and Armon Tamatea*

Globally, Indigenous Peoples are often over-incarcerated in relation to the general population (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). The criminalising—which leads to over-incarceration—of Indigenous Peoples is a continuation of colonial epistemologies, where Indigenous Peoples have been forcefully removed from their lands through policies, most often violently. By constructing Indigenous Peoples as violent, colonial agents and systems could (and continue to) destroy or remove Indigenous Peoples, as they were understood to be uncivilised. Violence then was central to the removal, either directly through wars or indirectly through colonial policies that sought to control the new territories. The process of removal differed geographically, but at its core, was the essentialised notion that Indigenous Peoples were close to nature and needed to be controlled (Dorries et al., 2019; LaRocque, 2011; Taussig, 2008).

Even though colonisation and colonialism are constructed as something of the distant past, they are not historical events and need to be understood as a continued relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples that affect Indigenous Peoples' lives in the present. According to Patricia Monture (2007, p. 207), colonisation needs to be understood as a “living phenomenon”, wherein to understand issues related to Indigenous Peoples today, “a well-developed historical understanding of colonialism and the present-day trajectories of those old relationships” is necessary. Therefore, to understand Indigenous Peoples' experiences within carceral spaces (and for the purpose of this chapter, specifically, Māori), colonisation needs to be centred to best understand how Indigenous relations to settler peoples and institutions reinforce a state of hyper-incarceration over Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples' contemporary experiences are positioned within a deficit approach, where colonisation has destroyed what has made one Indigenous. As a result, Indigenous programming in carceral settings centres on a “re-culturalisation”, focusing on “teaching” Indigenous Peoples their culture that was stripped from them through colonisation. Therefore, to keep Indigenous Peoples from becoming involved in criminality and the carceral system, they must “re-learn” who they are through state-sanctioned programming. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the need for researchers and policymakers to frame historical and contemporary colonial

experiences in order to best understand how to support Indigenous Peoples' experiences and develop effective Indigenous programming within carceral spaces.

This chapter examines how colonisation and settler colonialism have supported the hyper-incarceration (Wacquant, 2010; White, 2015) of Indigenous Peoples to come into higher contact with the criminal justice system, which leads directly to their overrepresentation behind prison walls. The present chapter contains three sections. The first section examines the role of colonisation and settler colonialism and how it has come to construct Indigenous Peoples, and Māori specifically, as violent and in need to be controlled, specifically through the criminal justice system. It moves from the need to control the “violent savage” for colonial encroachment and settlement to that of the contemporary violent criminal, with a focus on the Indigenous gang member and the need to move them out of their community and into prisons. The second section then focuses on how the construction of Indigenous People as violent has propagated and supported systems of hyper-incarceration and hyper-surveillance to watch and control Indigenous bodies. Here we discuss how gang culture and gang behaviours are both bestowed onto as well as acted out by Māori men, which leads to increased surveillance and incarceration. The third section looks at the *Hōkai Rangi*<sup>1</sup> strategy and its importance in supporting Māori prisoners to address the legacy and continued impacts of colonisation and settler colonialism. Here we look to emphasise how prisons both support and challenge colonialism as they provide opportunities to address historical traumas while at the same time control the state-sanctioned cultural programming.

### **Colonialism, Settler Colonialism, and Embodying Violence**

Colonisation, at its core, is best understood as a tool of exploration and accumulation to gain economic capital through the violent exploitation of Indigenous Peoples and territories (Fanon, 1963; Taussig, 2008). Western European nations sought out “new” territories, where they would assert a claim to the lands through international law (i.e. Doctrine of Discovery), despite coming into contact, working/warring with, and learning from the Indigenous Peoples of the new territories (Memmi, 2013). Through the exploitation of lands and peoples, early forms of colonisation relied on the ability to remove resources and bring them back to the home nation. Thus, colonisation/colonialism and capitalism work in relation to one another (Taussig, 2008). However, in nations such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States, the colonial paradigm shift occurred where the focus shifted from the exploitation of resources back to the metropole to the settlement and remaking of Indigenous spaces in the image of the settler. Therefore, colonisers no longer came to the new territories to increase their wealth and leave but stayed—claiming Indigenous territories as their own (Dorries et al., 2019; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). This shift brought with it new ways to govern and control Indigenous Peoples and lands, where European legal orders and governmentality were enforced to make room for the arrival of European immigrants. No longer were agreements made that were trade- or resource-specific; rather, treaties and policies were created to dispossess and control Indigenous bodies and

movement within their own Indigenous territories (Nichols, 2020; Wynard, 2019). This was done under the guise of a peaceful transfer of control to increase primarily Western European settlement (albeit colonialism is violence itself).

Despite differences in colonisation globally, colonisation has undertaken similar specific phases or stages. According to James Frideres and Rene Gadacz (2008), there were three specific stages of British colonisation. Within their framework, Frideres and Gadacz state that the first stage can be understood as the incursion of the coloniser into the new territories. The second stage focused on the extraction of resources through either treaties or violent actions. The third stage is the destruction and denigration of Indigenous lifeworlds—individually and communally. Although Frideres and Gadacz provide a broad understanding of colonisation, their framework only focuses on the impacts of colonisation. It ignores that Indigenous Peoples were engaged in dynamic processes of governance, trade, and relationality to space and place and does not provide a stage to decolonise. As such, Winona Stevenson's (2000) five-stage process of colonisation holds greater merit in examining Indigenous and settler relationships that have been shaped by colonisation. Stevenson's (2000) stages describe how violence is integral to colonialism, from that of imperial to settler colonialism (Barker, 2009; Smith, 2021; Veracini, 2010), where Indigenous bodies become a site of economic capital, which is a central tenet to understand the current reality of Indigenous over-incarceration (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016).

Stevenson's first stage is that of the *steady state*. The steady state is best understood as the time prior to contact from a colonising state. The steady state is where Indigenous nations had specific laws, governance, and relationships with other Indigenous nations uninhibited by Western Eurocentric influences. The steady state should not be understood as a state of utopia, which some have come to understand as pre-contact existence, but rather as a state where wars, disease, and conflict also occur. However, there were laws and governance structures in place that reflected the axiological, ontological, and epistemological values of the Indigenous Peoples. The second stage is that of *first contact*, where Indigenous and European colonisers, primarily merchants, came into direct contact. It was at this stage that Indigenous Peoples were brought into global markets, either for the resources they could provide or through their entrapment and engagement in the global slave trade. Contact also increased strain on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities, as they were introduced to new diseases (Daschuk, 2013) and ideologies, specifically heteronormative patriarchy (Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

Stage three, *imposition of colonial relations*, shifts from colonisers extracting resources and returning home to them staying in the new territories. Indigenous Peoples, whose populations were declining because of the introduction of disease and increased warfare, found themselves as the minority (Crosby, 1976; Daschuk, 2013). With increased settlement, there was a need to obtain more land. European laws and policies were implemented, which created Indigenous as second-class citizens, often limiting their ability to own land and engage in local economies. An example of this can be found in Canada, where the Canadian government instilled what was called the *pass system*, which limited First Nations peoples from leaving

their reserves. If they were found to be off reserve without a pass signed by the local Indian agent (government official), they could be fined or jailed. As such, we begin to see how Indigenous bodies began to be controlled by the state through laws and justice policies (Barron, 1988). These laws and policies were based on racialised perceptions where Indigenous Peoples were constructed as violent, leading to the development of a culture of terror (Taussig, 2008) directed towards Indigenous Peoples.

The first three stages highlight how Indigenous Peoples began to lose control of their lives, land, and autonomy. The complexity that occurs between *first contact* and *colonial impositions* could not occur without multiple systems working together. It was through Christianity and capitalism that colonialism was not only able to expand but to destroy Indigenous societies, positioning their people as secondary citizens that could be disposed of easily. The loss of control has led to the fourth stage, *manifestations of internalised colonialism*. Here, Indigenous Peoples do not have to rely on colonial engagement to impact their lifeworlds; rather, lateral violence and cycles of trauma support violence on Indigenous Peoples by Indigenous Peoples themselves, albeit personally or laterally. This stage highlights the high rates of internalised violence (suicide, substance abuse, etc.), leading to increased contact with justice, health, and child welfare systems. Increased contact with these systems supports historical constructions of the uncivilised Indigenous person in need of support and guidance.

The final stage is that of *decolonisation* where individuals can move beyond the impacts of colonisation and resurge their identities as Indigenous Peoples. Decolonisation, while ostensibly the dismantling of structures, values, and power imposed by the settler states, is invariably a lengthy and complex collective journey that draws on political, economic, social, and cultural resources. In some cases, the endgame is reconciliation; in others, it is independence. Perhaps in all cases, it involves negotiating power.

The New Zealand experience is somewhat consistent with the international experience of colonisation in Western countries such as Canada and Australia. A critical difference, however, has been the formalisation of a Treaty between Māori and the Crown in 1840 (Orange, 1987) that set the stage for a fractious relationship between Indigenous Peoples and colonisers and resulted in a series of conflicts and wars that devastated the fledgling nation (Belich, 1986; Keenan, 2009). Walker (2004) has described the consequent journey as an “endless struggle for justice, equality and self-determination” (2004) that is still evidenced in the overrepresentation of Māori in negative health, education, poverty, and criminal justice statistics.

In recent decades, efforts at decolonisation in Aotearoa have involved solutions posed from pre-colonisation to post-colonisation times (Smith, 2021). For instance, the revitalisation of language, customs, and connection with ancestral lands has resulted in something of a renaissance of traditional culture and positive identity, and engagement in mainstream politics (Māori party; Mana Motuhake) as a colonial-informed strategy that has moved the collective focus from tribe to state (Cox, 1993).

Historical and settler colonialism have negatively impacted Indigenous Peoples. The violence enacted on Indigenous Peoples and territories, both by the colonial process and by settler actions, has led to the development and continued perception of Indigenous Peoples as violent people who need to be controlled through violence. Sunsera Thobani asserts that “colonialism created an order based on absolute violence, Fanon argues, an order that relied on the transformation of the ‘native’ into a ‘thing’, an object of exploitation. The colonial encounter gave rise to new species of men, the native and the settler” (2007, p. 37). The construction of Indigenous Peoples as “less than” has helped to support the need to use violence and surveillance to control Indigenous Peoples and their movement (Crosby & Monaghan 2018; Lambert & Henry, 2019). For this discussion, we will focus on how hyper-surveillance has led to the hyper-incarceration of Māori peoples in Aotearoa prisons.

### **The State and Hyper-incarceration**

Colonisation and colonialism have constructed—and continue to construct—Indigenous Peoples as violent and the need to be controlled. Through early forms of paternalistic thought, settler states created ways in which to observe and control Indigenous Peoples in fear of them uprising or engaging in violence against the new settler states (Henry, 2015; Taussig, 2008). Through cultures of terror, Indigenous bodies have become vilified for the potential violence that they could enact but seldom ever did. Thalia Anthony and Harry Blagg (2020) highlight the fact that colonial policies have reduced Indigenous Peoples’ lives to the point that even their basic rights are often denied for the procurement of land and the extinguishment of Indigenous sovereignty. One of the ways that this continues to occur is through the penal system, which relies on the state and state actors to vigilantly “watch” Indigenous Peoples and movements through a lens of criminality.

Through stages two to four of the colonial process described earlier (Stevenson, 2000), the construction of the Indigenous body as violent or criminal was slow, embedding itself into colonial ontological thought. For example, in his work with Māori masculinity and sport, Brendan Hokowhitu (2004) expresses how Māori masculine physicality has shifted from something to be conquered and civilised to that of being harnessed to that of being a spectacle, all for the benefit of settler logic of control. Though Hokowhitu is discussing the role of Māori males in sports, his perceptions are important, as they illustrate the ways in which Indigenous male bodies have been constructed over time to support settler needs. However, while some Indigenous males were sought after for their physicality to support labour initiatives or pride within different venues, many Indigenous Peoples continue to be targeted and removed because they are unwanted.

In their research on Indigenous gangs in Canada, Elizabeth Comack, Lawrence Deane, Larry Morrisette, and Jim Silver (2013) found that one way colonialism has perpetuated is through a racialised discourse that has been constructed around the ideas of Indigenous Peoples as “savage”, “inferior”, and “child-like” but has shifted to a discourse of the “criminal other”, where there is a need for heightened

surveillance and control (37; see also Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Comack, 2012; Henry, 2019). It is not just the idea of the Indigenous body as a criminal that plays an integral role in the surveillance of Indigenous bodies. Racialised poverty (Loxley & Silver, 2007) plays an integral role in the hyper-surveillance of Indigenous Peoples, leading to the hyper-incarceration of racialised bodies living in communities of poverty.

Police and corrections have utilised several approaches and policies in their attempts to prevent, intervene or suppress crime in the community or in prisons (Norris & Tauri, 2021). The majority of these approaches have focused on ways to watch or conduct surveillance on populations that are determined to have “pro-criminal” tendencies. However, the application of surveillance is not objective, and one’s social construction of who is pre-determined to be a “criminal” becomes the focal point of who needs to be watched or observed (Alexander, 2010; Cacho, 2012; Wacquant, 2010; White, 2015). As such, the state helps to support Lisa Cacho’s (2012) notions of *de facto* crimes and criminals, where the term captures the multiple ways that criminalised conduct is associated with one’s social capital. The result is that:

De facto status crimes can be defined as specific activities that are only transparently recognized as “criminal” when they are attached to statuses that invoke race (gang member), ethnicity (illegal alien), and/or national origin (suspected terrorist).

(Cacho, 2012 p. 43)

Therefore, who an individual *is* is integral to whether one’s actions or movements can be considered criminal. In his work with Indigenous masculinity and street gangs, Henry (2015) talks about how boys fighting on a playground at school will be constructed differently based on who is involved and where it is taking place. If the boys are living in a middle–upper-class neighbourhood and are white, it is usually constructed as “boys being boys” and learning to become men. However, those same actions taking place with youth in a neighbourhood mired in racialised poverty are understood to be “boys becoming criminals”. As such, one can see how Michel Foucault’s (2008) concept of biopolitics and Achille Mbembé’s (2003) concept of necropolitics work simultaneously to create and eliminate.

The concept of biopolitics can help prison and criminal justice scholars appreciate the complexities and evaluation of what is understood as valuable within the prison complex. Biopolitics examines how the human body is used within different social economies (Foucault, 2008). Here specific bodies are valued for their worth and provide state structures with the opportunity to provide life or existence of being as the bodies are needed for the manufacturing of the economy. While Foucault focused on the power or biopower that a body has, Mbembé asserted that if bodies have power, then there are other bodies that do not have power or are not seen as having value. Necropolitics then examines the complexities of whose life is worth living and whose life is not. Necropolitics highlights how specific bodies can be removed or are seen to be a part of the “living dead”, a space where individuals are not seen to be of any

value, and that their death or removal is valid to make space for those whose lives hold value. Colonisation relied on the occupation of geographical spaces through the rewriting of relationships to those spaces. In other words, the ability to validate ownership within a colonial framework was necessary to remove Indigenous land rights, as Indigenous occupation was deemed to be primitive or non-existent. Through the ignoring and silencing of Indigenous sovereignty, colonial laws and logics invalidated Indigenous existence. Space then, according to Mbembé and Meintjes (2003), was:

therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it. Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood.

(Mbembé & Meintjes, 2003 p. 26)

However, because outright genocide could not happen in many colonial spaces, primarily due to a lack of colonial populations, treaties were signed to gain access *peacefully* to new territories while extinguishing Indigenous sovereignty.

The concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics look to provide a framework to understand how the prison industrial complex is the continuation of state-sanctioned violence, as it is a legitimised space. Prison economies then legitimise those bodies and thoughts that are deemed valuable while at the same time using these Indigenous bodies for the economic function of the prison itself. As such, the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitics help to frame colonisation and colonialism not as static points of time but rather as the “system” that has come to construct Indigenous Peoples as violent and validating settler civility to control Indigenous Peoples and territories through violence.

Colonisation and colonialism have created the socio-political histories that have shaped Indigenous lifeworlds and experiences. Through the creation of Indigenous as “savage”, policies, laws, and programmes were and continue to be used to watch, observe, and remove Indigenous Peoples that are deemed to be undesirable or criminal. Colonialism has emphasised settler perceptions that Indigenous actions need to be treated as violent, supporting hyper-surveillance over Indigenous Peoples and communities (Henry, 2019; Wolfe, 2006). Through the construction of the Indigenous body as violent, criminal justice systems have come to utilise and support hyper-surveillance as a neocolonial tool of control. However, this cannot be done outright, as the state and the actors need to make sure that they are not engaged in “racialised policing” (Comack, 2012; Wacquant, 2010) for fear of public backlash. Therefore, policy language needs to be broad to assert that everyone is under the same surveillance and justice policies.

Through his work examining the difference between mass incarceration and hyper-incarceration, Loïc Wacquant (2010) asserts that mass incarceration looks to portray the impact of the penal state as a “net that is flung far and wide across social and physical space” (p, 78). However, the actual targeting of crime policies has led to a cumulative targeting that has:

*led to the hyper-incarceration of one particular category, lower-class African American men trapped in the crumbling ghetto, while leaving the*

*rest of society—including, most remarkably, middle-and upper-class African Americans—practically untouched.* (emphasis in original)

(Wacquant, 2010, p. 78)

Wacquant highlights that it is more about the action of those living in specific neighbourhoods (or, as he states, the ghetto) that influences if one is a criminal or if a crime is committed. By differentiating between *mass* and *hyper*-incarceration, Wacquant looks to challenge the role and impact of a public safety policy that relies on penal systems to address societal perceptions of crime. In another vein, as long as carceral policies are not *actually* enforced across the masses, then there will be little challenge because those that are being targeted *are* the ones that are deemed to be criminals simply for being who they are.

The hyper-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples is a global phenomenon, specifically within colonial countries such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. All four countries have seen an increase in incarceration rates of Indigenous Peoples since the 1960s. For example, in Canada, the incarceration rate of Indigenous Peoples has steadily climbed to where they constitute over 30% of the total federally incarcerated population (this excludes provincial incarceration, which in the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan exceeds 75%), despite only constituting 4.1% of the total adult population (Government of Canada, 2020). In Australia, the Indigenous and Torres Strait Island incarceration rates increased by 8% from 2020 to 2021, to where Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders now make up 30% of the incarcerated population (Temple, Mercer & Callope, 2021). In the United States, Native American incarceration continues to increase steadily, such that they are now incarcerated at 420 per 100,000, an increase of 85% since 2000 (Wang, 2021). Similarly, in New Zealand, Māori incarceration rates doubled from 11% of the total prison population in 1936 to 21% by 1945, and by the turn of the Millenium, that proportion had increased to over 50% (Newbold, 2007), a rate that has more or less held constant despite Māori making up only 17% of the New Zealand general population (Ara Poutama Aotearoa, 2022; Statistics New Zealand, 2022).

The high rates of removing Indigenous Peoples from their communities and placing them into prisons continue to create trauma waves within and across Indigenous communities (Comack et al., 2013). Here, Indigenous families and communities are fragmented, where individuals are removed and placed in prisons to “pay” for their actions.

### **Indigenous Programming Behind Bars**

With the continued rapid increase and overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in prison, countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States have focused their attention on addressing these issues through multiple reports and inquiries into Indigenous incarceration (e.g., Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017; Clark, 2019; Minton, Brumbaugh, & Rohlof, 2017; Strategy and Research Group, 2007). The reports often look to address the concerns of overrepresentation

and link this to the impacts of historical colonisation. Often found in the reports is that through colonisation, Indigenous Peoples have lost their culture and need to “relearn” or reengage in their culture, which would alleviate individuals from committing criminal acts, specifically, acts of violence. As such, the social fields—racialised poverty, hyper-surveillance, and the ideology of Indigenous as violent—are often overlooked as they focus on social impacts, whereas cultural programming focuses on addressing the needs of the individual, who is lost and needs to reconnect.

