

Practising Offender Supervision in Europe



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Content



- Focus of the group's work
- Jurisdictions
- Where and by whom has research been done?
Who funds it?
- Common vs neglected themes
- Methods and data
- Some examples of studies
- Why so few?
- Dissemination of findings
- Ideas for the future...

Focus



- review of empirical research on the *practice(s)* of offender supervision
- *offender supervision* broadly defined to include:
 - professional and other bodies/workers
 - public, private and third sector agencies/workers
- emphasis on *what is known* about workers, interactions and practices, not outcomes
- ...and *how we know* what we know (research methods)

What do we know about...?



Five areas:

- 1. Roles, characteristics, recruitment and training of practitioners**
2. Interactions and relationships between practitioners and other professionals
- 3. The delivery, practice, performance of OS**
- 4. The role of tools and technologies**
5. The management, supervision and regulation of practitioners/practice

Where has research been done?



- Countries with longer histories of OS and/or research tradition/capacity
- UK dominates
- The Netherlands and Romania "up and coming"
- Fewer studies in other jurisdictions
- No obvious differences in designs or focus between jurisdictions



Who funds/does research into practice?

- **Governmental bodies**
 - e.g. Justice Ministries
 - academic or government researchers
 - tend to be larger-scale/national studies
- **Independent research bodies**
 - e.g. Economic and Social Research Council (UK)
 - tend to be more innovative
- **Probation organizations**
 - e.g. Salvation Army (NL)
 - few studies by practitioners
- **Studies without (or with little) funding**
 - postgraduate research projects (masters and PhD)
 - tend to be small scale
 - more likely to be theoretically informed
- **”Internal affairs”**
 - academic researchers tend to have experience of working in probation

More common themes



- Single role(s) in single jurisdictions
 - e.g. Community Service workers in Ireland
- Values, attitudes and motivations of workers
 - e.g. Probation Officers in England & Wales
- Discrete processes
 - e.g. assessment; report writing; enforcement; electronic monitoring
- 'Snapshot' studies of the 'here and now'
 - e.g. when introducing new measures or tools
- Impact(s) of change(s) (policy; new technologies, etc.)
 - e.g. balance of care vs control; rehabilitation vs risk management; discretion or 'professional space'

Neglected themes



- Recruitment and training of workers
 - more known in younger organisations, e.g. Romania; Croatia
- Para-professional and non-professional staff
 - e.g. PSOs in E&W; volunteers in Sweden
- Interactions (both inter- and intra-agency)
 - e.g. probation and sentencers/social services/prison staff/police etc.; how/by whom workers are supervised (by managers; by sentencers)
- Histories of practice
 - but recent interest in 'oral history' research in UK
- 'Everyday' practice and culture
 - another emerging interest, e.g. England & Wales and Romania
- Diversity
 - ...among workers doing OS; within and between countries; among offenders; between workers and offenders (etc.)

Methods and data



What is common?

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Artefacts

What is rare?

- Ethnographic/ observational research (but this is on the increase)
- Use of novel/innovative methods
- Use of multiple methods/data sources
- Comparative studies
- Replication of research (designs) within/between jurisdictions

So we know....



- quite a lot about what workers *say they do*...
- much less about what they *actually do*...

“Researchers (and the lay public) must learn to look behind not just the official but the [probation] officer’s versions [of practice]” (Fielding, 1984: 168).

Some examples



National Survey	Denmark Germany	Kyvsgaard (1998) Kurze (1999)
Diaries	Sweden	Gustavsson (2004)
Appreciative Interviewing	England & Wales	Robinson et al. (2013)
Mixed methods, incl. observations	France	Larminat (2012)
Working Alliance	The Netherlands	Menger & Donker (ongoing)
Comparison	Belgium (UK)	Bauwens (2011)

Why so few studies?



- Limited and unknown practice, few involved
- Short history in some jurisdictions
- Difficulties in finding funding
- Problems in getting access
- Lack of interest from researchers. Probation practice is mainly studied in the disciplines of criminology and social work, but is a "remote area" in both disciplines
- Preference for prisons research?

Dissemination



- Low interest
- Language
- Conducted in practice = reach practice

What do we need to know?



- **What are they actually doing?**

Need for ethnographic research, observations

- **Why they are doing it in that way**

Need to go beyond "stories"

- **Why probation officers resist or comply**

Need to understand motives

- **What is specific for probation practice**

Need for comparisons, international and interorganisational

Ideas for the future



- Funding for studies beyond mapping and stories on practice
- Attracting more researchers that will broaden the field
- International comparisons for developing understanding of the core practices of OS
- Comparisons with other organisations in the field for developing understanding of specific methods and technologies for OS

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