The irony of Indigenous cultural programming, and specifically for our discussion, the *Hōkai Rangi* strategy in prisons is that they are state-run apparatuses used to control. So, while colonisation and settler colonialism have looked to erase Indigenous Peoples from their own lands and territories, Indigenous prison programming looks to try to provide space for individuals to regain their cultural consciousness (see Martel, Brassard & Jaccoud 2011), as it may. However, cultural programming is controlled by the state, and the programming that is administered is framed through a Western lens, like learning through a textbook. For example, in interviews conducted with Māori prisoners, some participants explained how they felt Māori-specific programming behind bars reflected symbolic efforts rather than a genuine shift in institutional values:

*They've made it part of the policy of doing rongoa<sup>2</sup>. I've been in Māori focus units, and nobody's ever had a problem with that. But it's like, well, why should I have to go to the Māori focus units to experience culture, when it's a partnership? We've got Hōkai Rangi come out, you know, and that stuff. But to me it's like “Yeah, Yeah.” Doesn't surprise me at all, it's just the way these places run. We learn a lot about te whare tapa whā<sup>3</sup>, but to me it's just tokenism. You know?*

(P03, Interview 2021)

*So you're telling me, what? Do you think it's going to work in the next five years with this Hōkai Rangi program? It's not ... I don't buy any part of it. It's fucking full of shit. It's just making those fucking idiots at the top look good, you know what I mean. That's all it is. Some people believe in it, and try to do that and this and that.*

(P010, Interview 2021)

Despite notions of tokenism and self-righteousness of those implementing cultural programmes, not all participants were against the programmes, and some found them supportive.

*But now, after that Hōkai Rangi strategy and all that, they're actually starting to come round, and many ways where the culture's actually changed, a lot. The officers on segregation, I've been to quite a few segregation units, and the officers talk to you, not at you. And it's that humanising or that culture where they're changing their culture, it's allowing a lot more guys to change as well, in a positive way.*

(P014, Interview 2021)

Through the *Hōkai Rangi* strategy, engagement in Māori programming is promoted to try and intervene in the hyper-incarceration of Māori peoples in prisons. However, most of the participants talked about the helpful impact that non-cultural programmes were having, specifically in areas of mentorship and job skills. One reason for this is that despite the importance of understanding cultural perspectives to promote personal wellbeing, culture does not change the reality of racialised colonial poverty that continues to push people to engage in illegal underground economies to survive.

This is not to say that we should not have Indigenous cultural programming in prisons; rather, it is to examine how effective these programmes are in addressing colonial violence and the continued fragmentation of Indigenous identity. Questions need to be asked about how effective cultural programming in prisons is. It is not that cultural programming behind bars is not important for individuals—but rather that we need a critique to understand the effectiveness and impact of this programming. Do individuals engage in programming behind bars because it provides different levels of freedom? What happens post-incarceration when individuals go back to their communities and their communities do not want them? Or that they now have different perspectives of cultural protocols because of localised tribal differences?

## **Conclusion**

The legacy of colonialism continues to impact Indigenous lifeworlds. Indigenous Peoples face more ill health and compromised wellbeing due to the social determinants of health and increased contact with criminal justice systems stemming from colonial policies that have led to racialised poverty for many Indigenous Peoples. Heightened experiences of Indigenous racialised poverty continue to support settler peoples, structures, and systems where Indigenous actions are more readily interpreted as criminal and violent. Hyper-surveillance then is not only supported but justified under settler colonialism, as it maintains the colonial legacy that Indigenous Peoples are uncivilised, savage, and prone to violence. The cycle of colonial violence on Indigenous bodies continues to be ignored when addressing issues of over-incarceration and the carceral systems broadly.

One of the ways that prisons have looked to address and support Indigenous Peoples behind bars is through cultural programming. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, one such strategy is *Hōkai Rangi*. The purpose has been to reengage Māori “back to their culture”, as though it is something that one has lost and is the crux of their placement in prison. Issues arise with colonial-controlled programmes, which is something that must be understood. No matter the influence of Māori people in this system, the system itself is still structured to maintain colonial control. The questions raised in the final section of this chapter need to be undertaken in a critical manner; if they are not, then it is Māori culture that will continue to be seen as the point of criminal behaviours and not the social spaces that limit opportunities and emphasise Māori as criminal.

Finally, any evaluation, programme, or interpretation of Indigenous experiences must position imperial and settler colonialism within its framework. We emphasise

that any ecological framework, such as the one used in this collection, must position this as well. This is because, at every level of the framework, colonialism has and continues to impact Indigenous lifeworlds. A failure to do this will continue to ignore the precarious and continued legacy of colonialism that looks to position Māori experiences solely as a choice that is equal to all others within and across Aotearoa/New Zealand.

### Key Learning Points

- Colonisation and colonialism have and continue to have negative impacts on Māori and Indigenous Peoples globally.
- Prison programming and training needs to involve the stages of colonisation so that individuals have a deeper understanding of the factors that have led to the overrepresentation of Māori and Indigenous Peoples being incarcerated.
- Prison cultural programming should not be forced onto Māori or Indigenous offenders.
- The perception of who is violent is influenced by one's race and social standing.
- Decolonial frameworks need to be used in the evaluation of Māori and Indigenous prison programming.
- Māori and Indigenous Peoples' actions are more likely to be considered violent than non-Indigenous people's actions.
- Hyper-incarceration focuses on how the state uses surveillance to incarcerate specific populations over others.
- Biopolitics and necropolitics can help to explain why specific bodies are valued or devalued in society.

### Notes

- 1 Launched in 2019, *Hōkai Rangi* is the current national strategy for the New Zealand Department of Corrections and notable for its strong emphasis on Māori participation in design and outcome priorities.
- 2 Traditional Māori healing art that includes the use of medicinal plants and herbs.
- 3 A public health framework derived from Māori concepts of wellbeing developed by Prof Sir Mason Durie in the early 1980s.

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# 10 Critical Issue 2

## Gangs

*Armon Tamatea and Robert Henry*

P004: *So I'm sitting there ... "Whose is this cell?" He goes, "Ah, it's mine, mate." I says, "Can I have a smoke here?" He goes, "Yeah, cool." So I'm having a smoke, and I turned around, and I said to this guy, "Hey, remember what you said just before?" He goes, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Then I just turned around, and I just smashed him in the face and then gave him three of the best: Bang! Bang! Bang! Smashed him in the face ... And then I felt sorry for him. Fuck, he's a friend of mine now.*

Armon: *I bet.*

(excerpt from an interview between the first author and a gang member, July 2021)

### Why Gangs?

Violence has been described as an unavoidable reality of prison life (Fahmy, Jackson, Pyrooz, & Decker, 2020), and gang violence, in particular, has been regarded as a growing problem in prisons around the world (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Wood & Dennard, 2017; Worrall & Morris, 2012). Although it is a widely recognised issue for correctional agencies and penal institutions, surprisingly, only a few reviews have addressed the literature on the role of gang violence in prisons (e.g., DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler, 2004; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). Research on prison gang violence has either focused on descriptions of prison trends and the place of gangs within these contexts (e.g., Maghan, 1999; Wood & Adler, 2001) or presented qualitative accounts of aspects of prison culture situating gangs as the purveyors of the violence (e.g., Lindegaard & Gear, 2014; Trammell, 2009). As such, attempts to obtain an accurate estimate of the prevalence and incidence of gang violence in prisons across jurisdictions are vexed by a lack of consistent research approaches associated with a lack of consensus on what is being measured (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Wood & Alleyne, 2010). Nevertheless, gang affiliation is still seen to be an important variable contributing to institutional aggression, and the frequency of incidents attributed to identified gang members has been seen as an indication of the extent of the problem.

Despite the fact that criminal justice research that highlights gang involvement leads to increased incarceration, prisons have been called “the final frontier”

(Fleischer & Decker, 2001, p. 2) in research on gangs. In this chapter, we discuss conceptual and socio-political problems with gangs in research, summarise empirical research on gang violence in prisons, discuss policy and regulatory practices, and examine this critical issue through an ecological perspective.

### **Gang Research in Prisons**

Most research on prison violence focuses on the perpetrators rather than identifying the risk factors for victimisation (Lahm, 2009; Wolff et al., 2007; Wooldredge & Steiner, 2014). This research suggests that membership in a gang is likely a differentiating factor between victims and non-victims of violence in prison. Taken together, these findings suggest that the perpetration of violence is pervasive in the prison setting and likely felt most by those who perpetrate violence—gang members. There is a strong link between gang membership and violence (Fahmy, Jackson, Pyrooz, & Decker, 2020), which has been described as the “defining feature and the central value of gang life” (Decker, 1996, p. 254). However, there has been little critical attention paid to the need for or use of violence by gangs and their members in prison (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019).

The literature on prison violence establishes a relationship between gang membership and violent misconduct and victimisation. Although gang members represent a lower percentage of the prison population (approximately 15% in one study; Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2019), they are considered to be responsible for the majority of violent incidents in prison, with estimates ranging from 43% to 80% of violence and misconduct (DeLisi, Spruill, Peters, Caudill, & Trulson, 2012; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Mitchell, Fahmy, Pyrooz, & Decker, 2016). Gang-affiliated prisoners are understood to be involved in greater incidences of serious acts of violence (Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002) and are more likely to assault other prisoners and correctional staff than non-affiliated prisoners (Huebner, 2003). Such rates of assault are significant. Indeed, Sorensen, Cunningham, Vigen, and Woods (2011) found that prison gang members in their study were three times more likely to seriously assault correctional staff than non-gang members. In addition, gang membership and prior criminal justice system involvement are associated with an increased risk of misconduct and perpetration of violence in prison (Steiner & Cain, 2016). As within street spaces, gang members are also identified as both the perpetrators and victims in many violent altercations in prison (Pyrooz, Moule, & Decker, 2014). Indeed, results from the LoneStar Project – A North American research programme conducted in Texas and one of the largest studies of prison gang members to date—emphasised the finding that the victim–offender overlap not only exists in prison but that it is more notable among gang members (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019).

Pre-prison affiliation with street gangs is considered a relevant measure to assess an individual’s potential risk to prison misconduct levels (Davis & Flannery, 2001). The little research conducted to date suggests that those prisons with a higher proportion of the prisoner population affiliated with gangs prior to incarceration will experience greater levels of prison misconduct (Camp & Camp,

1985; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Krienert & Fleisher, 2001; Reising, 2002; Shelden, 1991). When in prison, prisoners who have gang affiliations in the community will often either join their affiliated gang while inside or, depending on the historical presence of their group, carve out their own space within the prison hierarchy. Prison gangs use violence, or the threat of violence, to gain power and privilege within the prison, and gang-affiliated prisoners are more likely than other prisoners to engage in prison misconduct to maintain their position within the gang (Camp & Camp, 1985; Gaes et al., 2002; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Huebner, 2003; Shelden, 1991). The greater the number of prison gangs and the greater the number of prisoners who are affiliated with these gangs inside the prison, the less effective administrative controls over prisoner behaviour are (Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Kalnich & Stojkovic, 1985; Ralph & Marquart, 1991). Prisons with higher levels of gang activity or gang membership are seen to also have higher rates of nonviolent misconduct (Gransky & Patterson, 1999; Rivera, Cowles, & Dorman, 2003) and violent misconduct (Reising, 2002), although Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) found that “the amount of gang activity had no effect on the level of inmate violence” (Griffin & Hepburn, 2013).

Even with the issues of gangs growing within prison settings, as acknowledged within this section, there is limited research and knowledge about the complexities of gangs within prisons. The research that has been conducted is limited for different reasons, which include access to reliable prison statistics and accessibility to gang members in prison (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). However, what is of most concern is a critical examination of gang research itself and the role of studying gangs generally, and the relationship with gangs, violence, the streets, and politics within prison walls.

### **Problematizing Gang Violence**

Gangs continue to constitute a culture of fear to the broader society (Hagedorn, 2008; Henry, 2015; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). As such, gangs are used a socio-political tool by law enforcement and justice agencies for increased budgets (Comack, Morrissette, Deane, & Silver, 2013; Hallsworth, 2013; Meehan, 2000). Because of this connection, data and information on gangs and violence within prisons may be exaggerated, emphasising a high-risk work environment for staff, ignoring that violence and group violence, specifically within prisons, has been an ongoing issue prior to the emergence and entrenchment of gangs.

Despite the intentions of prisons to be “total institutions” (Foucault, 1995; Goffman, 1961), gangs—both within the prison and in the community—have shown the permeability of prison walls. Although prisons have barriers to separate the prison from the wider community—i.e., walls, fences, and security measures—prison politics continue to influence what is happening beyond prison walls. Often this is connected to the illegal street economies that are understood to be controlled primarily by gangs in prison (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). With limited access to drugs and other contraband within prisons, gangs utilise their social networks and

influence to increase economic and social capital within prison walls. Violence, actual and perceived, is used to make sure debts to the gang are paid. Violence within prison is not as sporadic or volatile as is believed; it is controlled to maintain a flow of profit for gang members behind bars.

Prison violence associated with illegal economies is not obstructed by prison walls. Violence seeps through prison walls, especially for those who have close relationships, specifically family associated with illegal street economies. This violence is not just put onto those in prison but also onto primarily family members who are outside. Potential violence against individuals outside of prison walls promotes the need for hyper-surveillance and punitive enforcement policies within prison walls directed to “limit” a gang’s power over others. Issues arise, though, as prison and gang cultures become intertwined due to what Elijah Anderson (1999) identifies as street codes and their maintenance through street justice (Jacobs & Wright, 2006). Gangs continue to be associated with heightened violence within prisons and on the street; however, the connection and issues may not be clear. Secondly, the position that violence committed by gang members for the gang is a false presumption, and most violence is actually conducted outside of gang leadership knowledge (see Henry, 2015). Validity in violence statistics that associate violence with gang members simply by being a gang member ignores the complexities within the social and political spaces in which the violence or illegal activity is being carried out. For example, if a known gang member commits a violent assault that is not connected to the gang, then is that registered as a violent gang incident? Thus, the act of violence is not relatable to the gang but rather the individual who has been marked as a gang member. Therefore, if there are no gang members in prison, then any group violence or violence associated with the underground economy would not be related to gang violence. These are just some of the methodological conundrums that continue to hinder gang research both inside and outside of the prison. What constitutes violence to the degree that warrants recognition? What is a gang, or what separates a gang from other groups or security threat groups? What separates gang violence or gang activities from non-gang violence and activities when prison and gang cultures/behaviours are so tightly woven together?

This section (1) summarises and reports the extent and direction of gang violence from existing peer-reviewed prison-based literature; (2) discusses common issues across studies; and (3) recommends approaches for more conceptually useful data capture. It is argued here that “gang violence” is a deceptively simple issue that covers a diverse behavioural and cultural spectrum and that it is particularly evident at the level of incident reporting.

### **Defining “Gangs”**

Pyrooz and Decker (2019) note that the extant literature on gangs has resulted in a much larger body of knowledge concerning gangs in the community and very little about gangs in prison settings. Given that gangs tend to draw a disproportionate degree of attention and resource from law enforcement and correctional

agencies worldwide, it is of note that “gangs” as a social phenomenon are not well researched. Furthermore, these groups are poorly defined—and this has been a long-standing issue (Ball & Curry, 1995; Hallsworth, 2013; Henry, 2015). A lack of an operational definition risks developing a conceptually limited (and inaccurate) picture of gangs that informs reactive policies and practices that emphasise containment and restriction, especially if the definition is solely based on affiliation rather than culture, behaviour, and needs (see Spindler & Bouchard, 2011). Furthermore, a poor conceptual understanding of gangs undermines the ability to develop a useful *theory* of gangs that would serve to guide appropriate research, form an evidence base of salient variables that can inform violence prevention and desistance, and refine efficacious practices that support safe and sustainable change with those whose gang-centred lifestyle presents both recidivism risks as well as a barrier to treatment responsiveness.

In New Zealand, for instance, there is a need to recognise, first and foremost, that gangs are forms of *community* with norms, values, processes, and practices that possess an internal logic understood by members. So, arguably, any behaviour change efforts initiated for members of these groups would benefit from being “gang-informed”—that is, an approach that recognises the specific contextual issues faced by gang members that illuminates the difficulties of change, such as safety and other costs likely to result from leaving the gang. Again, operationalising gangs is critical to developing an understanding of relevant mechanisms that inform disengagement from these groups.

Perhaps the single most contentious issue in gang research is defining what a “gang” is and how to distinguish these kinds of groups from other collectives where antisocial behaviour is common (Ball & Curry, 1995; Hallsworth, 2013) or security threat groups (Decker & Pyrooz, 2019). For instance, the New Zealand legislative definition of “gangs” identifies criminality as the central defining feature. Criminal gangs and gang activity are regarded under the Crimes Act 1961 as “participation in organised criminal group” and emphasise participation and contribution (directly and/or tacitly) in the commission of criminal offences and an assumed antisocial function. However, while criminality is used to identify gangs, the idea of what constitutes a gang crime is rarely defined, nor are the reasons for participation, or the linkage of violence in the creation of identity that leads to status and power within spaces. In other words, the definition is reliant on notions of Foucault’s concept of biopower, wherein those in positions of power can give life. Therefore, the institution itself can decide which groups are to be classified as a gang. This is easier for some New Zealand gangs, such as the Mongrel Mob and Black Power, but is more difficult when it comes to new groups who are coming from the streets with no prison presence.

A common approach to the study of gangs is to delineate identified groups by type. Sullivan (2005) proposed a typology based on distinguishing types of association (rather than “gangs” per se) that focuses on joint activity, durability of association, publicly acknowledged criteria of membership, and antisocial behaviour. Based on a number of studies, Klein and Maxson (2006) developed a typology that distinguished five types of gangs that differ in size, duration, territoriality,

age composition, and type of activity. The typology included large, organised, and long-standing groups (e.g., Hells Angels); smaller, loosely organised, and less territorially bound cliques; and specialist groups that form for a specific purpose (e.g., drug distribution). Klein and Maxson's work framed the Eurogang definition where "*a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity*" (Medina-Ariza, Weerman, Maxson, Esbensen, Aldridge, Medina, & Van Gemert, 2009, p. 20). The Eurogang definition has become the central definition within much of gang research globally as it looks to bring together both behavioural and structural components in a framework that is broad enough to allow for differences across spaces but also differential to pro-social groups. A conspicuous conceptual issue is an emphasis on youth, crime, and the "street", which restricts the framing of gangs as primarily a juvenile delinquency issue that is located or largely concerned with community (non-prison) contexts. However, the notions of durability and group identity reflect the importance of continuity, order, and structure in the lives of members.

### **Approaches to Research That Involves Prison Violence with Gangs**

Similar to issues found with the definitional conundrum of street gangs, how to best define *prison* gangs is conflated. While differences across communities are easier to identify, it is less so across prisons since prisons are constructed of individuals from a variety of communities, and multiple gangs outside of the prison can come to form a singular gang within the prison (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Definitions of prison gangs have shifted over time, but the focus remains that, unlike street gangs, prison gangs are adult-centred groups that operate inside the prison walls, have a distinct hierarchy, and practice an established code of conduct. Members may still have connections to the street, but all continue to engage and benefit from their involvement in a criminal organisation (Lyman, 1989; National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011). Pyrooz and Decker (2019) state that the definitions created are important from an organisational structure but that they do not allow for the connectiveness to street gangs, which come into the prison to replenish the prison gang ranks. Therefore, following earlier street gang work by Finn-Aage Esbensen, Thomas Winfree, Ni He, and Terrance Taylor (2001) and Jeffery Fagan (1989), in their study on prison gangs in the United States, Decker and Pyrooz (2019) advocate for a self-nominating approach to prison gang research when working directly with gang members. The reasoning is that, just like the youth in earlier studies know what a street gang is in the context of their lived realities, so too do prisoners. However, we also acknowledge that within prison settings, confirming that you are a gang member may label you as an increased security risk, such that you are placed in a higher-security setting because of your confirmed "gang status". Like many hard-to-reach communities, no single methodological approach can capture the complexities of the subject matter of gangs, gang members, and the inter-relationships between gang members and other members of the prisoner community, and the community at large. Common approaches to prison violence research that

includes or concerns gang members have involved official records, ethnographic methods, and surveys. Each approach will be briefly discussed in turn.

### ***Official Records***

In some jurisdictions, gang membership is routinely recorded as an item upon prison entry and may even be subject to change over time (e.g., New Zealand). Official records have the advantage of ease of administration and the potential for large-scale analyses. Furthermore, analysis at the group level is possible and offers important data to consider when planning unit/cell allocation, especially if there are known tensions between specific identified groups. However, official records are generally restricted to conveniently available data that permits easy recording, and hence these records often rely on rigid categories that privilege operational priorities (e.g., policy) that do not reflect a theoretical lens or offer insights into the lived experience of the prisoners themselves. The consequence of accessible data requires a trade-off with a nuanced cultural view of gangs and gang members (i.e., structure and order, practices, and behavioural expectancies) in favour of an assumed average with universalist assumptions.

The above issues notwithstanding, a review of empirical studies of prison violence that includes gang membership as a variable (at the least) is presented in Table 10.1. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of these studies have concluded that gang members have been disproportionately involved in perpetrating violence in prisons. However, the research is not straightforward to compare. Studies have been published intermittently since the early 1990s and have mostly taken place in North American facilities, with sample sizes varying from just a handful of prisoners (Reidy & Sorensen, 2017) to large state-wide samples of over 82,000 (Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002). These samples have also been largely male, which is not out of keeping with prison populations in any case, but has also reflected an adult sample rather than just a juvenile group as is typical in gang studies outside of prison walls.

The inclusion criteria of gang members/affiliates varied amongst these studies with regard to demarcation strategy, gang identification, and conceptual rationale. The most common approach for determining group membership involved dichotomising samples into (deceptively) simple “Yes”/“No” or “Suspected”/“Confirmed” categories (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2011; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Ruddell & Gottschall, 2011). Another method involved a scale such as a three-point rating of prior gang involvement (i.e., 0 = none, 1 = minor, 2 = major) used by MacDonald (1999) or a five-point scheme developed by DeLisi (2003) that reflected gangs as a risk factor (i.e., 1 = very low risk to 5 = very high). A third technique involved a taxonomy that was based on meeting three or more criteria, such as self-identification, gang membership proven in a court case, confirmation of membership via police reports, and presence of confirmed gang tattoos.

The naming of gangs is especially rare in this literature. This is understandable given issues of confidentiality and may reflect researchers taking care not to inadvertently promote the interests of one group over others by publicising

*Table 10.1* Empirical Studies of Gang Involvement in Prison Violence

<i>Study</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Frame</i>	<i>Study design</i>	<i>Gang members disproportionately involved in perpetrating violence?</i>
Shelden (1991)	Nevada, USA	120	Male prisoners (age < 25)	Correlation	Yes
MacDonald (1999)	California, USA	3,995	Juvenile male parolees	Regression	Yes
Sorensen and Pilgrim (2000)	Texas, USA	6,390	Adult male prisoners, capital murder defendants	Regression	Yes
Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, and Suppa (2002)	USA	82,504	Adult male prisoners	Correlation	Yes
DeLisi (2003)	USA	1,005	Adult male prisoners	Regression	Yes
DeLisi, Berg, and Hochstetler (2004)	USA	1,005	Adult male prisoners	Regression	Yes
Griffin and Hepburn (2006)	Arizona, USA	2,158	Male prisoners	Correlation	Yes
Cunningham and Sorenson (2007)	Florida, USA	24,514	Male prisoners	Regression	Yes
Trulson (2007)	USA	4,684	Male and female youths, released	Regression	Yes
Kuanliang, Sorensen, and Cunningham (2008)	Florida, USA	703	Male and female youth prisoners	Regression	Yes
Cunningham, Sorenson, Vigen, and Woods (2010)	Texas, USA	52	Male and female prisoners	Descriptive	Yes

*(Continued)*

Table 10.1 (Continued)

<i>Study</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Frame</i>	<i>Study design</i>	<i>Gang members disproportionately involved in perpetrating violence?</i>
Drury and DeLisi (2010)	Arizona, USA	1,005	Adult males and females	Descriptive and regression	No
Ruddell and Gottschall (2011)	Canada	3,272	Male and female prisoners	Between-group comparisons	Mixed
Drury and DeLisi (2011)	USA	1,005	Adult males and females	Regression	Yes
Sorensen and Davis (2011)	Texas, USA	13,816	Adult male prisoners	Regression	No
Worrall and Morris (2012)	USA	27,831	Adult male prisoners	Regression	Yes
Diamond, Morris, and Barnes (2012)	USA	2,418	Adult male prisoners	Multilevel modelling	No
Griffin and Hepburn (2013)	Arizona, USA	Unspecified <sup>a</sup>	Adult male prisoners	Regression	Yes
Ruddell and Gottschall (2014)	Canada	18,075	Adult male prisoners	Regression	Yes
Reidy and Sorensen (2017)	USA	18	Adult male prisoners	Descriptive	Yes

<sup>a</sup>Sample reflected as means across 50 institutions of varying sizes.

involvement. Indeed, only three of the studies reviewed included the names of specific gangs (e.g., Aryan Brotherhood, Crips, and Bloods; Gaes et al., 2002; Reidy & Sorensen, 2017; Ruddell & Gottschall, 2011) and only two going so far as to recognise specific roles and membership ranks/status (Gaes et al., 2002; Ruddell & Gottschall, 2014). Lastly, the conceptual basis for defining gang membership relied on operational/administrative definitions across almost all of the reviewed studies. However, two studies (DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler, 2004; Worrall & Morris, 2012) appealed to theoretical definitions such as those proposed by Thrasher (1963), Hagedorn (1998) and Lyman (1989).

Taken together, empirical research has tended towards top-down demographic approaches to definition and analyses. What is gained is a bird's eye view of gang behaviour at the group level across sites and over time. However, what is lost are opportunities to better understand more fluid and hard-to-capture important notions of identity, experience, collective histories, and group cohesion.

### *Ethnography*

Qualitative approaches to the research of prison gangs allow for an understanding of behaviour and its function in context—an important ecological issue. For instance, Lindegaard and Gear's (2014) study of 35 current and former prisoners in a South African facility revealed the navigation of social roles that suggested that gangs can be considered to be adaptation strategies to the coercive and oppressive environments of those prisons. The roles were largely defined by the prisoners' ability and willingness to use violence.

*A gangster is involved in one of the prison gangs. A wyfie is a male inmate who usually (but not always) has had a feminized identity imposed on him and is in a sexual relationship, usually coerced, with another inmate who is most often a gang member. A franse is a prisoner who may not wish to become part of the gang, or aspires to gang membership but has yet to be initiated as such.*

(p. 40, emphasis in original)

Their findings also suggest that prison gangs may threaten the personal safety of prisoners but also offer an opportunity to attain a sense of safety and agency by averting random violence.

Due to the problems of official records, self-reported data collection is an alternative approach to capturing gang-relevant data in prison settings (Reisig, 1998). For example, the personal discretion of correctional officials can play a part in under-reporting and/or over-reporting violence and the victimisation of prisoners. Thus, official data may capture only the prisoners who are actually caught or targeted by correctional personnel. Also, reporting of official data may also vary across jurisdictions. Self-reported data allows for theory development and a deeper understanding of prisoner experiences in a more intimate way than is possible via other methods. However, there are limitations. In addition to the lack

of generalisability from small sample sizes, such research can yield highly unreliable disclosures from participants who are distrustful of external parties such as researchers. For instance, some prisoners may exaggerate or not remember the actual number of victimisations (Lahm, 2009).

### *Surveys*

Survey-based approaches offer researchers the ability to capture large volumes of data in less time than interviewing, as well as observe reliability through standardisation and re-administration over time. Early gang-related surveys have typically concerned gang-related activity in the community, such as the National Youth Survey<sup>1</sup> in the United States. This longitudinal study of adolescents began in the mid-1970s to provide a description of the incidence and distribution of specific delinquent acts by gauging youths' attitudes, beliefs, and values related to both conventional and deviant behaviour at home, in neighbourhoods, and in schools (Elliott, Aceton, & Huizinga, 1980). The first wave in 1976 included two questions on gangs (i.e., involvement in street violence); a decade later (Wave VII), it included over 30 items—but only concerned gang fights (i.e., experience of, extent of violence and injuries, use of weapons, use of drugs, number of participants, and nature of neighbourhood).

The 1990s saw the commencement of a series of reports released by the National Gang Crime Research Center in the United States (NGCRC; Knox, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2019) that focused on “Gang Profile Analysis” activities, organisational and economic factors inside American gangs, density and gang population issues, and gangs on the Internet. These surveys polled prison officials (e.g., wardens and security threat group [STG] co-ordinators) to understand issues for prison management. Knox (2004) commented that such an ambitious method is problematic, not least because some states can be hostile to such surveys because of reputational risks due to negative or unfair comparisons with other states. For example, in a state-by-state comparison of gang-specific problems, publication of STG and gang density factors could prove embarrassing, especially if discrepant reporting over time reflects apparent deterioration.

In the mid-2000s, an international multidisciplinary research collaboration emerged in the form of the Eurogang project<sup>2</sup> to build a body of knowledge about the scale, causes, nature, and control of gangs across Europe. The resulting tools and programme manual were designed to foster cross-national research and conduct comparative research on gangs. Again, the focus was on community groups within an urban context, not on prisons.

In 2014, the LoneStar project was launched to understand (1) the onset, continuity, and change of the behaviour and identity of incarcerated gang members over time, (2) the social networks that inhabit the wider familial and social milieu of these prisoners, and (3) the transitions of these prisoners from street to prison—in particular, re-entry experiences (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). The researchers utilised interview-based surveys of a sample of just over 800 prisoners. The longitudinal

approach necessitated multiple interviews/surveys. The data enabled the analysis of not only gang demographics but also the role of the gang in the prison's social order, misconduct and victimisation, gang recruitment, and disengagement, and change in status over time.

Surveys have the advantage of collecting large amounts of data informed by theory or research questions and in ways not attainable via official records. However, such approaches are time-consuming, reliant on the buy-in and co-operation of staff and prisoners, and involve a high-trust approach as staff and prisoners may under-report or exaggerate responses in ways that are not necessarily discoverable via this approach.

In summary, while each general approach holds promise for furthering our knowledge of gang communities, their place in prisons, and the role of violence in prison life, no single approach adequately captures the nuance, complexity, or culture. However, all are important when considering an ecological approach to management.

### **Controlling Gang Violence in Prisons**

As illustrated throughout this anthology, the ability to control or mitigate violence is a focus of policy and regulation practices in prisons. Violence control policies and practices with gangs in prisons are designed for two primary purposes. The first is to control the heightened hyper-violence often associated with gangs. The second is to limit the power of the gang in prison, specifically the ability to conduct "gang business" and increase their influence for recruitment. Most prisons adopt three main strategies to limit gang activities in prisons. These tactics include dispersion, concentration, and isolation (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). Table 10.2 displays the implications of gangs for prisons from an ecological perspective.

Canada provides an optimal example of the impacts of poor forward thinking in relation to prison gang policy. The prison system is understood to be a primary contributor to the spread of Indigenous gangs, leading to the surge of street gangs in the 1990s (Comack et al., 2013). It was at this time that Corrections focused on housing Indigenous gang members together in one institution, so that they would not be able to intimidate and increase violence against non-gang prisoners. However, a riot occurred at the institution, which then forced Corrections to rethink their policy, wherein they then moved the leaders of the gangs to different institutions throughout Canada. This strategy also proved problematic:

It was a strategy that backfired, as the street gangs responded in entrepreneurial fashion, using the new locations as a business opportunity to recruit even more members and expand their operations.

(Comack et al., 2013, p. 124)

Concentration and dispersion tactics continue to be the primary tools used to control prison gangs and their movement. Isolation policies, despite their higher costs, are looked on more favourably by administrators as they are a direct form of

Table 10.2 Implications of Gang Violence Management in Prison by Ecological Level

<i>Ecological level</i>	<i>Refers to ...</i>	<i>Relevance to gangs</i>	<i>Implication for prisons</i>
<i>Individual</i>	The person	Prospecting Joining a gang in prison Continuation of pre-existing gang membership Substance abuse	Directly address individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (e.g., life skills, employment, access to health providers and wellbeing experiences)
<i>Microsystem</i>	Institutions and groups that most immediately impact the individual's development and functioning	Multiple gangs Custodial staff Neutral prisoners Parole Board Family	Focus on behaviour change by targeting proximal interpersonal relationships and environments that present alternatives to gang-informed violence (e.g., visitation programmes, rehabilitation programmes, and active engagement of staff)
<i>Mesosystem</i>	Interconnections between <i>microsystems</i>	Tensions between gangs (rivalries/ power/territory) Tensions between gangs and custodial staff Family expectations Territoriality	Modify characteristics or conditions of settings that promote violent behaviour in prison (e.g., cell allocation, gang de-escalation, peer mentoring, inter-gang mediation, parenting programmes, and family therapy)
<i>Exosystem</i>	Links between social settings that do not directly involve the individual	External tensions between gangs (community/other prisons) Family hardship	Modify characteristics or conditions of settings that promote violent behaviour from beyond the prison (e.g., community policing, gang mediation, and increase collective efficacy)

(Continued)

Table 10.2 (Continued)

<i>Ecological level</i>	<i>Refers to ...</i>	<i>Relevance to gangs</i>	<i>Implication for prisons</i>
<i>Macrosystem</i>	The predominant culture that influences the individual and the micro and mesosystems that are embedded within the culture. In other words, <i>context</i> .	Discrepancies with identity and heritage Social attitudes towards gangs and their families Social inequalities (poverty, racial discrimination, etc.) Criminalisation of gang-specific attributes (e.g., assembly and apparel)	Focus on cultural, social and economic factors related to gangs and violence (e.g., public prevention campaigns to change community attitudes, beliefs and norms about gang lifestyles (including stigma) and gang-informed violence). Reconnection with heritage and alternative networks of pro-social influence. Co-ordination of services that includes in-reach and out-reach delivery
<i>Chronosystem</i>	Pattern of environmental events and transitions over time (including sociohistorical circumstances)	Multi-generations of gang members Compounding socioeconomic inequalities Ongoing distrust of social institutions Changes in gang operations Changes in gang-targeted policing operations Impact of ageing on members (e.g., desistance from violence)	Acknowledge histories of violence and create new legacies. Facilitating new life roles for gang members (e.g., becoming grandparents)

social control over gang members (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). There is another cost to isolation (or solitary confinement), which is the mental and emotional cost to prisoners who are placed in these settings. Therefore, out of the three strategies, despite prison administrators wanting to use it, isolation has the largest negative impact on the broader community, as those who are in isolation (dependent on sentencing length) will, at some point, be reintegrated back into the prison population or back into the community at large.

However, when talking about the need to control violence, it is not just the physical space that needs to be taken into consideration. Space and place have power themselves. Prisons, like gangs, look to create their own status and/or reputation. The status of the prison is used to enhance a gang member's status in the street. Therefore, the more violent an institution, the greater influence it has on solidifying the status of an individual, further entrenching them into street and prison lifestyles.

Therefore, narratives are needed to better understand the important values that a place or space has. The association of prisons, gangs, and violence cannot be understood in a vacuum of incident reports or quantified data points. Narratives provide opportunities to understand the role and intention of violence and why it is used in specific situations and spaces. Violence in open spaces provides gangs and individuals opportunities to create statements to a broader audience. Most violence, though, is conducted in what can be called "closed spaces". It is here where violence is not recorded because the actions are often related to internal gang business and need to be kept quiet, where gang members are punished for conduct that is detrimental to the gang. However, there is still another layer of violence—the use of fear, not through physicality, but psychological violence. Reputations of violence increase fear within institutions, always keeping individuals in check, but at the same time, they create heightened awareness that the potential of violence is always a possibility.

## **Conclusion**

Admittedly, the literature on prison violence as it pertains to gangs is minimal and reflects high-risk and/or security threat groups. The longevity and persistence of these communities has direct relevance to an ecological view of prisons. To date, gangs are typically framed in conceptually shallow terms that do not allow for a richer understanding of the nature, roles, relationships, and influence of gang members in the prison ecosystem and their part in the commission—and also prevention—of violence in prison spaces.

## **Key Learning Points**

- Gangs are part of the prison landscape and present management issues for prison authorities—not least because of the relationship between gang members and violence in carceral spaces.

- Inadequate planning around gang communities within prisons can perpetuate problems with regard to violence management as well as the dispersal of members (and future members) beyond the site. An ecological approach to conceptualising gangs recognises these groups in the context of a wider set of systems and relationships—rather than as a unidirectional social force.
- How gangs are defined and measured has implications for conceptualising and devising gang management strategies in prisons. For instance, determining “gang violence” from non-sanctioned “violence involving gang members” may risk over- or under-estimating gang violence in a given institution and result in overly punitive prisoner management.
- No single methodology is complete in accounting for gangs and violence in prisons. Different research approaches produce different types of data that will inevitably privilege certain forms of information and omit others. For instance, official records have the potential to yield large-scale data that can inform gang trends and movements at the population level that is not achievable via face-to-face interviews, whereas interviews can achieve depth at the expense of generalisability.

## Notes

- 1 [www.icpsr.umich.edu](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu)
- 2 [www.esc-eurocrim.org](http://www.esc-eurocrim.org)

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# 11 Critical Issue 3

## Prison Social Climates

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Throughout this book, we have argued that an ecological model can help us to better understand the multiple and interacting determinants of complex behaviours such as prison violence. We maintain that even a simple ecological perspective will help to better identify the wide range of factors that place people at risk of violence and, importantly, to draw attention to how risk factors that are present at one level of the ecology will inevitably influence those at another. This, in turn, highlights the importance of prevention strategies that cut across multiple levels of the ecology—as the most sustainable prison violence prevention strategies will aim to have a population-level impact on everyone who lives and works in a prison. The focus of this chapter is, however, on just one level of ecology; what we are calling the “social climate” of an institution.

### **Defining the Prison Social Climate**

From an ecological perspective, the prison social climate is primarily concerned with what have been called “micro-systems” that are physically external to the person (Stokols, 1992). For both Bronfenbrenner (1979) and McLeory et al. (1988), micro-systems can operate as *physical spaces* (the material or tangible space and characteristics of the prison), *cultural aspects* (shared values, expectations, and attitudes; see also Johnsen, Granheim, & Helgesen, 2011), *instructional mechanisms* (policies and practices applied to induce particular attitudes and behaviours) and the *socially structured space* (patterned relationships between people and groups as perceived by individuals within the prison; see also Tagiuri, 1968). Thus, the prison social climate impacts on—and is impacted by—different sub-systems at the same time, with each operating within the boundaries of the institution but exposed to, and influenced by, external forces and events in the macro-environment (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998).

An operational definition of the prison social climate has been proposed by Wright (1993), who describes it in terms of a set of characteristics that (a) distinguish a prison from other prisons, (b) are relatively enduring and (c) influence the behaviour of participants in the prison. This definition is widely used and sufficiently broad to encompass the perceptions of both staff and people in prison about

the institution in which they live and/or work. In our view, it is particularly useful as it invites efforts to measure the prison social climate in a way that allows direct comparisons to be made between different units or prisons. This immediately raises key questions about how much violence is to be expected (or is considered normal) in prison, as well as invites reflection from all stakeholders about how well a specific institution is performing relative to others that operate in similar contexts.

At the same time, however, other terminology is also fairly common. The terms “culture” and “climate”, for example, are often used interchangeably (Lok & Crawford, 2003; Parker et al., 2003), despite important differences in their meaning. Organisational “culture” refers to the beliefs and principles followed in an organisation at three levels—*artefacts* (e.g., offices, décor, furnishings, and dress), *espoused values* (company slogans, mission statements), and the basic *underlying assumptions* (which are unseen and not consciously identified in everyday interactions between members; Schein, 2010). In this way, culture is usually understood as the overall philosophy and condition of an organisation (or a collection of shared beliefs among members), which plays a central role in shaping attitudes, perceptions, motivation, goals, and behaviours (see Melnick et al., 2009). “Climate”, on the other hand, is a term that is generally used to refer to the *perceptions* of the organisation at an operational level, such as its ability to be supportive of new ideas and openness for change (see Taxman et al., 2008). There are also other terms that have overlapping meanings. For example, Brunt and Rask (2005) examined what they called the “psychosocial atmosphere” of wards, while Ross et al. (2008) studied the “prison environment”, relating it to the satisfaction levels of both people in prison and staff. Other terms that appear in the literature include the “social environment” (Smith et al., 1997), “climate perceptions” (Parker et al., 2003), “workplace climate” (Carr et al., 2003), and the “ward climate” (Stevens, 1961). In addition, a myriad of related concepts can be found in the management, work and organisational psychology, and medical literature (e.g., Dollard & Bakker, 2009; Garrett & McDaniel, 2001; Langdon et al., 2004, 2006; Moos & Bromet, 1978; Ulrich et al., 2007).

### **Measuring the Prison Social Climate**

Psychological research in this area has typically conceptualised the prison social climate as an object or structure that can be objectively measured—it is positioned ontologically as something that is not reducible to individual people and which exerts downward causal pressure on people to act in certain ways. In other words, psychological research generally frames the prison social climate from a functionalist perspective that seeks to identify associations between different aspects of the environment and key outcomes, such as staff sickness or violence (see Day et al., 2011 for an example). This approach has led to the development of several different assessment tools that purport to offer valid and reliable measurements of the prison social climate. As these tend to be the product of multiple and, at times, inconsistent conceptualisations of the social climate, they do, however, tend to

tap into different dimensions of the social climate. Three of the most widely used measures are described next.

### ***The Moos Scales***

Perhaps the most important body of scientific work for understanding, measuring, and modifying negative therapeutic environments and milieu is that conducted over the last 30 years by Moos (1975, 1997). Moos's work covers both prisons and a range of other service settings, including health and mental health services, but essentially draws on an original proposal that the climate of an institution can be captured across three dimensions: *relationship, personal development, and system maintenance and system change*. One of Moos's most important contributions to the field has been the Ward Atmosphere Scale (WAS; available in different versions for different settings, including prisons), a 100-item scale which purports to measure 10 aspects of the social climate of a unit or institution and is completed by both staff and patients (Moos & Houts, 1968).

Moos's Correctional Institutions Environment Scale (CIES) is a shorter instrument consisting of 36 items, which has been used routinely by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the US. The CIES is by far the most widely used instrument yet developed, although it has been suggested that this may be due more to the lack of alternative climate instruments than to the appropriateness of the CIES (Saylor, 1984). Nonetheless, the Moos scales continue to be used and underpin other, more contemporary, social climate instruments (e.g., in the Ward Atmosphere Audit Measure, the WAS-R, and the Working Environment Scale-10, Røssberg & Friis, 2003, 2004).

While Moos (1975, 1987) has stated that there are data to support the utility and validity of the CIES, these have not been published, and the scales have been subject to a number of critiques (e.g., Alden, 1978; Saylor, 1984; Schalast et al., 2008; Wright, 1980; Wright & Boudouris, 1982), with problems identified in relation to outdated item content, the length of the measure and suitability for repeated clinical use, the low internal consistency of some scales, and the time and effort required for completion in disturbed and unmotivated populations. The lack of validity of the CIES was identified as particularly problematic by Wright (1980), Wright and Boudouris (1982), Saylor and McGrory (1980), and Saylor and Vanyur (1983), who found little support for the dimensional structure posited by Moos. However, an early analysis of a subset of the data collected by Wenk and Halatyn (1973) and Duffee (1975) did show that the CIES could differentiate between six correctional institutions in Connecticut, USA. What is apparent, however, is that most of the Moos scales have not been rigorously validated, with Moos's original research, for the most part, based on surveys conducted in juvenile facilities and early validity studies conducted mainly in psychiatric settings (Ajdukovic, 1990; Griffin, 1999).

### ***The Prison Social Climate Survey***

Unlike the CIES, which is administered to both people in prison and members of staff (Langdon et al., 2004; Langdon et al., 2006), the Prison Social Climate Survey

(PSCS) only measures staff perceptions of the climate (see Saylor & Wright, 1992; Camp et al., 2002, 1997; Wright & Saylor, 1991, 1992). The full PSCS questionnaire is divided into sections based on different topic areas. For example, the *work environment* section consists of seven subscales which enable staff to assess the organisation's structure, supervision, satisfaction with the overall organisation, department, their job, level of stress, and personal efficacy. Factor analysis has provided support for the validity of these dimensions, and in terms of scale reliability, item-to-scale correlations are generally between 0.70 and 0.90, and internal consistency reliability analyses yielded subscale alpha coefficients between 0.80 and 0.91 (Saylor & Wright, 1992).

### ***The EssenCES***

In response to concerns about the resources required to complete more lengthy social climate assessments, Schalast et al. (2008) developed a brief measure that was specifically designed for use in forensic psychiatric wards but subsequently adapted for use in prisons. The 15-item instrument (Essen Climate Evaluation Schema; EssenCES) scores three factor-analytically supported scales: *Therapeutic Hold* (perceptions of the extent to which the climate is supportive of therapy and therapeutic change), *Cohesion and Mutual Support* (whether mutual support of a kind typically seen as characteristic of therapeutic communities is present) and *Experienced Safety* (tension and perceived threat of aggression and violence). Each scale contains five items that are scored on a 0 ("I agree not at all") to 4 ("I agree very much") response format. Responses are summed to produce three subscale scores, which are then aggregated to produce a total score.

In a validation of the EssenCES by Schalast et al. (2008), data were collected from 17 forensic mental hospitals in Germany, with samples of 333 staff and 327 patients. High internal consistency reliabilities were found for the subscales and good support for the expected factor structure. Convergent validity was demonstrated in terms of correlations with related measures, including job satisfaction in staff. The EssenCES is available in an English translation and was subsequently used in three pilot studies in an English high-security setting, Rampton Hospital (Howells et al. 2009). In these studies, internal consistency reliabilities, factor structure, and convergent validity were found to be acceptable and broadly similar to those reported by Schalast et al. (2008).

### **Social Climate and Prison Violence**

So far in this chapter, we have introduced the idea that the social climate of prison is an important level of the ecology and defined the social climate with reference to some of the ways in which it has been conceptualised and operationalised. Three different measures of prison social climate have been described, each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, there is an absence of empirical research that has examined the relationship between the perceptions of the prison social climate and the prevalence of violence. This is even though we know that the rates of violence can vary markedly both within prisons and between prisons

(see Polaschek & Daffern, this volume) and that a significant amount of this variation can be explained by the characteristics of the prison environment or context, including security level and employment opportunity (Howard et al., 2020). While a positive social climate has been associated with improved treatment (Woessner & Schwedler, 2014) and re-offending outcomes (Auty & Liebling, 2020), the causal nature of these relationships remains unclear.

There have been attempts to establish the extent to which the social climate determines key outcomes in other settings that are informative. For example, in schools, there is research to suggest that perceptions of social climate mediate relationships between the school environment, student characteristics, and incidents of violence (Lindstrom, Johnson et al., 2017). In short, methodologies are available from which to start to understand the causal relationship between individual characteristics, the prison environment, the social climate, and violence. At present, however, we can only speculate about the nature of these associations. It has been proposed, for example, that in some prisons, the (predominately male) correctional officer workforce is characterised by a certain “machismo” or the belief that the essential skills required for the job include “masculine” traits such as physical strength and a willingness to use force (e.g., Cheek & Miller, 1983). Some of the early prison studies also reported that violence was more likely in those prisons that rewarded the use of force by prison officers with improved duty posts or even promotions, with this type of behaviour becoming heavily entrenched in prison culture (e.g., Hepburn et al., 1997; Marquart, 1986). In one particularly influential study that sought to identify predictors of the use of force in prison, Griffin (1999) was, for example, able to show that certain aspects of the social climate, such as one’s authority, fear of victimisation, and quality of supervision were all related to officers’ readiness to use force. More research is required to reliably establish the association between these factors and prison violence.

There is also evidence to suggest that prison climates that encourage violence impact their ability to achieve core correctional goals, such as rehabilitation. For example, Listwan et al. (2013) have reported data showing that “negative” prison environments (defined as places where people in prison were more afraid of being assaulted) were associated with increased odds of rearrest, with direct victimisation by other inmates associated with higher odds of recommittal. Similarly, a 15-month follow-up study by Zweig et al. (2015) showed that victimisation while incarcerated had both direct and indirect (through hostility) effects on measures of any crime and violent crime after release and both direct and indirect (through depressive symptoms) effects on drug use.

More broadly, the impact of a prison social climate on violence has been understood in relation to (1) harming ties to key social institutions, (2) neglecting the mental health needs and trauma histories of individuals who are incarcerated, (3) disproportionately focusing on rule violations and failing to track and reward progress, and (4) creating an environment that may be incompatible with the outside world. For example, a “negative” prison climate might impair ties with those social institutions (e.g., family, employment, and education) that have the potential to strengthen motivation to not respond to provocation with violence. A

negative climate might also be more likely to trigger mental health impediments, exacerbate pre-existing conditions in ways that promote impulsive aggression (Schnittker, Massoglia, & Uggen, 2012), and/or feed intense feelings of injustice, anger, despair, and powerlessness, which in turn trigger unresolved past trauma (Kazemian, 2020). Violence may also represent rule-breaking behaviour that simply reflects attempts to survive and cope with imprisonment (Ugelvik, 2014). It is quite possible, for example, for individuals to react to a negative social climate by engaging in rule-breaking while, at the same time, maintaining a self-narrative that is consistent with a non-violent identity. Or perhaps, prison violence reflects a loss of hope or desperation when the prison fails to promote coping strategies, leading to a loss of empathy for others, self-isolation, emotional suppression, heightened feelings of mistrust towards others, and a progressive detachment from the outside world (Kazemian, 2020).

A particular advantage of viewing prison violence in this way is that it moves the focus away from overly simplistic explanations of the prevalence and causes of perpetration and victimisation to considering some of the more systemic factors that will inevitably determine the overall safety of a prison (Wooldredge, 2020). This serves to further remind us that contemporary violence reduction strategies are often—and sometimes exclusively—limited by their focus on intervening only with the individual perpetrator (e.g., John Jay College, 2020). Even situational violence prevention approaches are often based on efforts to manipulate the perpetrator's perceptions of cost (Cook, 1986) rather than trying to understand the significant overlap between victimisation and perpetration—even though high rates of childhood and adolescent victimisation have been widely reported in criminal justice populations (e.g., Malvaso et al., 2022), it remains the case that the usual prevention options do not adequately account for the complex interactions that arise from victimisation. These may include retaliation, emotion dysregulation, pre-emptive violence resulting from hyper-vigilance following trauma, bullying, and considering whether violence precedes victimisation or the reverse (see Ousey et al., 2011). Further complicating matters here is the fact that the same person can occupy the role of victim and perpetrator in a single incident. We would argue then that focusing on the prison social climate—to a certain extent at least—can help to avoid the trap of searching for overly simplistic solutions to prison violence. Rather, the resulting prevention strategies will be more holistic and aim to create psychologically safe places for everyone who lives and works in prison. In summary, though, the studies reviewed here not only illustrate how some prisons will work in ways that encourage violence more than others but also put forward some possible causal mechanisms for this that can be tested empirically.

### *Sociological Approaches*

There is a parallel sociological literature on prisons that focuses on understanding how different institutions have distinctive cultures, social structures, languages, and hierarchies of authority. The work of Bourdieu (1977), for example, has been particularly influential in integrating knowledge about some of the macro forces

that determine a prison climate with the more micro forces that characterise actual service delivery and embrace the lived experiences of those who are confined. Although more theoretical in nature, this work offers some different thinking about the concept of the prison social climate and the ways in which institutions operate.

Bourdieu introduced two important concepts: *habitus* and *field*. The concept of *habitus* is used to examine how the socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures within a prison are internalised by people in prison to make them act in certain ways. As Schlosser (2013) describes this, it is “a taken for granted, natural, ordered and regulated, yet altogether unspeakable way of existing within the boundaries and definitions of structured potential constituting a state of being handed down by no one yet accepted by everyone” (p. 36). The concept of *field* is used to illustrate how a prison environment can penetrate the unconscious actions of staff and prisoners (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This relates to how staff and people in prison attempt to establish, alter, and maintain boundaries through their social interactions and in response to fluctuating tensions, which in turn creates the “objective conditions that are embodied as the *habitus*” (Caputo-Levine, 2012, p. 169). Thus, for example, the threat of violence and intimidation requires actors within a prison to maintain a state of hyper-vigilance to preserve their personal safety. This then creates a *habitus* in which individuals internalise and automate the cognitive and motivating structures that allow them to respond appropriately, yet unconsciously, to potential or perceived threats of violence and violation to keep them safe. These unconscious responses can be described as both aggressive and hyper-masculine and can come to define a prison sub-culture. In this way, prison violence is conceptualised more in terms of a natural consequence of exposure to an environment rather than in relation to individual pathology or the decisions that individuals make to perform violence.

This more sociological work draws our attention to the need to carefully consider the nature of dyadic relationships between staff and people in prison *and* between people in prison and other prisoners to understand how these reflect the social conventions and cultural norms that are accepted in prison (Herzfeld, 1985). A simple example of this is the use of prisoner identification numbers instead of names when addressing people in prison and how this serves to reinforce the power structure and group memberships within the institutional environment. This symbolic communication, it is suggested, serves to reinforce the identity of those in prison as “criminals” and to inhibit their capacity to establish more reflexive and productive identities. It also reminds us that any attempt to prevent violence may be compromised by a perception of prison staff as agents of social control within a broader political system that wants those in prison to conform to narrow social and cultural norms and expectations. To put this another way, it alerts us to the need to think about how the power dynamic between those who are incarcerated and those who deliver correctional services may have deleterious effects because of the perceived need to provide sincerity and felicitous actions to appease those in power. As a result, those in prison may engage in dramaturgical action (see Goffman, 1959) or impression management to improve staff perceptions of them while not authentically engaging with, or promoting, a culture of violence prevention.

## Violence Prevention through Improving the Prison Climate

The available measures of the prison social climate described earlier in this chapter have all been fairly widely—and at times, systematically—implemented in correctional settings around the world. In our view, this work has, however, largely failed to produce information that can be used to directly inform violence prevention efforts—partly, we suspect, because the link between the assessment and available interventions is not always obvious. For example, while the EssenCES assessment might identify that many people perceive a high level of threat and aggression in a particular prison (and perhaps that this perception is more widespread than in other prisons), it does not offer any substantive explanation of why this might be the case. As a consequence, little guidance is available for the prison administrator about how to actually intervene to prevent violence. Thus, although these measurement tools can—and should—be used to assess changes over time, they are broadly descriptive and lack the theoretical depth that is required to inform prevention efforts. In fact, from a measurement perspective, we would argue that if the prison social climate is viewed as a social structure, then people in the prison will inevitably be largely consciously unaware of many important features. As a result, the use of simple self-report measures of prison social climate will be unlikely to result in the collection of the *type of data* needed to inform actual prevention strategies. For example, scores on these measures will never establish whether violence is a product of the effects of the social climate or a “casual” factor in developing a social climate that tolerates or promotes violence—or indeed both (i.e., whether the aggregated rates of violence reflect the behaviour of individuals within a prison or whether rates of violence at a prison are simply the aggregate of individual actions). A better approach to assessing the prison social climate, then, might be to augment this type of self-report data with institutional data about the outcomes of violence or the pattern of its effects on individuals. It might also be argued that it is almost impossible to identify or isolate all different facets of prison life that allow violence to occur and that effective prevention strategies can only be identified following intensive, qualitative assessment, and formulation of violence in the specific context (unit or prison) in which it occurs. This is essentially the approach that is expected when administering the PRISM assessment (see Cooke, this volume).

### *Implications for Future Research*

Although there has been significant research on prison-based violence, the focus of most studies has been on the rates and types of violence and on identifying those individual characteristics that are most strongly associated with perpetration and victimisation. To date, there has been insufficient research exploring the contextual, causal variables that influence the propensity for violence within institutions. The adoption of an ecological framework supports the application of multilevel analyses of the relationship between elements of the prison environment, including social climate, and the prevalence of violence. Addressing this gap will provide the foundation for the development of violence prevention strategies that involve improving the prison social climate. We conclude this chapter with our observation

that there is a need to better understand (or hypothesise or theorise about) underlying mechanisms that are causal to prison violence before successful prevention and intervention strategies can be identified and implemented. The concept of the prison social climate does help to facilitate understanding of this type.

### Key Learning Points

- The prison social climate is primarily concerned with “micro-systems” that are physically external to the person but which impact on—and are impacted by—external forces and events in the macro-environment.
- Different assessment tools are available that purport to offer valid and reliable measurements of the prison social climate but do not typically produce information that can be used to directly inform violence prevention efforts.
- Self-report data about prison climates should routinely be integrated with institutional data about the outcomes of violence or the pattern of its effects on individuals following intensive, qualitative assessment, and formulation of violence in the specific context in which it occurs.
- Consideration of the social climate can aid understanding of the underlying mechanisms that are causal to prison violence and the foundations of successful prevention and intervention efforts.

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# 12 Critical Issue 4

## The Prison Environment

*Lars Brabyn*

There are two main schools of thought about the reasons for prison violence. While deprivation theories link prison violence to the prison institutional and environmental factors (Arbach-Lucioni, Martínez-García, & Andrés-Pueyo, 2012), importation theories link prison violence to individual factors (Steiner, & Wooldredge, 2020). Needless to say, the combined effects of a mix of individuals with personal histories of violence in a deprived environment can only increase the likelihood of violence (Moran, 2015; Sykes, 1958) and yet there has been much less attention paid to understanding institutional and environmental factors that impact prison violence. These factors are wide-ranging and include the physical layout of prisons, the social environment determined by the mix and density of inmates, and management culture (Wener, 2012; Wortley, 2002).

It is a common perception that the conditions in prison should be “tough” in order to deter offending, but it seems clear that poorer living conditions often result in significantly higher rates of serious violence (e.g., Bierie, 2011). A more ecological and holistic understanding of prison violence is required if successful prevention strategies are to be identified and implemented. This inevitably requires an understanding of the personal, social, and physical context in which prison violence occurs. In this chapter, our focus is on the influence of the prison environment. While data on the type and frequency of prison incidents can be accessed relatively easily, we know much less about the places and spaces where violence occurs.

From the outset, it is worth noting that there is considerable spatial variation in prison environments. Each prison has its own unique architecture, design, and history, and understanding the impact of space and place has become an important theme of the discipline of carceral geography (Moran, 2015). Theoretically, this work often draws on the ideas of Foucault (1977) and the ways in which space is regulated in institutional settings and, indeed, any other aspects of the physical environment that might influence behaviour (e.g., the availability of sports spaces, see Norman & Andrews, 2019). There are similar ideas evident in the related field of situational crime prevention, which emphasises the possibilities of preventing violence through a range of environmental control strategies (see Wortley, 2002).

While it might seem impossible to change the physical design or layout of a prison, prison managers do have some control over the prison environment and

how space is used. The most obvious management tool in this regard is the use of segregation or placement into protection or into a vulnerable person's units. However, there are many other strategies that prison managers can use to prevent violence, such as placing cohorts together—whether these are based on age groups, gang membership, or criminal histories. Too often, these decisions are made in the absence of robust evidence that particular management responses will be beneficial, although experienced correctional staff will often draw on their personal experiences of which arrangements work. However, in a large organisation, there is a real danger that practice becomes too localised, such as when conflicting views emerge as a result of the complexity of managing prison violence across unique settings. It is here that scientific evidence, based on explicit and repeatable methods that can be independently verified, can assist with understanding the impact of the prison environment on behaviour. In this chapter, we begin by talking generally about prison violence and population-level characteristics that appear relevant or influential. We then provide an example of a place-based approach to identifying specific locations in which violence is most likely to occur.

### **Data on Violence and the Prisoner Population**

Well-run prisons will record all incidents that are relevant to the safe running of the regime, both violent and non-violent. This will often be a requirement of Health and Safety legislation but is also consistent with good management practice. A good data collection system will also provide an accurate inventory of the prisoner population, including the current location and background information of each person in prison and when and where incidents occur. In New Zealand, prison incident and prisoner population data is collected using the Corrections Business Reporting and Analysis (COBRA) system, and this information is utilised in this chapter.

#### ***Data Complexity***

A prerequisite for any analysis of violent incidents is determining which behaviours count as being violent. The New Zealand Department of Corrections (Ara Poutama) has an incident categorisation system with appropriate categories to describe the incidents selected from a list of 245 options. Determining which categories are “violent” is nonetheless a subjective process. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of violence—“the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 1084)—provides useful guidance, but it still requires interpretation. Violent incidents can, however, be relatively easily classified based on whether the violence was against staff, which is explicitly stated in the category descriptions, and in practice there are only a few types of incidents that are difficult to classify as violent or not. These categories are not often used and do not have a major impact on the overall statistics.

It is important when reporting violent incident data to take into account the size of a prison. In general, larger prisons will have more violence; so to compare violence between prisons (or changes in incidents over time), the number of people in prison (the prison population) needs to be taken into account. This can be measured using the number of people in a prison at a particular time (e.g., the first day of the year), the number of unique prisoners that have spent time at a prison within a year (the throughput), or by prisoner years. Some prisons have a high turnover of prisoners, such as remand prisons, or where the prisoners have short sentences. Prisoner years is a robust method for recording the prisoner population but requires regular snapshots of the prisoner population. In New Zealand, this is possible as prisoner population snapshots are available at the end of each month. The total prisoner months can thus be calculated for each prison unit, which can then be converted to prisoner years by simply dividing by 12. Since some people may have only been in a prison unit for less than a month, and others may have left before the end of the month, this method does contain errors, but it is unlikely to bias any particular prison unit type or have a large impact on the results of any analysis. It is, however, fortunate from a statistical perspective that there is variation in the prisoner population across different units and within particular security levels. In Aotearoa New Zealand, there are 18 different prisons and many separate units within these prisons. Some parts of New Zealand have higher gang membership, and in such areas, the local prison is likely to have more gang-affiliated prisoners.

A key consideration in increasing the variability of the data is to carefully select the most appropriate spatial unit of analysis. It is common for prison statistics to be compiled at the prison level (see Morris et al., 2012). Yet, within a prison, there can be many different units that are of different security classifications and functions. Prisoners are prevented from moving between different units, and, in effect, each prison unit is like a separate small prison with its own unique environment. To maximise the variability in the data, it therefore makes sense to collect and analyse data at the prison *unit* level rather than at the prison level. To illustrate this point, in Aotearoa New Zealand, for the year 2020, the average number of violent incidents per prisoner year at the prison level ( $n = 18$ ) was 1.03 with a standard deviation of 0.48. At the prison unit level (units > 10 prisoners,  $n = 228$ ), the average violence per prisoner year was 1.07, and the standard deviation was 1.32. Less variability at the prison level is not surprising as violence calculated at the prison level averages out all the variation between the prison units. It might even be argued that analysis should be at the individual prisoner level to provide even more variability. However, the problem with this is that the environment cannot be calculated at the individual level, as it is the composition of individual prisoners that forms part of the environment. Analysis at the individual level is useful for identifying at-risk prisoners, but this is not the focus of this chapter.

It will always be difficult to attribute any change in the rates of violence to any one particular factor. There are many variables that contribute to the prison environment, and these factors interact to create a complex ecosystem. For example, a large prison unit may have low levels of violence for low-security prisoners who have low levels of gang affiliation but be highly violent if there is high gang

affiliation (see Worrall & Morris, 2012). To statistically identify the influence of different environmental factors, there also needs to be variation in the data. If every prison unit has the same levels of violence and a similar population, then it will be impossible to statistically identify the influence of a particular variable. Most prison organisations, however, do segregate prisons by the security level of the prisoners, and this results in variability in rates of violence, making it possible to statistically establish whether the security level has an important influence on violence. However, trying to prove the influence of other social and environmental factors can be more difficult, and it is neither practical nor ethical to conduct scientifically controlled experiments in prisons, where certain factors are systematically changed and others are held constant. Moving people around for such experiments also creates “churn”, which in itself can be a factor contributing to violence.

### Types of Violence, Unit Size, and Security Classification

To demonstrate the influence of the environment on different types of prison violence, this chapter first uses basic descriptive statistics and just two factors—prison unit size and prison unit security level. Later more factors are used, but this requires more complex analysis and machine learning is demonstrated.

Types of violence were assessed by asking eight experts to individually classify incidents as violent or not. Where there was at least 50% agreement, a type of incident was recorded as “violent”. The same method was used for determining “seriously violent” incidents, which generally involved hospitalisation and police investigation.

Table 12.1 shows the rate of different types of violence for six different prison unit sizes (i.e., the number of people in prison in a specific location). This shows that, for each of the different types of violence, the rate of violence mostly decreases as unit size increases. This may seem counter-intuitive, given that there is more potential for conflict with larger groups of prisoners, yet this is an example of where unit size and the security level of a unit interact. For example, there are many small low-security units designed to help people to transition to

*Table 12.1* Rates of Different Types of Violence by Different Size Prison Units

<i>Unit size class</i>	<i>Count per prisoner year</i>			
	<i>Violent</i>	<i>Seriously violent</i>	<i>Violent against staff</i>	<i>Seriously violent against staff</i>
1–10	1.54	0.014	0.89	0.0057
10–20	0.94	0.012	0.45	0.0021
20–30	0.76	0.011	0.38	0.0022
30–40	0.84	0.015	0.39	0.0028
40–50	0.69	0.011	0.30	0.0015
50+	0.42	0.006	0.19	0.0013

life outside of prisons. This demonstrates that the relationship between prison density and misconduct is complex and explains why the evidence on the relationship between overcrowding and violence remains inconclusive (Glazener & Nakamura, 2020).

Table 12.2 reports the rate of different types of violence for units of different security classes. There are no surprising trends here, although the magnitude of the difference in violence between minimum and maximum security is noteworthy; those units with a high-security classification had higher rates of violence. This makes sense because problematic and violent people are often assigned to units with higher security. In fact, the segregation of prisoners by security level is one of the primary tools that prison management has to manage violence.

Table 12.3 shows how prison violence varies by different levels of security and for different unit sizes. In this case, only general violence is presented to show how a more nuanced understanding of the effects of unit size on violence can be gained compared to examining unit size alone. We see that there is no longer a clear relationship between unit size and rate of violence—apart from high-security units, the rate of violence is no longer highest in the smallest units. In fact, the opposite is true, with minimum and low–medium security units featuring heavy and higher rates of violence generally found in the mid-size units. This perhaps

*Table 12.2* Rates of Different Types of Violence by Different Security Levels

	<i>Count per prisoner year</i>			
	<i>Violent</i>	<i>Seriously violent</i>	<i>Violent against staff</i>	<i>Seriously violent against staff</i>
<i>Minimum security</i>	0.071	0.001	0.026	0.000
<i>Low medium security</i>	0.287	0.003	0.127	0.001
<i>High security</i>	0.908	0.014	0.407	0.003
<i>Maximum security</i>	2.298	0.038	1.604	0.016

*Table 12.3* The Relationship Between Unit Size, Security Level, and Violence

<i>Unit size class</i>	<i>Violent count per prisoner year</i>				
	<i>All security classes combined</i>	<i>Minimum security</i>	<i>Low medium security</i>	<i>High security</i>	<i>Maximum security</i>
1–10	0.538	0.027	0.084	2.515	1.698
10–20	0.826	0.056	0.236	1.387	1.593
20–30	0.828	0.137	0.392	0.954	4.681
30–40	0.787	0.162	0.281	0.820	
40–50	0.752	0.063	0.598	0.684	2.961
50+	0.465	0.058	0.282	0.857	1.675

reflects a practice of housing more “difficult” prisoners in smaller units with specific management procedures in place. Others are housed in larger units or smaller “self-care” facilities if they are near completion of their sentence.

This data highlights the complexity of understanding prison violence and how different variables interact. In this case, only two factors are considered—unit size and security—with the data showing that the relationship of unit size to violence will depend on the variability of security. To understand prison violence at a detailed level, it is useful to use multivariate analysis. Multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis has been a common method for this but is problematic when the factors have high levels of collinearity. Machine learning techniques, which rely on trial-and-error assessment and computer power, are less affected by collinearity (referred to as non-parametric) and are becoming the preferred method.

### **Multivariate Analysis Using Machine Learning**

The main advantage of machine learning is that it can work with a large number of explanatory variables. An early example of machine learning is stepwise regression, whereby additional explanatory variables are added. Since the order in which these variables are added to the regression influences the model, the algorithm reruns the model using different sequences of explanatory variables and selects the most optimal model based on which model has the least error against the testing data. The error is commonly measured using  $R^2$  or root mean square. With stepwise regression, a linear model (line of best fit in multidimensional data space) is used. A more common structure used in machine learning is the decision trees, which are used by Random Forest. Random Forest gets its name from producing hundreds of random decision trees (thereby creating a random forest). Each tree is evaluated against the test data set, and the optimal decision tree is chosen. Other structures used for machine learning include neural networks, Bayesian models, and vector-based models (support vector machine). Machine learning thus uses a sequence of trial and error to develop the optimal model. Each model representation in the sequence is evaluated using a subset of the data, known as bootstrap sampling (Breiman, 2001), and when no improvement in the model can be gained, the sequence stops. Data is split into a training set and a testing set. For example, 60% of the data can be used for training (i.e., developing the model) and 40% for testing. For many analysts, the best machine learning model is one that performs the best or has the least error (predictive performance). Researchers will often compare the performance of different algorithms and simply choose the model with the best predictive performance. However, equally important is using models to understand the relative importance of the explanatory variables (explanatory performance). With OLS regressions, the coefficients of the standardised explanatory variables provide insight into which variables are the most important drivers of the model.

When selecting explanatory variables for inclusion in models, thought has to be given on whether to include categorical (nominal) data. Categorical data can

be included, but this can weaken the model. If categories are used, a separate sub-model is required for each category class, which reduces the number of records used for each submodel. Categories can also be represented using 1 and 0 (present and absent, respectively) or simply using a count or proportion for each class. This requires a separate column for each class. For example, if the gang name was used in the model, then each separate gang (e.g., Black Power and Mongrel Mob) would require a column. In general, it is best to avoid categorical data and find numerical methods for representing these categories. For example, with gangs, percent gang-affiliated and gang entropy are used. With the security classes, the percentage of prisoners in each of the security classes are used.

Sometimes it is useful to remove records from the data to improve the representativeness and accuracy of the model. This needs robust justification; otherwise, the model can appear to be biased by the developer. For example, in the example used in the following section, the prison units with less than an average of 10 prisoners were removed from the analysis. As explained previously, these units are highly variable in the frequency of violence as they are used for minimum- and high-security prisoners. They, however, only account for 5% of the prisoners and would disproportionately distraught the model.

The development of the explanatory variables is the most difficult and important part of modelling. The execution of a model algorithm (machine learning or statistical) is not difficult. Clever development of explanatory variables can improve both the predictive and explanatory power of a model. With machine learning, a large number of explanatory variables may not detract from the performance of the model; at the same time, many variables may not improve the model. When two variables are similar and therefore co-vary (collinearity), the model will simply show that these two variables are of similar importance to the model. While with the OLS regression model, collinearity will distort the coefficients and produce an erroneous model. For this reason, OLS regressions will use principal component analysis to reduce the number of variables and collinearity, which can lead to problems associated with model interpretation. Modern machine learning algorithms, such as those based on decision trees, do not have these complications and therefore make implementation easier (Tomaschek, Hendrix, & Baayen, 2018).

### **A Worked Example**

Besides information on unit size and security class, there are many other factors that can be used to describe the environment of each prison unit. These include the percentage of prisoners that are affiliated with a gang, diversity of gang membership, the lead offence that each person has been sentenced for, the sentence length, prisoner age, and prisoner ethnicity. Table 12.4 provides a list of explanatory variables used in this chapter for demonstration purposes. These variables were all derived from monthly prisoner population “snapshots” and averaged for each year over a 10-year period (2011 to 2020). The prisoner population database contains information on the lead offence for being in prison, as well as the length of sentence, and the prisoner’s age.

Table 12.4 Explanatory Variables Used for Modelling Prison Violence

<i>Main classes (subclasses)</i>	<i>Subclasses</i>	<i>Measurement unit</i>
<i>Prisoner population (1)</i>		Count
<i>Gang entropy (1)</i>		Entropy score (no units)
<i>Gang affiliated (1)</i>		Percent of prisoners
<i>Security (6)</i>	Minimum, low, low–medium, high, maximum, remand	Percent of prisoners
<i>Ethnicity (4)</i>	European, Maori, Pacific, Other	Percent of prisoners
<i>Lead offence (10)</i>	Breaches, burglary, dishonesty, drugs, property, traffic, sexual, violence, weapons, other	Percent of prisoners
<i>Sentence term length (3)</i>	Short, long, indeterminate	Percent of prisoners
<i>ROCROI class (3)</i>	Low, medium, high	Percent of prisoners
<i>Age group (7)</i>	Under 20, 20–24, 25–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+	Percent of prisoners

There are two variables that require further explanation—gang entropy and ROC\*ROI (Risk of ReConviction + Risk of Imprisonment) score. Gang entropy is derived from the gang name that a prisoner is affiliated with and measures the diversity of the gang membership in a unit. It is a useful explanatory variable since the mixing of gangs within a unit can lead to more violence. If a unit is made up of all the same gang or there is no gang membership, then the diversity within the unit is low. The opposite is the case if there is a high level of mixing of different gangs. It is possible to calculate the proportion of membership to each gang, and this proportion information is used to calculate entropy. The Shannon Entropy index was used as it has been used previously in prison studies for this purpose (Worrall & Morris, 2012). High entropy equates to a high level of diversity (equal probability of any gang group), and low entropy is when there is a concentration of a particular gang (low diversity). The RoC\*RoI score is based on the statistical probability that an individual prisoner if released from prison would be returned to prison for a new conviction in 5 years following release (Bakker, Riley, & O'Malley, 1999) and similar to other international indices for reoffending (see Fazel et al., 2019). RoC\*RoI is often presented as ROC\*ROI—ROC equals Risk of ReConviction, while ROI equals the Risk of Imprisonment. The asterisk (\*) means “multiplied by”. RoC\*RoI scores are based on age, gender, and various sentence and conviction history variables (Bakker, Riley & O'Malley, 1999). Here, scores are collapsed into three categories: low (0 to 0.29), medium (0.3 to 0.69), and high (0.7 and above).

***Using CatBoost and the SHAP Machine Learning Tools***

This final section provides a demonstration of machine learning using CatBoost and SHAP to understand the influence that social environment factors have on violence. CatBoost is a decision tree method that uses “boosting” techniques, which sequentially grow decision trees (Prokhorenkova et al., 2019). CatBoost has the advantage of high predictive performance (Chen et al., 2018) but also high explanatory power when used in conjunction with the tool Shapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) (Lundberg & Lee, 2017). CatBoost and SHAP are free Python libraries that, once installed, are executed using a Python editor and interpretation tool, such as Pyscripter, Jupyter Notebook, or online using Google’s Colaboratory.

CatBoost works through an iterative process of building a decision tree and testing and learning from this decision tree until a final decision tree is built. There is, therefore, testing occurring in the decision tree building process. Prior to running CatBoost, the data needs to be split for training and final validation. In the example below, the data was split into 80% training and 20% final validation. However, as machine learning uses testing for the learning process, the proportion of the data that is to be used for testing needs to be specified. In this example, 20% of the training data was used for testing. The training and validation observations were randomly selected using a process that ensured that there was an even distribution across the different size units. Since machine learning is an iterative training process, the number of iterations can be specified, and this was set to 10,000. Too many iterations can result in the overfitting of the model, and an overfitting detector was used to limit the iterations. The final number of iterations was 2,726.

CatBoost was initially used with all 36 predictor variables shown in Table 12.4. This shows the most influential variables. CatBoost was then rerun using just the top 10 performing variables (listed in the SHAP figure below) with only a negligible drop in performance. The final model had an  $R^2$  of 0.53 and an RMSE of 0.04. The SHAP tool provides a visualisation for interpreting the model predictions, and it complements the global performance with individual variable performance, which is necessary for explaining the model. Figure 12.1 presents the results of the SHAP analysis for the final 10 variables used. The variables in the SHAP graphs are arranged in descending order and ranked by importance. The importance of the SHAP variable is based on the sum of the SHAP values over all the observations in the dataset.

Each observation for a given variable is a point in the SHAP graph: the shade of the point is representative of the magnitude of the variable’s value (i.e., high = lighter dots, low = darker dots), while its location (e.g., left or right—see values bar at the bottom) represents its direction of influence on the model’s output. As an example, “Percent\_Security\_Minimum” is listed first and shown as the most important variable. Low values (darker dots) are mostly to the right of the zero axis and have a positive influence on violence (model output). The lighter dots (which are high values) are all on the left side of the zero axis and have a negative influence on violence. This is the expected result since units with a high percentage of minimum-security

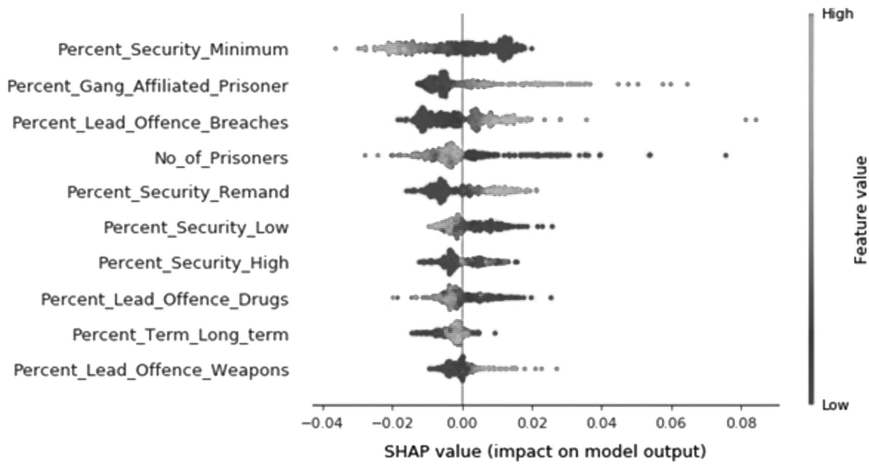


Figure 12.1 Importance of Different Social Environment Factors in Predicting Violence at the Prison Unit Scale Using SHAP Graphs.

prisoners should have low levels of violence. Basically, the model shows that the percentage of minimum-security prisoners in the unit will provide a good indication of likely prison violence. With this variable, there are, however, low values (darker dots) that are also negatively influencing violence, which is because there are many other variables that also influence violence.

Figure 12.1 shows that “Percent Gang Affiliated” was the second most important predictor variable. In this case, the darker dots (low values) are mostly on the negative side of the graph, and the lighter dots are mostly on the right, indicating that the units with a high number of gang-affiliated prisoners are more violent. With this variable, there are also some observations that are a long way to the right, indicating a high positive impact on the model output. Not all explanatory variables have such a clean distribution. With the size of the unit (number of prisoners), the low values generally have a positive influence; however, there are also low values having a negative influence. Again, this is the expected result. As discussed previously, small units can be high security and very violent or have minimum security with low levels of violence. With many of the explanatory variables, the influence of high and low values (lighter and darker dots) is often mixed (negative and positive).

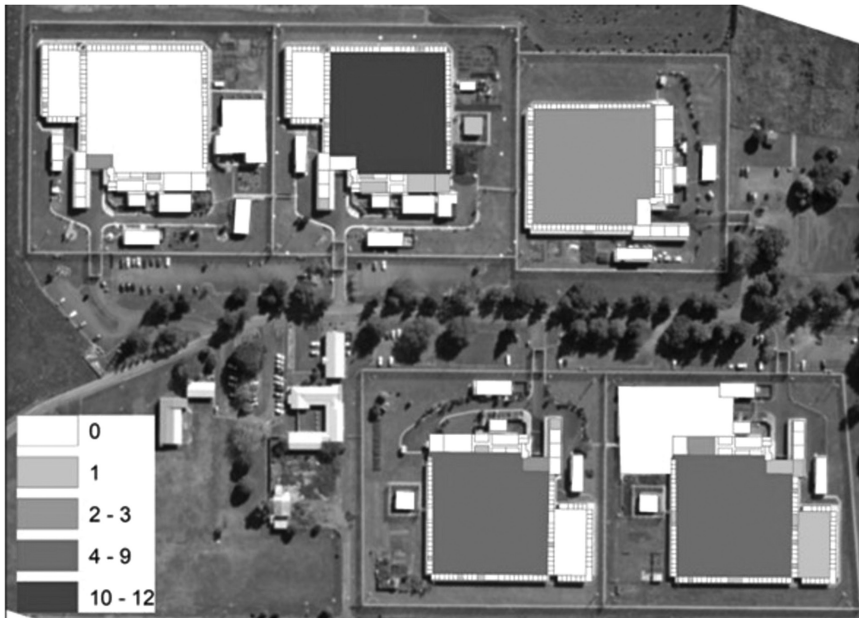
Remand and the different security levels also play a factor in explaining violence. These results are not unexpected. An unexpected observation from the SHAP graphs is the importance of the lead offence category. Lead offence for three subclasses—breaches, drugs, and weapons—and is an important predictive variable for violence according to the CatBoost model. Prisoners who have been sentenced for drugs are less violent than those sentenced for weapons or breaches.

This finding warrants further investigation, and the lead offence could be actively used for managing prisoner populations to reduce violence.

### ***Location and Frequency of Violent Incidents within a Prison Unit***

The COBRA dataset also contains information that describes the location of an incident within a prison unit. This often includes the cell number or a description of the place. This location information is not standardised and therefore needs manual cleaning and interpretation. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) provide the opportunity to map this data if a spatial plan of a prison unit is available. As a proof of concept, the frequency of violent incidents was mapped for five prison units in Waikeria prison, and Figure 12.2 shows the results.

Obtaining spatial plans of prison units is not easy. For example, in this prison, maintenance services are contracted out and contractors have the spatial plans on paper. Photocopies of these plans can be digitised to provide polygons of the spaces in the prison units, with each polygon named in the associated attribute data table. Site visits of these prison units are then required to identify the cell numbers and rooms on these plans. The frequency of violence obtained from the COBRA database can then be joined with the GIS spatial plan of the prison units using the



*Figure 12.2* Aerial Image Reflecting the Number of Violent Incidents in 2019 within Prison Units located in Waikeria Prison.

Table 12.5 Frequency of Violent Incidents by Room Type

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of violent incidents in 2020</i>
Cell	3529
Yard	1335
Dayroom	670
Landing	209
Auxiliary	173
Interview room	150
Medical	135
Walkway	134
Kitchen	114
Receiving office	112
Visits room	100
Other locations	1004
Unknown	1669

*All prisons combined, 2020 data only.*

room/location name as a link. In conclusion, generating these maps requires a considerable amount of effort and cooperation with the maintenance contractors and the prison staff.

Interpretation of Figure 12.2 requires care because large polygons dominate the map. Not all spaces are the same size, and the yards are much bigger than the cells. The statistics on the yards dominate the map, yet these represent just one space. The high frequency of violence in cells can be easily overlooked. It is also difficult to understand the influence of video cameras on the frequency of violence. Site visits revealed that video camera surveillance covers the whole unit except for inside cells and showers (which are individual cubicles). As a result, there is very little spatial variability in cover, making mapping unnecessary to assess the influence of video cameras on violence.

An alternative to mapping violent frequency is to provide statistics by room type. Table 12.5 provides a count of the number of violent incidents by room type for 2020 using incident data from all New Zealand prisons. This shows that the space with the most frequent violent incidents is the cell. Nearly half (46%) of all incidents with known locations occur in the cell. A likely reason for this is that the cell does not have video surveillance. It would be useful to extend this research by examining units of different security classes separately.

## Summary

This chapter has explored the complexity of using prison data records to understand the influence of the environment of a prison on levels of violence. Considerable effort goes into collecting data on prisons, and it is important that analytical techniques are developed to convert these data sets into meaningful evidence that can actively inform prison management strategies. Although prison staff develop an

understanding of how the environment impacts prison behaviour through years of experience, it is nonetheless useful to have data-driven evidence to support such experiences. Statistical evidence is particularly important when experiences differ.

The availability of quality data is an important factor in determining when and how statistical modelling can be used to understand and predict prison violence. In many countries, such data will not be available as it is simply too expensive to collect. Even when data are available, there will always be limitations. For example, with the New Zealand data used in this chapter, there is no information on the openness, naturalness, and availability of recreational spaces in prisons. These have been shown to be important factors for prisoner wellbeing (Norman & Andrews, 2019), and without this data, the influence of these factors cannot be accounted for. Nonetheless, this chapter demonstrates the potential usefulness and complexity of using prison data to investigate prison violence.

### Key Learning Points

- Data analysis helps understand the institutional and environmental factors that impact prison violence.
- Understanding the impact of space and place has become an important theme of the discipline of carceral geography, as each prison has its own unique architecture, design, and history.
- For each of the different types of violence, the rate of violence mostly decreases as unit size increases. Those units with a high-security classification had higher rates of violence.
- Machine learning helps understand the complex interaction between environmental and social variables that contribute to prison violence.
- GIS can be used to map where incidents occur. Nearly half of all incidents with known locations occur in the cell.

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## **Part IV**

# **Possibilities and Solutions**



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# 13 An Approach to Preventing Prison Violence

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This final section of the book is concerned with identifying an approach to preventing prison violence. This is a much harder thing to do than we might at first imagine—after all, administrators and researchers alike have, for the best part of 30 years, sought to identify and implement effective violence prevention practices. While the seminal work of Cooke (1991; 2019), Steiner and Wooldredge (2020), Wener (2012), Wortley (2004), and others has, in different ways, significantly advanced our understanding of the problem, it is fair to say that this accumulated knowledge has not led to the widespread implementation of systematic strategies that successfully prevent prison violence (Ellis & Bowen, 2017). In fact, it remains the case that violence is a common—and at times a defining—characteristic of many prison environments, with some, such as Homel and Thompson (2005), even expressing surprise that there is not more violence in our prisons (when we consider the people they house and the conditions in which they live). And so, in this chapter, we draw upon other contributions in this book to outline a comprehensive practice framework to prevent prison violence.

Many contemporary efforts to prevent violence draw on an understanding of risk factors as described in a broad public health model of disease prevention (see [cureviolence.org](http://cureviolence.org)). From an ecological perspective, risk factors for violence can be conceptualised as extending out in concentric circles, with the outermost circle reflecting general risk factors across societies and cultures, moving inwards to community, neighbourhood and schools, the family, and, finally, to the individual (Giorgianni, 2001). The simplest way to understand risk is in terms of those factors that increase the likelihood that violence will be enacted, although as discussed by Malvaso et al. (this volume), it is also very important to identify those factors that are causes and not just correlates of violence. Interventions to reduce both the presence and intensity of causal risk factors can then be developed for delivery at the population level or in relation to responding to specific risks (usually, this means identifying those who are “at risk” or at “high risk” of perpetrating violence and then providing targeted programmes). The principle of progressive universalism, where some services are available to everyone (“*universal*” or “*primary*” prevention), and more intensive services are available to those who need them most (“*secondary*” or “*selective*”, and “*tertiary*” or “*indicative*” prevention), is important here. *Universal (or primary) prevention* initiatives target whole populations or places and are designed to prevent violence from

developing or occurring in the first place (e.g., developing a culture where violence is not tolerated). *Secondary prevention* targets at-risk individuals, groups, situations, or places (e.g., reducing confrontational interactions between staff and people in prison) and, finally, *tertiary prevention* targets those individuals or places identified as violent—to ameliorate associated harms and prevent any repetition of the problem (e.g., working directly with victims of violence, those known to have perpetrated violence, or specific environmental conditions where violence occurs).

Cooke (2019) has further suggested that any violence prevention strategy should involve a broad range of responses that address how individual actors/perpetrators interact with the physical, social, technological, and cultural aspects of their environment and, indeed, a key tenet of the public health approach is that intervention is required *at every level of prevention* if it is to succeed. In an important sense, this positions prison violence as a product of functional social ecologies—spaces where people, the presence and flow of resources, and the built environment inter-relate. This suggests that intervening only with those who are identified as at “high risk” will have limited impact. In the public health literature, this is known as the *prevention paradox*—where most cases of a disease come from a population at low or moderate risk of that disease, and only a minority of cases come from the high-risk population (of the same disease) (Rose, 1992). In other words (and counter to the risk principle of the Risk Needs Responsivity [RNR] model of correctional case management), greater impact can be expected when interventions are provided at the primary or universal levels of prevention. And these will always require a detailed assessment of interpersonal, organisational, systemic, and cultural context in which violence occurs (see Cooke, Tamatea, Henry, all this volume) that goes beyond an understanding of individual risk. This is mainly because of the diversity of acts that are violent, as well as how these acts serve different functions, at different times, for different people (Polaschek, this volume).

For Malvaso et al. (this volume), the identification of effective prevention strategies essentially involves the adoption of a four-step methodology that begins with (a) *defining the problem* through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics, and consequences of prison violence before (b) *establishing why the problem occurs* by determining the causes and correlates of the violence (i.e., those factors that increase or decrease risk, and then identifying those that can potentially be modified through intervention). This is then followed by (c) *describing what works* to prevent violence by designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions; and, finally, (d) *implementing effective and promising interventions* across a range of different settings and evaluating their impact.

The logic behind this approach has immediate appeal and, indeed, is supported by evidence summarised across the various contributions to this book. We can, for example, document when and where prison violence occurs using institutional incident report data (Brabyn, this volume) and then use this information to identify a set of factors that are associated with high rates or high-seriousness violence at both the individual and institutional level (Perry & Grace, this volume). This knowledge can then be matched to what we currently know about effective intervention programmes and strategies and used to determine which are most likely to

succeed in any given location. The challenges associated with actually applying a public health approach of this type in the institutional, organisational, and cultural context of a prison should, however, not be under-estimated. And so, in this chapter, we aim to describe, in more practical terms, just how this work might proceed.

### **Use Administrative Data to Define the Problem**

Even though administrative data relating to prison violence is often inconsistently collected and/or incomplete, it nonetheless provides the best available source of information to understand the problem of prison violence. And so, the starting point for any systematic approach to violence prevention—in our view at least—is to curate what this type of data can tell us about the nature, incidence, and prevalence of violence. But to overcome some of the limitations of this type of data, we suggest adopting a return “data-to-source” approach. This involves presenting a detailed analysis of what the administrative data tell us about violence to all levels of the prison—from the leadership team to those who are responsible for recording violent incidents. We would strongly recommend that people who are incarcerated are involved with this as they have an important role to play in providing feedback and assisting with interpretation. Sharing data in this way will not only help to establish the validity and utility of any available data but also facilitate discussion about those areas (e.g., types of violence) that might be prioritised for prevention efforts. This should also help those who record the data to better understand how it can be used, as well as identify new opportunities for strengthening minimum data collection, definitions and practices, and staff training and support. We would, however, also strongly advocate for this work to be augmented with methods that allow stories and narratives of prison violence to be told—and then shared with stakeholder groups across the prison. We see this as an important first step to developing a shared commitment to violence prevention across the whole prison. Shafak (2020) has reminded us that “data and factual information are crucial, but not enough to bring down the walls of numbness and indifference, to help us empathise with people outside our tribes. We need emotional connections” (cited by Uzzell, 2021). Stories of prison violence can be meaningful and moving - they can change minds and provide hope.

### **Establish Why the Problem Occurs through the Identification of Risk Factors**

Administrative data alone is too limited to help us understand *why* violence occurs and the functions that it serves. Understanding why violence occurs—or the mechanisms that lead risk factors to be expressed behaviourally—is central to the development of effective preventive initiatives and will inevitably require a detailed analysis of each violent incident in a particular location. And so, we would suggest that the next step is to review incident reports to see if patterns can be identified across a series of different violent interactions. This process can also shed light on possible risk factors that are relevant to a particular setting (for example, gang-related violence may be a significant problem in some units or

wings, whereas in others, violence might be the result of housing a high proportion of unsentenced people in prison). We would recommend here that the coding of narrative incident reports occurs systematically (a) with reference to what is already known about commonly occurring risk factors for prison violence and (b) in relation to the most identified functions of interpersonal violence.

The list of risk factors for prison violence identified in McGuire's (2018) review is helpful here, especially if they are considered in terms of Hill's "viewpoints" (1965) criteria (i.e., strength, consistency, temporality, coherence, and experimentability—see Malvaso et al., this volume) to determine the most plausible *causal* risk factors in the specific site under consideration. And, of course, we are most interested in those risk factors that are "dynamic" in so far as they are potentially modifiable by intervention. For example, if we take the most prominent individual-level variables identified by McGuire (2018) (younger age, pre-existing record of prison violence, gang membership, ethnicity, gender), we might conclude that most of these should be considered causal risk factors, but (arguably) none (with the possible exception of gang membership) are factors that can be readily targeted in prevention efforts. However, those commonly occurring factors that relate to the prison social climate (feeling threatened and unsafe, mistreatment by staff, being wrongfully accused or punished, perceiving treatment as unjust, being subject to additional restrictions, having fewer work assignments, structured routines, or levels of programme participation, perceiving that rules are under-enforced, or that officers have less legitimacy) would also be considered causal (using our criteria) and are potentially modifiable by intervention. Those variables that relate to prison design (cell areas, "telephone pole" design, lower levels of guardianship, lower staff-to-prisoner ratio, poorer prison conditions) are probably also "casual" but likely to prove more difficult to change as this might involve, for example, new infrastructure. And finally, the administrative, procedural, and managerial factors (time out of cell, freedom of movement, the availability of different resources and facilities, the extent of choice over daily activities, the experience and skill levels of front-line staff, higher security levels, how well organised the prison administration is, the extent to which people in prison experience processes as fair, inconsistency between staff) probably sit somewhere in between—these are all likely to be causal risk factors that are potentially modifiable, but a reasonably high level of administrative and procedural change would be required for this to occur.

The conclusion of Galouzis et al. (this volume) was that addressing causal risk factors at the level of the prison social climate offers the most promise in terms of identifying violence prevention efforts that can be most easily implemented. Furthermore, aspects of a (positive) prison social climate might also be conceptualised in terms of what Lösel and Farrington (2012) refer to as both a *direct* protective factor (associated with a decreased likelihood of specific problem behaviours) and a *buffering* protective factor (one that moderates the influence of risk factors). One reason for suggesting this is that we already have tools that can help us not only to understand the impact of the prison social climate on rates of violence but also to measure it and how it changes over time (see Galouzis et al., this volume). And, importantly, this then allows us to test

the hypothesis that changes in the social climate over time (i.e., improvements) will be associated with a reduction in the prevalence (i.e., the number of people impacted), the incidence (i.e., the rate at which violence occurs), and the severity (i.e., the harms that result) of violence in a specific prison setting. Collecting this type of evaluation evidence is key to the success of the public health approach to violence prevention.

Focusing on the prison social climate inevitably means that *all* stakeholder groups (i.e., prison staff, managers, and people who live in prison and their families and communities) should be engaged in the identification of suitable targets for violence prevention efforts. This is not only consistent with the ecological approach (see Tamatea, this volume) but also reflects the returning “data-to-source” methodology that we describe above. In practice, this involves presenting suggestions about plausible causal, dynamic risk and protective factors to stakeholder groups to (a) confirm their relevance, (b) to identify their relative importance (i.e., areas of priority), and (c) the feasibility of intervening successfully to change each factor. In this way, our proposed approach to prevention becomes one of co-producing knowledge to co-design violence prevention plans that are tailored to the circumstances of the specific location in which efforts are targeted (see Day et al., 2023).

### Case Formulation

The process of gathering and integrating diverse information to develop a concise account of the relevant variables to guide decision-making is sometimes referred to as case formulation—and this is a key step in the structured professional judgement approach described by Cooke (this volume). An important question that arises here is how the quality of any case formulation of prison violence might be judged. Hart et al. (2011) have proposed a set of evaluative criteria to do this, which involve assessing *external coherence* (the degree to which a formulation is consistent with theory), *factual foundation* (the extent to which a formulation is based on information about the case that is adequate in terms of quantity and quality), *internal coherence* (the degree to which a formulation rests on propositions or makes assumptions that are compatible or noncontradictory), *explanatory breadth* (the degree to which a formulation accounts for critical evidence), *diachronicity* (the extent to which the formulation ties together information about the past, present, and future of the problem), *simplicity* (the degree to which a formulation is free from unnecessary details, propositions, and assumptions), *reliability* (the extent to which different professionals develop formulations that are similar or agree that a particular formulation is adequate), *generativity* (the extent to which the formulation yields useful knowledge and, in particular, detailed and testable predictions), *accuracy* (the extent to which the predictions generated by a formulation are accurate), and *acceptability* (the extent to which the formulation is accepted by stakeholders as useful). This resonates with the public health approach to implementation science, which, for example, is centred around the assumption that prevention efforts need to be feasible, meaningful, appropriate, and effective to succeed (Jordan et al., 2019).

## Critical Steps

This broad approach to prison violence prevention has been adopted by Jaspers et al. (2022), although their work describes this more in terms of an organisational and human factors approach to workplace safety. Their research in Denmark was based on an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders to first identify which violence prevention strategies were currently in place before a guided problem-solving process was used to identify potential solutions. The resulting “solutions” were then implemented at the local level (Table 13.1).

The Jaspers et al. (2022) approach is not dissimilar to that of the PRISM assessment (Cooke, this volume), as both rely on those who live and work in prison to identify, explain, and respond to violence—and both give key stakeholders the responsibility to implement those interventions that are both feasible and have a high level of integrity. Both approaches also accommodate critical local contextual factors into prevention planning (such as staff turnover, leadership changes, and motivation to participate), although we would also recommend the adoption of the scenario planning approaches utilised by the PRISM (this asks stakeholders to specify the circumstances under which the risk of violence is likely to increase,

*Table 13.1* Core Elements of Prison Violence Prevention

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Activities</i>
<i>Phase 1: Preparation</i>	A telephone or face-to-face meeting with prison management to introduce the prevention programme and engage employees (the unit manager is asked to identify members for a steering group).
<i>Phase 2: Mapping of the existing violence prevention practices</i>	Interviews are conducted with the unit leader, a focus group interview with employees, and a survey among all employees in the work unit to map existing violence prevention practices. The mapping takes place at least 2–4 weeks before any intervention activities begin.
<i>Phase 3: Problem-solving process</i>	A seminar for the unit managers and leadership group, followed by a seminar for all employees to present results from the mapping together with knowledge about the management’s role in preventing violence and threats. A three-hour seminar with the unit manager and as many employees as possible to present data and ask employees to identify the most relevant areas of violence prevention and identify possible solutions. The steering groups are then invited to consider these prevention initiatives and supported by coaching sessions on how to support ongoing violence prevention work.
<i>Phase 4: Assimilation</i>	In this final phase, intervention activities are no longer facilitated by the project team, as units have full responsibility for conducting all activities.

Adapted from Jaspers et al. (2022).

decrease, or stay the same—and this information can then be used to guide prevention efforts). We would also advocate for the involvement of people in prison and other stakeholders, such as family and community representatives.

### Policy Support

A final critical component of any public health prevention strategy, as Malvaso et al. (this volume) have noted, is the need to support any prevention plan with corresponding policy and operational procedures. These might relate to *communication and marketing* strategies to promote prevention efforts across the prison, developing *guidelines* that recommend or mandate practice, *fiscal* measures to reduce or increase the financial costs of prevention, *regulation* or developing principles of behaviour or practice, *legislative reform*, *environmental/social planning* to redesign and/or controlling the physical or social environment, and *service provision*, or actually delivering a service. It is the development of a policy of this kind that will embed violence prevention practice in any given location and help to ensure its sustainability over time.

### Some Challenges

While it is relatively easy to lay out a roadmap for the prevention of prison violence according to an understanding of the public health model, in practice, institutional and organisational change is never easy. For example, even trying to identify causal risk factors for prison violence is far less straightforward than it might seem. In fact, it may not even be possible to observe (or measure) some important risk factors for prison violence (these are known as latent risk factors), and, for others, establishing causality will be challenging. In addition, while it makes intuitive sense to implement as many prevention interventions that target as many causal risk factors as possible across all three levels of prevention, there are rarely the resources or capacity to deliver multiple systemic violence prevention programmes. And it is also the case that many of the key risk factors for prison violence will occur at the regime or organisational level, and it is also often beyond the control of local management teams to implement change in these areas. For example, efforts to reduce the use of segregation or protection may be hard to implement, given the legal and operational considerations that are in place to guide their use across the prison estate.

In this chapter we have proposed that intervening at the level of the prison social climate is a reasonable way to think about what might be possible. It is, however, unclear whether this will be either necessary or sufficient to bring about significant reductions in prison violence. For example, one of the most sophisticated studies of prison violence to date used multi-level modelling methods to show how a range of different individual- and site-level (i.e., contextual or situational) risk factors were associated with increased victimisation rates (Howard et al. 2020). This allowed them to assess the relative weight of different risk factors and to show, for example, that differences in daily routines and activities were the strongest risk factors for violence—increased time spent in employment was most

strongly associated with a lower-than-expected incidence of physical assaults. It is, however, not at all obvious how prison managers and violence prevention teams might be able to provide more employment options for people in prison, even though we might expect this to be one of the most effective prevention strategies. Ultimately, the extent to which interventions that improve the prison social climate exert a positive influence on rates of violence will only be determined through careful evaluation (Cooke, this volume).

A potentially more significant challenge arises from the core assumption that the key mechanism by which prevention interventions can be expected to cause a reduction in prison violence is through a reduction in dynamic risk or in those causal risk factors that are able to be modified over time. This basic assumption of the risk factor approach has recently been challenged by research examining the mechanisms of change in prison rehabilitation programmes. Specifically, a relatively recent meta-analysis provides only weak support for the hypothesised link between change in known dynamic risk factors and reduced recidivism (van den Berg et al., 2018). For van den Berg and colleagues, the particular problem here is an over-reliance on risk factors to understand change over time, given that these are simply correlates that will inevitably lack the explanatory power to design effective interventions. This is, in part, why we advocate strongly for careful consideration of only those risk factors that can be reasonably identified as *both* causal and dynamic. Nonetheless, this does highlight the importance of having a guiding theory to understand why specific prevention efforts are likely to be successful. Theories of violence can help us to organise groups of causal risk factors into meaningful conceptual domains that then facilitate communication and engagement. In this respect, Thagard (1992) has proposed that an explanatory account should only be accepted if it *coheres* better than its competitors—and the degree of coherence can be assessed against the principles of symmetry, explanation, data priority, analogy, contradiction, competition, and acceptability (see Ward, 2019). In our view, current theories of prison violence, such as importation and deprivation theories, lack sufficient coherence when they are viewed in this way, and there is a need to develop more robust and specific theories of prison violence going forward. One way to do this is to develop a theory that is more ecologically framed.

In this book our decision to adopt a broad ecological focus reminds us that the problem of addressing prison violence is not simply one of changing behaviour. It suggests that any framing of the problem solely in terms of individual-level risk (e.g., impulsivity or instrumentality) not only restricts our understanding of other potentially important causes but also closes down many of the options to prevent violence. Rather, we would argue that prevention solutions are not going to be linear and that the policy and programme levers for change will not only involve the use of incentives, regulations, education, and awareness-raising interventions (as Collins et al., 2003 describe this “carrots, sticks and sermons”). Knowledge and positive attitudes are important, but by themselves, they are not usually sufficient to encourage behavioural change (Uzzell, 2021). Rather, there is a need to develop more social approaches (such as using social norms and peer-group pressures as well as community persuasion exercises to invoke cultural change). This helps us to better

appreciate the importance of the familial and cultural context in which violence occurs and to not underestimate structural factors in society that have a significant influence on the opportunities, competencies, abilities, and willingness of people to be non-violent and the environmental. In short, the ecological model reminds us that behaviours such as violence are often simply visible manifestations of socially embedded phenomena or social practices. Such thinking resonates strongly in countries like Aotearoa New Zealand, where public policy focuses attention on early intervention initiatives that promote social development and the impacts of a range of negative social indicators that drive violence. This reflects a national policy discourse that places community wellbeing and responses to inequality at the centre of government service delivery (see Stanley & Monod de Froideville, 2020) in a context which sees the continuing over-representation of Māori and other cultural minority groups in prison violence statistics.

We end this chapter with some examples of prison violence that highlight just how important it is to understand the context in which violence occurs *and* the different functions that it can serve. This serves to remind us that different risk factors will be present in different scenarios and that different prevention responses will also be required. Simple prevention solutions are unlikely to be successful. The first relates to a case that was being heard in a UK court where a prison officer was alleged to have encouraged inmates to attack each other because he “hated” the sexual offenders (sic) he guarded in a special section of a prison:

James Cookson, who worked at HMP High Down in Surrey, denies illicitly releasing information about a prisoner to others at the jail and encouraging inmates into violently attacking each other. Mr Cookson did not appear in court.

(Daily Telegraph, 2017)

The second is an account of an incident that was reported in the German media about a 20-year-old man called Hermann. It was reported that, for no apparent reason, three cellmates attacked Hermann, beating him with bars of soap wrapped in towels, forcing him to drink half a litre of water mixed with toothpaste, salt, and chilli powder. It was reported that

When he had to throw up, they made him eat the vomit. They made him drink their urine and then kicked him until he threw up again” and then that Hermann “was forced to perform fellatio on his tormentors and made to crawl through the cell with a splintered wooden broomstick in his rectum.

After watching a game of soccer on TV, they decided to kill Hermann and strangled him with a bed sheet:

The next morning, the cellmates called the guards and told them a story about a suicide. They had heard that one could hope for conditional release after having witnessed a traumatic incident.

(Kotynek et al., 2012, cited by Noll, 2015)

### Key Learning Points

- Efforts to prevent violence should draw on an understanding of risk factors as described in a broad public health model of disease prevention that encompasses all levels of the ecology.
- The principle of progressive universalism suggests that some interventions are made available to everyone, with more intensive services offered to those who need them most.
- Intervention is required at every level of prevention if it is to succeed.
- Once data have been collected and risk factors identified, a key step to effective prevention is to develop a case formulation of why violence is occurring.
- A guided problem-solving process involving all stakeholders can then be used to identify and implement solutions.

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# 14 Exploring the Wicked Problem of Violence in Prison

## Capturing the Complexity of Contexts

*David J. Cooke*

On Sunday, 8 November 2020, Albert Bourla, CEO of Pfizer, called his executive team into his office in Connecticut; tension was in the air. The outcome of a multi-billion-dollar bet was about to be revealed. Nine months earlier, Bourla had driven his company—then best known for the production of Viagra—to produce three billion doses of a vaccine that had not yet even been developed. That Sunday, statisticians were able to unblind the trial; around 100 people had been naturally infected with the COVID-19 virus; the good news was the majority of cases were in the control group, not the vaccine group. The implications for the world, for Pfizer, and for Bourla were profound (Bourla, 2022). This is the power of randomised controlled trials, the acme of experimental designs.

In some sense, the empirical question being answered in the vaccine trial was straightforward. In epidemiological terms, the *Agent* (pathogen) attacks the *Host*. The host susceptibility is influenced by, amongst other things, genetic composition, nutrition, medication, physical and psychological state—and, crucially, by vaccine status. The causal pathway is not hard to discern when a powerful pathogen is in play; randomised controlled trials of interventions are essential in these circumstances (Victoria, Habicht & Bryce, 2004).

### **On the Wickedness of Violence in Prisons**

The success of the Pfizer vaccine is a potent example of the *pipeline* model of science into practice; an intervention is assessed under tightly controlled conditions; if found effective, it is rolled out to other groups, contexts, and countries. Unfortunately, this is not the place we find ourselves in when we endeavour to understand and intervene with regard to violence in prisons. There are no powerful pathogens; there are no powerful risk factors. Violence in prisons is a wicked problem. Wicked, not in the sense of being evil or morally wrong, but rather wicked in the sense of a problem that is hard to define and that is impossible to solve in a way that is simple and final; it is a problem characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, and complexity. Initially introduced by Rittel & Webber (1973), the concept of a wicked problem is somewhat hard to pin down (Danken, Dribbisch, & Lange, 2016). Wicked problems are not merely complex problems. There are perhaps four

fundamental features that make a problem wicked. First, a clear formulation of the problem only becomes available when solutions to the problem have been generated; these solutions are never right or wrong but merely better or worse. Second, wicked problems resist simple solutions and tend to become chronic; solutions to wicked problems generate waves of consequences which are inherently unpredictable. Third, the management of wicked problems entails collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders with different interests, values, and understandings. Finally, every wicked problem is essentially unique and resists a thorough appreciation of its nature and consequences (Danken, Dribbisch, & Lange, 2016). Randomised controlled trials and traditional experimental designs are ill-suited to understanding interventions for wicked problems because of the complexity of input, unforeseen relations, and ever-changing active and reactive agents and organisations (Wright, Cairns, O'Brian, & Goodwin, 2019).

It is unsurprising that violence in prisons is a wicked problem given the entanglement of the many and various factors that promote violent behaviour; added to this is the continuous evolution of risk factors—and interventions directed at these risk factors—so that the problem can only be managed, never solved (Cooke, 2019, 2020; also Cooke, this volume). People are active, reactive, interactive, and adaptive organisms; the processes leading to any behaviour, including violent behaviour, are complex and non-linear (Cooke, 2010, 2016). On the one hand, violent behaviour may be underpinned by qualitatively different psychological processes within the same individual at different times and across different individuals at the same time. This is termed *equifinality* (Cooke & Michie, 2010; Richters, 1997). On the other hand, different patterns of violence may be underpinned by similar psychological processes within the same individual across time and across different individuals at the same time. This is termed *multifinality* (Cooke & Michie, 2010; Richters, 1997). The complexity inherent in equifinal and multifinal intra-personal functioning is further compounded by the complex nexus of situational factors that impinges on those in prison (Cooke, 1989, 2019; Cooke, this volume, Wortley, 2002).

Simple models will not work. This has been recognised in other fields but, unfortunately, not necessarily in the field of violence risk management: “The inherent complexity of biological ... and economic ... systems show that they are not adequately described by deterministic or traditional probabilistic models. Yet the siren call of models is seductive and too easily they take on the status of false gods” (Taylor, 2011, p. 445). Depth is required; other approaches are necessary.

### **Why Case Study Methodology Is Appropriate**

The wickedness of problems is not a reason to ignore them. Any scientific endeavour is concerned with asking questions and building models to better understand the problem of concern. Different approaches have evolved: experimental, quasi-experimental, and case-study methodology (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002; Yin, 2003, 2009, 2018). I will focus on the case-study methodology. A case study is a systematic investigation of a contemporary phenomenon

which informs a greater understanding of the phenomenon and promotes theory development through analytical rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2003). Case study research is particularly useful when asking “how” and “why” questions about a phenomenon; this is particularly the case where the phenomena of interest cannot be manipulated by the researcher. This is generally the case in prison studies; for example, it would be challenging to randomly assign prisoners to different conditions as would be required in traditional experimental designs. The phenomena of interest can be investigated either using an extreme or unique case—as is common in clinical and neuro-psychology—or using a representative or typical case. Case studies provide depth, whereas large-scale research projects provide breadth; both approaches are necessary for scientific progress (Davies, Howells, & Jones, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, as highlighted by Flyvbjerg (2006), “the advantage of the case study is that it can ‘close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (p. 235). When the overarching goals of research are to understand a phenomenon—and to provide practical guidance in a real-life setting—systematic case study methodology provides a good fit.

Historically, psychology depended on case studies as much as on group designs; however, case studies have faded from use because they have been deemed—incorrectly—to be unscientific (Campbell, 2009; Forward to Yin, 2009). Single case study methodologies have long been used in clinical and neuropsychology practice and research but are less common in forensic research (e.g., Davies et al., 2007; Nee & Farman, 2007). Davidson and Tyrer (1996), for example, demonstrated that single-case methodologies can be very useful for evaluating treatment outcomes for personality disorders in non-forensic populations. Kreis and Cooke (2012) used case study methodology to clarify the conceptualisation of psychopathic personality disorder as it presents in females. Case methodologies may be particularly useful in treatment development and evaluation with forensic mental health clients who have complex and heterogeneous clinical presentations (Fishman, 2003). Case methodologies are also recognised as a key tool in the mapping of the content validity of a psychopathological construct (e.g., Blashfield & Livesley, 1991; Kreis & Cooke, 2012). They have been useful in understanding violence in prisons (Cooke, 1989; Johnstone & Cooke, 2010). Large-scale studies and randomised control trials are difficult to apply to forensic populations. Indeed, such approaches may be limited in focus and provide generic conclusions at the group level that may not apply at the individual case level (Davies et al., 2007).

Case studies may have been neglected in the forensic literature due to misunderstandings about their scientific value and rigour and the value generally of idiographic approaches (Robinson, 2012). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), such misunderstandings include the views that general theoretical knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical knowledge; that one cannot generalise on the basis of an individual case; and that a case study contains an inherent bias towards verification. However, analytical generalisation from an individual case is not only possible, but such analytical generalisations have played a key role in scientific progress both in the natural sciences (e.g., physics and biology) and in psychology

(Flyvbjerg, 2006; Robinson, 2012). Single case studies of patients with frontal lobe damage, for example, have informed the debate about the aetiology of psychopathy (e.g., Blair & Cipolotti, 2000). A recent multiple case study examined the development of multi-agency services for prison leavers with mental health problems (Lennox et al., 2021).

### ***Different Forms of Inference***

Yin (2009, 2018) identifies a key distinction, the misunderstanding of which leads to confusion regarding the utility of case study methodology—namely, the distinction between inferences based on sampling logic and inferences based on replication logic. When sampling logic is applied, the entire universe of cases is enumerated, and a sampling procedure is designed to select a specific sub-sample of cases to be evaluated. These cases are assumed to represent the entire universe of cases from which the sub-sample was selected; inferential statistics are used to determine the confidence with which this representation is assumed to be accurate. This is a statistical generalisation (Yin, 2018). Replication logic is different. Replication logic is similar to the logic used in multiple experiments; a finding emerges, new studies attempt to replicate the finding, and if the finding is robust, other studies vary the experimental conditions to evaluate the limits of the original findings. Yin (2018) states the position clearly: “Rather than thinking about your case(s) as a sample, you should think of your case study as the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concept or principles” (p. 73). He argued that case studies can provide analytic generalisations—lessons learned—that go beyond the specific case being studied. Analytic generalisation can be based on corroborating, modifying, or rejecting concepts or theories that guided the design of the case study or by generating new concepts that emerged when the case study was completed (e.g., Cooke, 1989).

### ***Case Study: The Role of Theory***

The design and implementation of case studies are founded on a preliminary theory; this theory guides the nature and sources of data that are to be sought and the interpretation of these data (Yin, 2009). It is important that the theory is congruent with the organisation being studied. This does not need to be a grand theory but rather a blueprint about why acts or events may occur. Competing theories can be adopted to clarify thinking or to provide different perspectives on the case (perhaps a prison unit or whole prison) under study. Structured Professional Judgement (SPJ) decision theory, as discussed in Chapter 4, provides an explanation of how an individual decides to be violent (Hart & Logan, 2011). Within the correctional context, key risk processes that can affect a prisoner’s decision to be violent would include having a sense of injustice, a sense of disrespect, a sense of uncertainty, fear, loss of agency, loss of trust, and the affiliative need to be accepted by peers (Cooke, 2019). Case studies can be enhanced by exploring evidence to support or contradict the role that these processes may play in the prison of study.

Additional theoretical perspectives can add richness to understanding. Gear, Eppel, and Kozoi-McLain (2022) argued that within Aotearoa New Zealand, it is possible to weave together distinct theoretical perspectives, including Tikanga Māori, which supports an indigenous worldview. Being explicit about the theory not only aids design but also allows those evaluating any case study report to determine whether findings might apply to their setting.

In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation that *Complexity Theory* can enhance our understanding of complex health and criminal justice services (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Braithwaite et al., 2018; Gear, Eppel, & Koziol-McMain, 2022; Lennox et al., 2021; McDaniel & Driebe, 2001; Thompson et al., 2016) and that such theory provides a good fit with case-study methodology (Anderson et al., 2005). In essence, Complexity Theory, while recognising the importance of elements within a system, emphasises that it is the interactions and interdependencies amongst the elements that create the whole. Post-structural complexity theory posits that outcomes are emergent due to the sheer number and dynamism of the interactions amongst agents in a complex system (Gear et al., 2022). The understanding of wicked problems and complex adaptive systems has emerged from a parallel track; nonetheless, they share common origins in complexity perspective (Nelson & Stroink, 2014). Complexity theory can elucidate the concept of a wicked problem in complex social systems such as prisons.

Case studies, using a complexity theory lens, focus on understanding the interactions between system elements across levels and across time rather than on the elements alone. A detailed account of complexity theory is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will highlight some key concepts in complexity and will then discuss how these concepts can guide case-study methods directed at understanding violence in prisons.

In summary, theoretical propositions derived from theory shape the collection of data and the analyses of these data (Yin, 2009). Therefore, in PRISM studies in Aotearoa New Zealand, Complexity Theory can provide a rich account of the functioning of prisons, theoretical perspectives, including Tikanga Māori, can enhance cultural relevance, while SPJ Decision theory can provide a systematic means by which to articulate the psychological processes that form the nexus between prison ecology and violent behaviour.

### **Prisons as Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)**

It is important to recognise that prisons have the characteristics of *complex adaptive systems* (CAS); a prison is not merely constituted by the sum of its components but rather by the complex of inter-relations amongst its components (Anderson et al., 2005). In reality, there are many components, moving parts and shifting relationships, and our evaluation is more imprecise, convoluted, uncertain, and ambiguous than some would claim. Theory-guided decomposition can elucidate the key elements of wicked problems (Wright, Cairns, O'Brian & Goodwin, 2019). The application of CAS theory can clarify wicked problems such as violence in prisons.

While there is no unanimity of definitions of a CAS, there are several key defining principles (Thompson, Fazio, Kustra, Patrick, & Stanley, 2016). CASs are systems of agents that respond to the actions and information provided by other agents; an agent can be an individual, a collective such as a prison unit, or a process such as a programme intervention. The responses of agents entail learning and adaptation at the individual or collective level (Gear, Eppel, & Koziol-McLain, 2018, 2022). The relations amongst these agents are the foundation of the CAS that emerges (Thompson et al., 2016). Within the CAS, components (people, equipment, settings, artefacts, and technology) combine haphazardly and in unpredictable ways emerging into complexes that are more than the sum of their individual parts. It is often difficult to trace the origins of a complex system back to a specific cause or set of causes; the phenomena of interest are dynamic and unfold in unpredictable ways. Over time the repeated interactions amongst agents result in new patterns of behaviour. Agents vary. They may be diverse in terms of their motivations or ideology; they may belong to groups—professional, gangs, different areas of origin—that influence their interactions and outcomes. While diversity can be a source of creativity, it can also be a source of communication difficulty. A key feature of a CAS is that the interactions amongst agents are not controlled by some central entity. Interactions may be shaped by agents following simple rules; however, these interactions are frequently non-linear, with small inputs producing large outcomes or, indeed, large inputs producing small outcomes.

It follows from above that the focus of research on a CAS is directed towards the pattern of interactions amongst components of the system, at different levels and different times, rather than the individual components in isolation. These interactions self-organise into routine ways of interacting, resulting in the emergence of discourse, for example, a discourse about the causes of violence in prison. The dominant discourse will serve to configure the values and meaning for agents in the CAS and serve as barriers to alternative understandings. One consequence of prisons being CASs is that evaluating the efficacy of any particular intervention is hard to determine as cause and effect will always remain unclear. Prison systems are probabilistic and stochastic; they are not deterministic and causal.

### ***Complexity Theory Implications for Case-Study Methodology***

The adoption of a complexity theory perspective has implications for the design and implementation of any case study into prison violence. I will consider five aspects of a CAS and the implications of these aspects for any case design (See Gear, Eppel, & Koziol-McLain, 2022; Jordan, Lahham, Anderson, & McDaniel, 2010 for more detailed accounts).

As noted above in complexity theory, an *agent* is an individual component of a CAS that not only includes multiple classes of individuals, e.g., prison staff, management, unions, gang members, and sex offenders, but all other entities, security processes, medical processes, computer systems, etc. The more diverse agents are, the more likely it is that novel structures and practices will arise as

they interact. Critically, agents can learn and adapt across time, learning from multiple sources and accumulating knowledge from current practice. Agents are able to create novel and flexible responses. Within a prison, this might be to meet new challenges, e.g., the use of drones to deliver contraband into a prison or the creation of no-go areas in prison by particular sub-groups of prisoners. Agents will interact within their local environment; however, networks ensure that information spreads rapidly through systems that go beyond the local environment. For example, gang members in one prison may instruct a member in another prison to commit an assault in order that he is transferred to the first prison to restore the precarious balance amongst competing groups (Wilson & Tamatea, 2010). A single agent can thus affect multiple agents through networks of connections.

The role and behaviour of agents within a CAS have implications for the conduct of systematic case studies. First, often standard research methods assume uniformity across agents; this obscures the diversity amongst agents, for example, amongst prison officers and prisoners. There are inherent dangers in over-relying on averages to represent the system—often the median is not the message—the non-linear dependencies that characterise CAS are generally non-normally distributed; thus, prevailing assumptions of normal distributions do not apply. Jordan et al. (2010) made a number of recommendations that can assist in the interpretation of case-study data. For example, they suggest grouping agents, e.g., prisoners and prison staff, in a variety of ways—in fine-grained and course-grained clusters—as this can reveal the diversity of agents along various dimensions. They also emphasised the importance of tracking down the unusual or atypical rather than focusing on the average; frequently, it is the outlier that drives the behaviour of a CAS. For example, Cooke and Wozniak (2010) found that prisoners and staff in the Barbados Prison Service could identify a small number of oppositional staff who perpetuated bad practices.

Second, the case-study method should take cognisance of the fact that agents learn and adapt; for example, the process of assessment may lead to spontaneous change; it is thus necessary to be sensitive to the ways in which learning may affect the variables of interest (Wilson & Tamatea, 2010). Wilson and Tamatea (2010) found that merely initiating a PRISM evaluation led to positive changes in staff behaviour.

Third, the case-study methodology seeks knowledge about the CAS from key agents in the CAS. It is vital to mobilise end-users, in this case, prisoners, in an equitable partnership at the outset of the research. Dialogue is fundamental. This approach has the dual advantages of gaining access to privileged knowledge and setting the conditions under which change may take place. Wright et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of “democratic conversations” that allow key questions to be discussed openly. A key element in any case study is triangulation: triangulation of data sources, perspectives, and methods. Triangulation allows converging lines of inquiry to provide corroboration of evidence and, for example, facilitates the assessment of the credibility of allegations made (Cooke & Wozniak, 2010). Triangulation increases confidence in ratings made.

### *Networks of Agents*

Within complexity theory, agents are linked in *networks*. Networks are webs of relationships amongst agents at and across different levels of the CAS. Agents can be conceptualised as nodes in a web of connections that describe the network; these networks are generally complex, overlapping, nested, looping—and frequently ill-understood (Brainard & Hunter, 2015).

Gaining an understanding of networks is central to any case study of violence in prison. It is important to gather information about the relationships amongst the agents, not merely the quantity but also the quality of relationships. This can be facilitated by in-depth interviews and focus groups designed to evaluate the thought processes that lead to particular actions, including violence. Problematic interactions can be identified, and possible interventions can be suggested. For example, Cooke and Wozniak (2010) identified an overly hierarchical and overly structured approach to the day-to-day management of prisoners in Barbados prisons, perhaps best exemplified by a comment from the staff survey: “dignify your subordinates by allowing them to be part of the process”. The failure to engage staff resulted in staff implementing their own methods of control, methods that senior management was unaware of. The aim should be to adjust the current system structures using the embedded knowledge of those who live and work in prisons rather than implementing something novel which stresses an already overburdened organisation. The collaborative approach not only has the advantage of ensuring that relevant information is extracted from the various information silos in the institution but also promotes buy-in. Buy-in increases the probability of institutional change.

### *Non-linear Effects*

Within complexity theory, it is recognised that the relationships amongst agents within a network are frequently *non-linear*; that is, agents are unpredictable in response to the actions of others. As a consequence, small changes may have a large effect or, indeed, large changes may have small effects. Non-linearity means that the CAS is sensitive to initial conditions—the so-called butterfly effect—with small differences in initial variables resulting in substantial differences in outcome. In one Scottish prison, the simple act of fixing a scanner used to detect weapons coming into the institution had a disproportionate impact on the level of knife violence (Johnstone & Cooke, 2010).

Appreciating the possibilities of non-linearity is important in the design of case studies in prisons. Non-linearities are often key to understanding the CAS but are hard to detect: the challenge is to identify small events that have large outcomes or large events that lead to small outcomes. An example of the former was a major riot in a Scottish prison in 1986 sparked by the treatment of one prisoner. An example of the latter from my own experience was working in a large health authority; over my 20 years, it was subject to five or six major reorganisations; however, staff were not engaged in the process, and the delivery of clinical services remained unaffected by these changes. Practitioners just waited for the next reorganisation.

The case-study method should examine outliers as well as averages because it is often the exceptions that drive the changes in a CAS. By focusing on the outliers, the researcher has to confront their unexamined assumptions about what is normal and common in the prison setting. The case study has to be sufficiently flexible and capable of evolution because non-linearity and unpredictability mean that events can change during the period of study (McDaniel et al., 2013). It is often the case that cause-and-effect relationships are hard to determine, and unintended consequences are frequent. Information from prisoners, staff, and visitors can often aid identification of non-linear effects. Participants can be asked about what has surprised them about the CAS or what events or processes have caught them off guard.

### *Self-organising*

At first glance, prisons may appear to be highly structured environments, but as with any CAS, prisons can be characterised as being *self-organising*. This has implications for any case study. Grouping agents in different ways can facilitate understanding of the network and how it is organised. Visual mapping can be used to depict the relationships between primary, secondary, and tertiary functions within the institution; it can be used to examine how units are nested within the institution and the institution is nested in the correctional system more broadly. Prisons are perhaps best understood as a system, smaller units being nested within larger networks, networks that go beyond the prison walls and which include other influential agents. For example, prior to the Glendairy prison riot in Barbados, the politicians decided to introduce a parole system to alleviate the overcrowding in the prison. Preliminary parole interviews were initiated with prisoners, but a dramatic volte-face by the politicians threw fuel on the fire—almost literally (Cooke & Wozniak, 2010).

Often successful organisations contain agents who improvise; they deviate from standard procedures and routines, resulting in new ways of intervening. The case-study protocol should permit the identification of improvisation and bricolage—the creation of services or interventions using under-utilised resources. Mapping can also be used to identify the blocks to information flow—deliberate or chance—and the sources of bias that creep into communications. Findings can be used to amplify or dampen interactions within the system in order to strengthen multiple pathways to interventions.

With regard to case-study methodology, researchers should evaluate whether unexpected configurations of networks emerge, perhaps with unexpected leaders. It is vital to understand informal structures and contrast them with formal structures. Cooke and Wozniak (2010) observed that in the Barbados prison system, the informal network of middle managers disregarded the formal network of control from senior managers. Often cliques will prevent information from moving through an organisation, causing fragmentation of the system. It is important to be aware that there can be more than one successful process, structure, or configuration in an organisation being studied. Case studies are pre-eminent designs for

characterising the uniqueness of a case and, thereby, are well suited to identifying multiple successful patterns.

### ***Emergence***

*Emergence* is a key concept in complexity theory (e.g., Braithwaite et al., 2018). Emergent phenomena are the product of interactions amongst agents that are a level up in terms of scale and manifest themselves as social structures, patterns, or properties of the organisation. A prototypical example of an emergent property of a system is the murmuration of starlings—the beautiful shape-shifting flocks that twist, turn, swoop, and swirl at dusk prior to roosting. These complex patterns have no central control, but rather they are the consequence of two simple rules that govern the relationships amongst the individual birds—do not get too close to the bird next to you, go in the same direction as the birds close to you. Complexity emerges from simplicity. Within the prison literature, the Barlinnie Special Unit (Cooke, 1989; Chapter 4, this volume; Whatmore, 1987) is an example of a complex and effective prison regime that evolved from three simple principles: modify the traditional officer–prisoner relationship towards a therapist–patient relationship, engage volunteer staff, and provide psychological input.

Because change within a CAS is emergent, it is essential in any case study to have multiple indicators of outcome, change, and delivery of service. For example, the focus should not merely be on violence—broadly defined—but also on other indicators of institution malfunction—self-harm, suicidal behaviour, substance misuse, unauthorised leave, self-neglect, and victimisation.

In summary, viewing prisons as CASs means that case studies must be flexible, adaptive, focused on relationships, take cognisance of non-linear effects, and consider multiple outcome measures. Perhaps, by chance rather than design, viewing prisons as CASs gels well with the PRISM process (see Chapter 4, this volume; Cooke, 2019, 2020; Johnstone & Cooke, 2008).

In conclusion, it is fundamental to recognise that violence in prisons is not merely a complex problem; it is a wicked problem. For any researcher attempting to understand—and intervene—with the complex adaptive system that is a prison system, the key attribute is persistence. Persistence to work through setbacks and resistance; persistence to engage with a multiplicity of agents who inhabit indistinct, oppositional, or culturally diverse universes; persistence to negotiate with both the constructive and destructive politics that pervade prison life; and, finally, persistence to drive through the inherent lethargy of many organisations (Cooke, 2019; Chapter 4, this volume). Case-study methodology provides a powerful means by which to understand the wickedness of prison violence.

### **Key Learning Points**

- Prison violence is a wicked problem: it is poorly understood, stakeholders hold conflicting values, and there are no right or wrong solutions, merely better or

worse solutions. Wicked problems are common in social systems and are hard to solve.

- Wicked problems are common in complex adaptive systems such as prisons.
- Case study methodology provides a rigorous and systematic approach to the problem of understanding wicked problems, including violence in prisons.
- Viewing cases through different theoretical lenses (e.g., complexity theory, structured professional judgement theory, and Tikanga Māori) can add richness to our understanding of the phenomena under evaluation.

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# 15 Violence in Prisons

## What Have We Learned So Far?

*David J. Cooke, Andrew Day,  
and Armon Tamatea*

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the hell is water?”

(David Foster Wallace, 2009)

Wallace’s oft-quoted parable is apposite here. It reminds us that the most obvious, the most important, and the most malleable risk factors are often the hardest to recognise and, thereby, the hardest to manage. While we are certainly not presenting ourselves as wise old fish, we believe that this volume provides a roadmap towards improving the safety of our prisons. Our purpose in editing this book was to identify some new ways to think about, understand, and, ultimately, prevent prison violence. The various contributions to this book—in their different ways—offer several suggestions and directions for doing just this. And yet, at the same time, all our authors are clear that violence in prisons will remain a wicked and partly intractable problem. One of the most important themes to emerge from this book is the need to think ecologically and systemically about the drivers of violence. Violence in prisons is not something that can be understood simply in terms of the characteristics—the risk factors—inherent in those who act violently in prison. These are only half of the equation. Simply put, there is a fundamental need to also consider the situational and environmental context in which violence occurs. Not merely the immediate prison environment but also the broader socio-cultural norms that set expectations about the appropriateness of resolving conflict, dealing with frustration, or achieving personal goals through violence.

Of course, even wise old fish do not have the solutions. In fact, the contributors to this book are clear that every prison is different and that careful assessment and formulation of the problem is required before any effective prevention strategies can be identified and implemented. What is also apparent is that preventing violence will require the concerted efforts of many different people. This means working with individuals who have perpetuated violence and those who have been victims of violence, working with different cohorts (be they gang members or First Nations leaders, uniformed or non-uniformed) towards a common purpose. It will

also mean drawing on the knowledge of different disciplines to identify a wide range of possible solutions that will suit the local context. Given that it is often in everyone's interest to resolve difficulties non-violently, we believe that this is quite possible. So where should we start? We believe that three different challenges are identified in this book: the first is to achieve conceptual clarity about the concept of prison ecology; the second is to answer the question, "Why is prison ecology important?"; and the third is the need for better measurement technology.

### **Conceptual Clarity**

Despite our best efforts, the concept of prison ecology remains an elusive concept; there is no clear agreement about what prison ecology encompasses or, indeed, what it excludes. Tamatea (Chapter 2) brigades the current state of understanding of prison ecology. He reviews a number of historical theories before concluding that multiple layers of influence interact to produce violence. Extra layers of complexity are added when considering violence in prisons in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tamatea & Wilson, Chapter 6; Henry & Tamatea, *Critical Issue 1*; Tamatea & Henry, *Critical Issue 2*). These chapters discuss the impact of colonisation, the consequent hyper-incarceration of First Nations peoples, and the saliency of gang culture on the ecology of prisons within Aotearoa New Zealand. Most jurisdictions will have their own particularities; the challenge is to identify principles of practice that generalise across them.

Efforts to define prison ecology are hampered by the complexity and nature of the phenomena being considered. The bottom line is that prison ecology, while clearly important, is a slippery concept. This conceptual challenge underpins the operational challenge; if we do not know *what* we are trying to assess, it remains unclear *how* we should assess and evaluate prison ecology. As Campbell (2013) observed, we cannot measure what we cannot describe. And so, if we are to understand and measure the prison ecology, then conceptual problems have to first be resolved. This is because the adequacy of any measurement process can only be judged in terms of the underlying concept that it was designed to measure (Borge & Shye, 1995; Guttman & Greenbaum, 1998; Krauth, 1981; Middendorp, 1991). And so what the field requires is a good conceptual model of the prison ecology, which captures the major features and from which new measures can be evolved.

How might such a conceptual model be achieved? The first step is to describe the content encompassed by the concept, capturing all relevant features yet purging the secondary or irrelevant content (Smith et al., 2003). Multiple procedures are required to explicate a construct like a prison ecology. Representations of the concept can be explicated through literature reviews, consultations with subject matter experts, the analysis of relevant research, as well as direct observations of prison organisations and from subject matter experts such as those who work and live in our prisons. It is important to sample to ensure that a comprehensive representation of the construct is achieved.

In terms of a literature review, Tamatea (Chapter 2) (Tamatea and Henry, *Critical Issues 1 and 2*) garner the (albeit sparse) literature on prison ecology. Other

chapters highlight the value of bringing the thinking of distinct disciplines to bear to the problem. We will inevitably need a multidisciplinary perspective, whether this be from psychology (Daffern, Chapter 7), from public health (Polaschek and Daffern, Chapter 2; Malvaso et al., Chapter 5), from sociology (Galouzis et al., *Critical Issue 3*), from machine learning (Brabyn, *Critical Issue 4*; from Indigenous studies (Henry and Tamatea, *Critical Issues 1 and 2*), or gender studies (Chapter 3; Perry and Grace, Chapter 3). Different ways of thinking cast different light on the problem and promote creative solutions. In the future, it would be useful to embrace other areas of expertise; the science of change management and operational research being obvious sources of potentially useful information (e.g., Gear, Eppel, & Koziol-McLain, 2022; Wright, Cairns, O'Brien, & Goodwin, 2019).

To fully flesh out a construct, recourse to sources other than the extant literature is essential. In the development of PRISM (Cooke, Chapter 4; Cooke, Johnstone, & Wozniak, 2008; Johnstone & Cooke, 2008), steps were undertaken to capture the understanding of those with direct experience of prisons and violence within those prisons. Semi-structured interviewing allowed us to identify aspects of prison ecology that were salient but had not been identified in a systematic review of the then-extant literature. This was a rich seam of data. Not only did it identify *what* was important, it provided explanations of *why* it was important. Subject matter experts outlined possible mechanisms underpinning the relationships between ecological variables and institutional violence. The PRISM was, however, developed at a different time within a different culture, and this book provides the foundation for testing its generality, or otherwise, in the distinct culture of New Zealand corrections and to embrace Tikanga Māori in support of an Indigenous worldview (Cooke, Chapter 15).

### Explaining the Importance

Having tackled the “What is prison ecology?” question, the second challenge is to answer the question, “Why is prison ecology important?” when considering prison violence. A number of contributors (Cooke, Chapter 4; Daffern, Chapter 7; Polaschek, Chapter 8; Day et al., Chapter 14) have taken tentative steps in explaining the links between prison ecology and prison violence. They draw attention to risk processes that generate a sense of injustice, a sense of being disrespected, or that engender a sense of uncertainty or frustration can drive, disinhibit, or destabilise an individual to increase the likelihood of violence. A more comprehensive and nuanced theory is required. Fortunately, Structured Professional Judgement (SPJ) decision theory provides an overarching theory that can be brought to bear on the problem. As discussed in (Chapter 4; Cooke, 2019) SPJ decision theory posits that the violent actor *decides* to be violent; this may be a bad decision or a decision made badly, nonetheless, it is a decision (Hart & Logan, 2011).

We need to understand how the prison ecology affects decisions to be violent. One approach to this conundrum would be the functional analysis of the nexus between prison ecology and violence. This is fundamentally a conceptual process informed by empirical information. Conceptual analysis is an under-used process

in psychology, but it is a valuable approach for enhancing the clarity and coherence of theoretical issues: issues that are difficult to approach by way of experimentation or other empirical methods (Machado & Silva, 2007; Racine & Slaney, 2013). It embraces a variety of approaches, including concept clarification, the explicating of theoretical consistencies, and the evaluation of scientific hypotheses (Machado & Silva, 2007). In general, then, the goal is to increase “the conceptual clarity of a theory through careful clarifications and specifications of meaning” (Laudan, 1977, p. 50). Gatner et al. (2021) further noted that a central feature of conceptual analysis with regard to SPJ decision theory is the process of clarifying the relations amongst concepts. Gatner et al. (2021) provided a comprehensive conceptual analysis of how one risk factor for violence—psychopathy as operationalised by the Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality (CAPP) (Cooke, Hart, Logan, & Michie, 2012)—can be linked to violence. For example, they argue that symptoms such as *Self-aggrandising* or *Sense of Uniqueness* may make an individual decide to be violent in order to establish status, dominance, or esteem; symptoms such as *Unempathic* may disinhibit violent decision-making because the individual is unable to experience the emotional consequences generated by harming others; symptoms such as *Reckless* may destabilise thinking and lead to impulsive decisions to be violent. Gatner et al. (2021) provide an excellent exemplar of conceptual analysis in the field of violence risk. We propose that such a conceptual analysis should be undertaken with regard to the prison ecology violence link. This is not merely an academic exercise, but rather it is a practical process. As the pioneer of organisational psychology, Kurt Lewin famously observed, “Nothing is as practical as a good theory”: a good theory can sustain good interventions (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 2). By parsing the risk factors that emerge from such a conceptual analysis, we can provide the evidence base to support the design of diverse risk management strategies.

### **Better Measurement**

The third challenge that emerges from this volume is the need for better measurement technology. It has long been recognised that the theoretical underpinnings of coherent risk assessment and risk management have been hampered by inadequate approaches to the measurement of key variables (Monahan & Steadman, 1994). Experience suggests that the measure of the key dependent variable—violence—is often poorly operationalised and then poorly implemented. Polaschek and Daffern (Chapter 2) argue that comprehensive conceptualisations of violence more in line with public health conceptions of violence should be adopted. They contend that violence in prison should not merely focus on the intentional physical acts carried out by individuals but should entail systemic acts that result in deprivation and neglect. This plea is echoed by (Cooke chapter 4) The PRISM definition of violence (“Institutional violence is the actual, attempted or threatened harm towards another person within the institutional setting”; Johnstone & Cooke, 2008, p. 16) is designed to be broad and to capture non-physical acts of violence (e.g., threats of harm and stalking) and, as such, should capture the systemic acts outlined by

Polaschek and Daffern (Chapter 1). However, Cooke (Chapter 4) also argues that to fully evaluate the deleterious effects of some prison ecologies, it is necessary to go beyond measures of violence to embrace other indicators of institutional distress such as self-harm, suicide, drug misuse, absconding or disengagement from activities, or staff sickness absences.

When definitional issues are resolved, operational issues remain. For example, what are the benefits and costs of monitoring change over time and aggregating violence across institutions (Brabyn, *Critical Issue 4*) at the unit or wing level (Galouzis et al., *Critical Issue 3*) or at the level of the individual prisoner or staff member Daffern and Polaschek, Chapter 2)? Or indeed, what sources of information about violent behaviour should be utilised, for example, official statistics, prisoner and staff self-reports derived from surveys, and more nuanced accounts derived from focus groups (Cooke, Chapter 3)?

In conclusion, our key message is that a safe prison is a prison that has the best chance of delivering the outcomes that the community expects. We cannot expect people to change their behaviour if we house them in environments that are unsafe. It is virtually inevitable that they will return to their families and communities at higher risk than when they came in. A safe prison also provides people with opportunities to work towards their desired futures. This means presenting opportunities for growth, personal development, and hope for the future—to give people something to work towards, something to motivate them, and, of course, something to lose. And let us finish on a note of optimism. This book tells us clearly and loudly that we can easily make our prisons safer places to live and work. And that if we work together to find solutions, then violence can be prevented, and those who live and work in prison in ways can lead more meaningful, fulfilling, and constructive lives. We just need to try harder and longer!

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